JUST US JUSTICE: THE GENTLE GENOCIDE OF WORKPLACE MOBBING
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Introduction

Conflicts with bullies generally head in one of two directions. Either you begin telling people about what the bully is doing to harass you, solicit their experiences, find that they, too, have had problems with the bully, and together you report your concerns to higher management, an investigation ensues, and the bully is out the door.

Or the bully begins telling people about what *you* are doing to annoy him or her, solicits their experiences, finds that they, too, have had problems with *you*, and together they report their concerns to higher management, an investigation ensues, and *you* are out the door. Either way, bullying is no longer the issue. What you're dealing with is a mob, and you are either an instigating participant in the mob, or you are its target.

So what is the fundamental difference between which one of you, "the bully" or yourself, is out the door? Power. If "the bully" is someone with power or influence over others in the organization, even if not beloved by the workforce, *you* will be out the door if you solicit support from others. If "the bully" does not have much meaningful power, has displeased someone who does have it, or their power is precarious in the organization, then *they* will be out the door. [1] Either way, the workforce joins together to share and shape their perceptions of who is undesirable, forge an identity of the target that will be more widely communicated to others, and pursue the results they are after – the elimination of someone.

In most work settings, it is fairly easy to eliminate an employee; they can be terminated for no reason at all. But when there is the possibility that doing so could lead to charges of discrimination or retaliation – such as when the target is a woman in a male-dominated work force (or vice-versa), a person of color, handicapped, gay, older, a whistle-blower or has reported discrimination or sexual harassment, or if the worker is protected by a union, a contract or tenure, eliminating them is not so easy. In these cases, persuading the worker to

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[1] I use quotations around the term "the bully" because, as I suggest in this chapter, name calling is a form of dehumanizing and legitimates excessive aggression against others. It places people into classes of people, and the actual acts or intents of the one labeled "bully" are buried under the rubble of intolerance for the whole class. In this way, by labeling someone "bully" it is far easier to stop seeing *the person*, and emotionally respond only to the term, seeing everything they do or say as consistent with what "bullies" do or say.

quit is more favorable to management than firing them, and one of the most effective ways to get a worker to quit is to make their jobs so miserable that they readily flee.

But if finding another job is not going to be easy for the worker, they may very well tolerate a miserable job – or report their concerns to higher management in hope that someone will help – only to find that higher management facilitates their elimination through more aggressive means. What comes as such a shock to workers who find themselves in this mess is that not only will management defy reason by escalating the aggression (very often leading to costly lawsuits), but *that the workforce will collaborate with management to eliminate their co-worker*, even if it appears that doing so will jeopardize their own job security, is contrary to their ideals about fairness and justice, and will compound their own workload with the loss of a once valued worker.

The shock of a workforce turning on an aggrieved worker is not only very painful, but it is totally confusing to most workers who do not understand how so many people can turn against them and for what reason. This shock turns to shame and outrage when false accusations begin to mount, as they almost always do, and leaves the worker wondering *why? How could they do this to me?* While the aggression a mobbing target endures is seemingly incomprehensible, an understanding that *humans behave very differently in groups than they do as individuals*, makes it clear that the processes of mobbing are as patterned and predictable as a bad marriage in the hands of good attorneys – it will get worse for everyone but the lawyers, and no matter how good it used to be or how the problems all got started, reconciliation will not be an option.

If power determines *who* will go, then persuasion determines *how* they will go. It is fairly easy to eliminate a person from any group, and persuade others to share that objective, as long as the person in power understands that it is necessary to:

1)   shape perception that the target is different from others and that the difference is undesirable;
2)   frame the problem in a specific manner that places the responsibility for the conflict squarely on the shoulders of the person to be eliminated;
3)   elicit fear and loathing among the workforce toward the targeted employee; and
4)   diminish the social support and strategic capacity of the target to defend themselves.

A useful way to understand how persuading workers to gang up on a co-worker and force them out is to take a look at how collective aggression develops in warfare and genocide. These two forms of collective violence – warfare and genocide – are not the same, because the manner in which humans organize for violence is fundamentally different in each case. Warfare provides a framework that helps us to understand how organizations are structured, how political games are strategized and played out in the workplace, and how leadership and allegiance operate to unite a group. Books with titles such as "War at Work," "The Invisible War: Pursuing Self Interest at Work," "The Art of War for Managers" and "Women vs. Women: The Uncivil Business War" have so normalized the language and ethos of warfare in the workplace that just as on the battlefield, interpersonal conflict at work is glamorized, made sacred, and celebrated

– thereby conditioning workers for the violence of interpersonal attacks as mere "office politics."

