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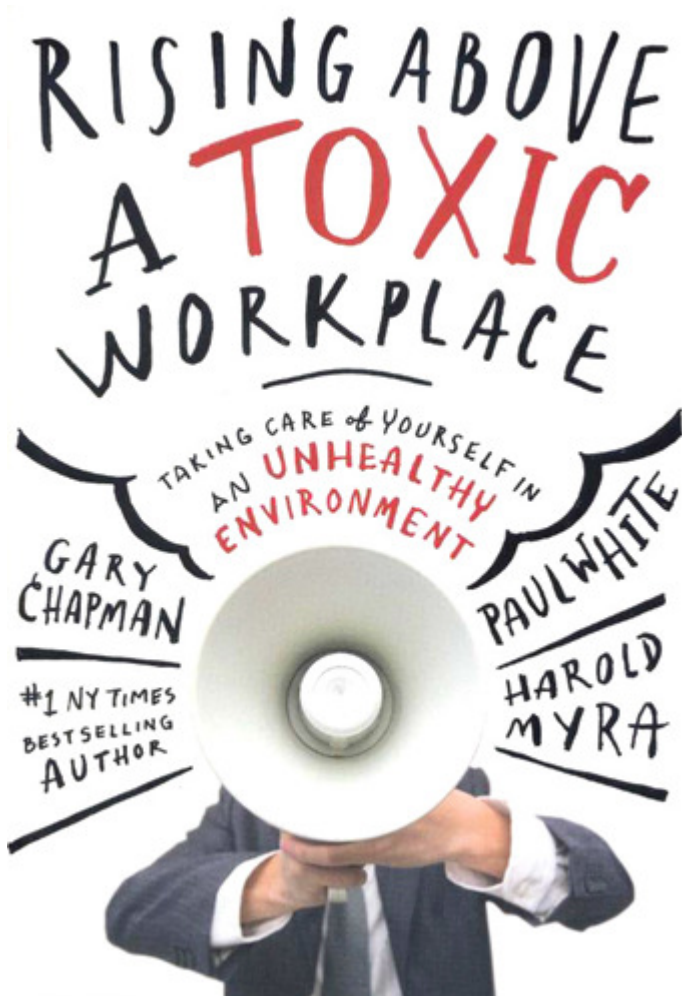
PARK CITY

DAILY NEWS

'Toxic' reflects workplace status quo

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"Rising Above a Toxic Workplace: Taking Care of Yourself in an Unhealthy Environment" by Gary Chapman, Paul White and Harold Myra. Chicago, IL: Northfield Publishing, 2014, 170 pages, \$19.99.



"Healthy workplaces grow from high mutual respect and sensitivity to others," Gary Chapman, Paul White, and Harold Myra assert in the introduction to *"Rising Above a Toxic Workplace: Taking Care of Yourself in an Unhealthy Environment,"* their new treatise on how to survive when confronted with less than desirable circumstances at work. "All of us have the emotional need to feel appreciated by those with whom we work. Working in a toxic environment day in, day out can be a deeply discouraging and draining experience. We believe that, while profitability is a necessity if a company is to survive, it is not to be the only concern of business leaders. Taking people where they are and helping them develop their potential often brings greater emotional satisfaction as well as financial profitability."

Chapman is the author of several books, including *"The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate,"* a New York Times bestseller which has been translated into 49 languages, and *"Love is a Verb: Stories of What Happens When Love Comes Alive."* White is a licensed psychologist who has consulted

with Microsoft and NASA; prior to the current effort, he and Chapman co-authored *"The Five Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace."* He has a doctorate from Georgia State University. Myra's previous publications include more than twenty-five books; he is perhaps best known for *"The Leadership Secrets of Billy Graham,"* as well as *"Sync or Swim: A Fable About Workplace Communication and Coming Together in a Crisis,"* a previous collaboration with Chapman and White. All three authors are in demand as speakers and consultants.

Let me say up front I thoroughly enjoyed this book. Even though many academics would not consider *"Toxic Workplace"* to be adequately researched in the traditional sense, I found it to be exceptionally reflective of the current status quo at far too many companies, agencies and institutions. A constant theme found throughout the volume is the undeniable role of leadership in

setting the stage for the atmosphere – good or bad -- that inevitably arises in any organization. Many well-intentioned leaders, whose hearts are no doubt in the right place, seem clueless as to how their actions affect others, especially those who depend on them for direction and guidance. Over the years I have encountered many leaders who were obviously driven by their own self-serving motives as opposed to keeping the focus on the overall success of the organization and serving as a mentor to those around them.

“Toxic leaders come male or female, young or old, smooth or gruff,” the authors explain in “The Many Faces of the Toxic Boss,” the second chapter. “They’re toxic for all sorts of reasons in all sorts of settings, and those who must work for them face difficult choices. Many workers endure clueless bosses with big personal problems and they can be especially clueless about relationships.” In characteristic fashion, Chapman, White and Myra are able to find the silver lining inevitably hiding just out of site in virtually every situation: “It surprised us to hear how often interviewees said they learned a lot from their toxic bosses. On reflection, we can see how that happens since it generally takes moxie to become a boss – in some cases the worst controllers and manipulators have high capacities.”

Another chapter I found particularly uplifting was the last one, “Rx for Cynicism.” After making my way through all the things that often contribute to toxic workplace, it was refreshing and even a little reassuring when I realized the authors chose to end on a particularly optimistic note. In the final analysis, there is always hope – regardless of the amount of negativity we have to deal with as we are simply trying to do the jobs we have been hired to do. “What’s the one thing that most affects how much people enjoy their jobs?” the authors ponder. “First and foremost, people thrive when they feel appreciated by their supervisors and colleagues – and that means they sense the appreciation is heartfelt and authentic. Surveys repeatedly find benefits are not the key factor in worker satisfaction. More important are feeling they’re genuinely appreciated in the company and that their jobs make them feel they’re part of something meaningful.”

There were several features about “Toxic Workplace” I found appealing and helpful. First, at the end of each chapter there are three sections, “Survival Strategies,” “Leadership Lessons,” and “Questions for Discussion,” which provide the main ‘take-aways’ for the material just covered. Second, at the conclusion of the eight chapters that form the main text, there is a “Survival Guide and Toolkit.” Here, the authors provide several hands-on evaluations, case studies, interviews, and other enlightening and informative suggestions for dealing with unhealthy work environments. Finally, the book has a companion website (www.appreciationatwork.com/toxicworkplaces/) that provides additional support for the main strategies outlined in the book, as well as a short quiz, “How Toxic is Your Workplace?”

One story that really stood out to me was about Ruth, a middle manager at a small company; see if you can relate to her experience: “One day she had an epiphany. At work she was demeaned and treated as incompetent, but everywhere else she was highly valued – as a mother, a friend, a valued church leader, and a neighbor. ‘These both can’t be true,’ she realized. ‘People I admire and respect value me. That’s where the truth is.’”

Even if you think the place where you work is heaven on earth, I encourage you to at least peruse the website and take the short assessment found there. Before you know it, you might just find yourself in the management section of your local Barnes and Noble Booksellers.

— Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.