The truth is, for all the talk of wanting peace, humans have a deep-seated commitment to waging wars. We tend to express a desire for peace because we do not want to be harmed, and are innately reluctant to harm others. Yet once commenced, our innate resistance to killing each other erodes, and killing becomes much easier and is done with far less remorse. As long as the enemy is viewed as external, this killing instinct is controlled. In warfare, rules and laws of war are established to limit casualties, determine the manner and methods of acceptable violence and targets, and provide options for surrender. In the workplace, the killing instinct is controlled by channeling aggression into productive competition with external rivals. But when the enemy is viewed as *internal*, war is anything but civil; in nation-states, once the enemy is viewed as residing within the boundaries of the state, genocide commences. In the workplace, a similar social process of brutality commences, albeit on a lower end of the continuum of violence. In either case, the rules of war are replaced with the rules of genocide – complete dehumanization, destruction and elimination of "the enemy."

If warfare provides a framework for understanding how organizational hierarchies are structured in the workplace and allegiance to the employer is strengthened, genocide provides a framework for understanding how humans can be persuaded to act inhumanely and horrifically against the very people they once dined and danced with. Genocide is a far greater scale of atrocity than is warfare, and has as its aim the annihilation of a group, the strengthening of power, the control of the group to fear and love that power, and to fear and hate the group that is targeted for annihilation. When those ends are achieved, those in power are in complete control not only of the actions of the population, but of their minds. For the target of mobbing, then, understanding that where the workplace was once a battleground of interpersonal wars, with factions, conquered territories and battles over resources, once mobbing commences, it's an entirely new ballgame. Justice falls away in favor of Just Us.

The concept of Just Us is far more powerful to humans than the concept of Justice. Just Us confers status, privilege, access to resources, and social identities that ensure success. Justice confers struggle and uncertainty, punishment and pain.   Thus, it is critical for the mobbing target to understand that in genocide, the most horrific atrocities are not carried out by leadership, and usually not even by its soldiers. The most horrific violence in genocide is perpetrated by citizens, and the most vicious acts perpetrated by those closest to the targeted group – friends, neighbors and even family members. What does this mean for the worker who is being mobbed? If there is any one thing a mobbing target must understand to survive, it is that when mobbing commences, no matter how popular and well loved the target has been in the past, no matter how unified the "us" against "them" might have been on the shop floor when workers wailed about managerial abuses or misconduct or a bad boss, the target no longer belongs to a workplace "us." Instead, a new "us" begins to form among the non-targeted workers, with leadership at its helm.

Those closest to the target – in proximity as co-workers, subordinates, and friends, and in identity as members of the same social group such as race, gender, socio-economic class, nationality, age, sexuality or other group, especially if the group has legally protected status, will be the most valuable agents to those who seek a target's elimination, and thus, they will be the most actively courted by management – behind closed doors. They have intimate information about the targeted worker that can aid the exterminators. They are in fear and emotionally exhausted from the anguish of the tormented worker. If they turn against the worker, it legitimates the claim that the worker is unwanted and helps undermine any legal claims of discrimination against a whole class. And once those closest to the targeted worker turn away, the worker is left without social support, making it even harder to withstand the daily torment. Let me be clear: I am not suggesting that if you are being mobbed that those closest to you might betray or hurt you. What I am telling you is that *in almost every case I guarantee they will* – and when they do, they will be the most damaging, and the most committed to your destruction. Here's why.

How Genocide Operates

The brutality of genocide is as incomprehensible as it is common. For all the talk of "never again" that followed the Holocaust, genocidal atrocities have remained as constant since World War II as they were prior to Hitler's horrifying slaughter. Occasionally, world attention is drawn to certain genocidal acts – such as in Cambodia, Maoist China, Rwanda, Bosnia, and Darfur. Most acts of genocide, however, such as in Namibia, Armenia, East Timor and the USSR, are either all but unknown in the United States, or so politicized that meaningful dialogue about the genocidal nature of the events is drowned out by defenses of the political ideologies of the perpetrators, whether on the right (as in East Timor) or the left (as in the USSR under Stalin). The constancy of genocidal atrocities and arguments defending or denying them – or just the ease with which humanity forgets them – bring us to the question: If genocide is so abhorrent, why then do so many citizens engage in it, and so many others defend it? The answer is because genocide operates under specific social conditions and through specific tactics of persuasion and group psychology which normalize the violence as *necessary and of the targets' own making.*

The social conditions which make genocide possible include the following:

- periods of social and economic instability;
- changing or precarious leadership; and
- an ideology envisioning a better and more unified nation.

It could certainly be argued that these conditions can pretty much describe almost any society at any time, but in cases of genocide, what you find is that prior to the rise of genocidal power, the society faced grave economic distress and/or long-lasting social trauma which planted seeds of rage in the population. A charismatic leader takes power with assurances of a promising future and unified population – but begins to nurture a sentiment that *certain types of people* do not share this idealism, have different values, want power for themselves, and

seek control over the nation's future. Whether by way of their national heritage, their race, their ethnicity or their religion, the people targeted for genocide are increasingly:

- represented as "different;"
- their difference is given value as "less than" that of the favored group;
- they are openly renounced and dehumanized with labels that make it easier to view them as less than human, such as animals, monsters, evil, barbarians and therefore threats to the security and safety of the favored group.

This conditioning ripens the population for the acts to come, which will begin with exclusion – first from positions of leadership, then from strategic resources, and finally, from society altogether. In this last stage, members of the vilified group are persecuted, imprisoned, tortured and killed. And then it gets bad.

The third stage of genocide, after shaping perceptions among the population, then inflicting punishments and removing them from society, is triggered when leadership grants the populace *permission to attack*. In Philip Zimbardo's 1971 Stanford Prison experiments, where research subjects were assigned roles as prison guards or prisoners, and Stanley Milgram's 1963 social psychology experiments in which research subjects were instructed to administer what they (falsely) believed to be electric shocks on unsuspecting "learners," the researchers found that ordinary humans are very susceptible to authority and conformity, and that many can easily become sadistic under certain conditions – conditions found not only in genocidal contexts, but organizational cultures as well. These experiments have shown that if permitted to inflict pain by someone in a position of authority, *and not held accountable* for the consequences of their actions, humans will not only inflict pain on others, but they will continue to do so above and beyond what is necessary to satisfy the authority figures – and they will not stop until they are made to do so. Moreover, the participants showed little remorse for their aggression. Zimbardo's experiment, replicated in multiple variations over the decades since it was initially conducted, was used to explain why soldiers who tortured inmates at Abu Ghraib were not aberrant "bad apples," as the military depicted them, but ordinary non-pathological people conforming to an environment where abusive behavior was permitted and expected.

So what about people you work or live with? Mobbing doesn't involve strangers hiding behind a partition as in Milgram's experiments, or prisoners who have ostensibly violated social laws as Zimbardo's subjects represented, but is instead real people acting with increasing aggression against people they know and in many cases once liked and admired. But friendship has its limits, as elementary school teacher Jane Elliott demonstrated in 1968 when she divided her third-grade classroom into "blue eyed" and "brown eyed" students. In the aftermath of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., Ms. Elliott set out to test how "difference" is learned. After dividing her students by eye color, she told them that one eye color was superior to another, and that those with a certain eye color were bad, stupid, lazy and deserving of shunning and abuse. To be sure eye color was noticeable from afar, she had the target group wear paper collars around their neck, and watched in horror as her students almost immediately began to act abhorrently to their collared friends and classmates. Moreover, their

abuse grew particularly aggressive at recess – when she, the authority figure, was no longer present. And just as Zimbardo found that the "prisoners" in his experiments had internalized their roles, accepted their fates and abused anyone who resisted, Ms. Elliott found the persecuted children began to believe the claims made against them, withdraw almost immediately and perform poorly in school.

In genocide, we see these human capacities for violence carried out to the most inhumane extremes when brutal leadership establishes the conditions that encourage humans to freely abuse each other. One reason so many people fail to resist genocide is because when under the terror of a murderous leader, people operate on survival mode. They want to retreat, avoid the line of fire, and become as distant from the target as possible. Yet humans do care about the pain of others, they do want to help those who are persecuted. Reconciling the survival need to distance themselves from the targeted group, and to protect and assist those who are persecuted, causes incredible stress and anxiety. To reconcile the competing needs for survival and altruism, people will almost always choose survival – then cognitively realign their perceptions of events, and people, to legitimate their decision not to help.

Yet people tend to believe that their own friends, neighbors and family will not hurt or betray them because we need other people in order to survive. This mutual interdependence makes it critical that we be able to trust the people we are closest to. For this reason, to be betrayed is a profound injury, one that threatens our survival. Ironically, the fact that betrayal is so hurtful is the very reason that once it commences, the aggression against the target will turn rabid – to compensate for the guilt of betrayal and ensure that the betrayed target can never act on the rage that betrayal provokes.

The process of aggression by intimates begins with a small betrayal, as the favored party fails to reveal information that might assist the target, assists the aggressors in some small way, or spreads gossip about the target that reproduces negative and dehumanizing perceptions of the target. Once this small betrayal is made, there is momentary guilt, accompanied by anger – an emotion that is almost always a mask for fear – at the target. Why? Because anger directed at a murderous leader is risky, and were it not for the existence of the target, the person would not have had to compromise their principles by betraying the target. And once a small betrayal is made and justified, it is easier to make the next, and larger, betrayal.

The problem, of course, is that eventually the betrayals will be discovered. And because betrayal is so threatening to our survival, particularly in genocidal contexts, the betrayed party is likely to be enraged at the trusted friend or neighbor who has endangered them. What would happen if the betrayed target survived, particularly if leadership were to change and the targeted group was returned to live next door? Take a look at Rwanda. People know that betrayal is something humans don't forget. In a genocidal context, where machetes are wielded with blood-thirsty force, any act of betrayal can mean deadly payback – if not from the victim, then from his or her children or kin. So in the killing fields of genocide, once neighbors turn on neighbors and kin on kin, their savagery will not stop until there is no possibility that the victim or their kin can ever return to seek revenge. They end up slaughtering not just their target, but their own internal fears and guilt.

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How Mobbing Operates

It should be clear at this point how similar mobbing is to genocide. Clearly, in terms of shear violence and inhumanity, there is no comparison; genocide is the most extreme form of violence imaginable, whereas mobbing is a form of social exclusion and verbal assault. But the social processes and psychological rationales that facilitate group aggression are nearly identical between mobbing and genocide. In an organizational setting where there have been many changes, economic struggles, increased competition for resources, and rapidly changing leadership, the workforce is stressed and anxious that they might lose their status, resources or even their jobs. And leadership is even more frightened that they might lose power, so any signs of "trouble" can easily be perceived as threats to that power. And where opportunities for advancement are prized but limited, such as in universities, primary schools, religious institutions and health care facilities, there is even greater competition for leadership positions – and a determination to keep them once attained. Any organization that has an influx of new blood – such as rapid gains in hiring of under-represented populations, mergers, or new hires associated with changing organizational priorities and directions, is especially ripe for mobbing. Although in time changes will be made, and eventually the workforce will adapt to the changing faces and voices, those who are in the front lines of change will be the most threatening to the old guard. They will be among the most vulnerable to attack. Subordinates who are new to the workforce, newly hired managers, and members of the target's social group may be the most likely to cooperate in mobbing, because an attack on one of their senior counterparts is a signal that they, too, are vulnerable and provides them an opportunity to prove their allegiance to leadership.

The more secretive leadership is, often in the name of privacy to protect the workforce, the easier it is to engage in abusive tactics without accountability. As management instigates secretive investigations, withholds findings from the workforce, and secretively punishes the targeted worker, the broader workforce grows fearful yet unaware of just what is going on – fertile ground for gossip, which will increasingly find fault with the target – especially because the targeted worker will become increasingly anxious, fearful, angry and anguished – appearing far more frightening and pathetic to the workforce than the calm and jovial management which will begin showering other workers with praise, assurances and perks.

Many targets of mobbing believe that if the law is on their side, they will eventually prevail. Indeed, friends, family and even some anti-bullying experts may encourage the mobbing target to communicate to an abusive manager that their conduct is illegal (if they believe that it is) and that if it continues they can be sued. Yet contrary to popular perceptions, managers may not like lawsuits, but they do not fear them. Managers will not likely be held accountable for any lawsuits their actions prompt, yet they will be rewarded if they can assist the organization's legal team in defeating the targeted worker's claims. One way managers can use a lawsuit to advance their careers – even if the lawsuit arose from their own wrongdoing – is to provide witnesses from "similarly situated" workers or close associates of the workers who will testify against the targeted worker. Thus, anyone who is a potential ally, witness or member of the same social class (such as by gender or race) will be courted by management. They will be

brought into their manager's office – usually for some other reason – or casually encountered in the hallway or their own work space. The message they receive will prime them for the small betrayal. The manager will assure these potential witnesses that:

- he or she respects their friendship or work relationship with the target and does not want to interfere (relief)
- they know that this conflict *of the target's* (assigning responsibility for the conflict onto the target) is difficult/stressful for the co-worker (empathy)
- they do not have to worry about this happening to them (you are one of us)
- they know it must be hard on the co-worker to have to listen to the target complaining (hell yes – and there is the small betrayal – no big deal)
- the target has many good virtues (agreement) but it is too bad they have never been happy here or are so difficult or there have been other problems (a statement that is usually untrue, but appears to the co-worker as *new information* – making it easier for them to justify the small betrayal, become open to management's position, and agree that the target might benefit from dismissal)
- it will be for the best if the target is able to find new employment elsewhere (agreement, the target will benefit)
- by the way, that promotion/raise/report you just submitted/suggestion you made at the meeting . . . (praise and reward)

The co-worker departs, feeling relieved, reassured, and a bit guilty for agreeing that the target is a pain and should go. The next time the co-worker encounters the target, it will be with new and un-approving eyes. While the mobbed target is suffering daily, living in fear of his or her job, not knowing what the next move will be and in desperate need of support, they will not be viewed as sympathetically by those who could and once did provide support. Instead, the perception of the co-workers who have been primed for betrayal (and often provided or promised promotions or raises) is that the target really should just go, and if he or she does not, and continues to fight, it is their own problem, not the co-workers'. Because the co-worker has made a small betrayal, because the encounter with management probably will not have been explicitly about the target, but about some other matter, or at least, just a minor conversation to reassure the co-worker – it was about the *co-worker's* stress, after all, not the target's – the co-worker will not mention the meeting to the target. But they will talk *about* the target – as multiple co-workers have similar encounters with management. They will begin to express "concern" among themselves about "the target's problems" (assigned guilt), their "unhappiness" or "complaints" (reframing) and bolster their comments with – watch out – examples (*new information*) to justify their changed views. And as the gossip grows, the examples will become embellished, fabricated, and repeated. And the more they are repeated, the more true they become to those who tell and hear them, and in no time at all, the co-worker who first made a "small betrayal" – a betrayal so minor, they may not have even consciously thought of it as a betrayal – will be convinced by this gossip that there is now enough "new information" to radically alter their perception of the target.

And what will the target hear while all this is going on? Very little. They will not be included in the gossip, but they will sense the growing distancing, the exclusion, the shunning, the eyes cast on them as they pass a co-worker or client, and eventually, the exclusion and gossip will intensify to include increasing cruelty and derision by the very people the target once turned to for support.

The natural response to shunning and being the subject of gossip is to become angry and anguished, particularly as management simultaneously escalates their punishments, stripping the target of responsibilities, subjecting them to specious "investigations" with pre-determined findings and ever-mounting paper trails condemning the value of the worker. As the worker becomes confused and depressed, he or she will be dehumanized with labels such as "crazy," "mentally ill," and "paranoid." And as the worker becomes angry, he or she will be labeled a "threat." The longer the worker remains in the atmosphere of persecution, the more aggressive co-workers and management will become. The worker will have been dehumanized and demonized as crazy and threatening and fundamentally different from the rest of the workforce, and the workforce will have been granted permission to attack. And it will be clear to the aggressors that no matter what is done to the worker, no one will be punished. But to support the worker in any way will mean shunning, derision, possible punishment from management, and the risk that the worker might really be crazy, might really be ready to blow. Convincing themselves that the worker is already at that point of madness and rage is not so much threatening to the workforce, as it is comforting, because it justifies turning away in the face of atrocity.   The longer the targeted worker remains in their sights, the more they will be hated – not for who they are, but for who they represent – the darkness inside us all.

How Survival Operates

Fighting the mob is like fighting a grizzly bear. When the bear goes after you, friends are going to run as fast as they can – away from the bear. And if you run in their direction with a grizzly hot on your trail, they will be outraged – not at the bear, but at *you* for putting them at risk. So what do you do once the bear gets a hold of you? Have a fair fight? Give that bear everything you've got? Good luck. The more you fight a grizzly bear, and the longer you are visible and moving, the meaner that bear is going to get. What that means in an organizational setting is that you are no longer engaged in the warfare of work, but are instead facing a genocidal process. Leadership has given the signal that you are to be eliminated and it is okay to attack you, the mob has formed and the bear is coming your way. The more you fight the mob, the more force will be used to *compel* your elimination – regardless of how accurate, fair or even legal the claims are that are used to justify your elimination. Your anger will be treated as evidence of threatening behavior, your fear will be evidence of paranoid thinking, your confusion will be evidence of your erratic state and mental impairment, and your impaired productivity – from having your responsibilities taken away, your contributions ignored, your time invested in specious "investigations" and fighting for your job, and your emotions exhausted by the sheer weight of the battle – will become evidence that you can't do the job. Importantly, reason – and public scrutiny – will not stop the aggression, but intensify it. *The*

more you demonstrate that the attacks against you are wrong, illegal and just plain cruel, the more wrong, illegal and cruel they will become.

In order to survive, it may be helpful to take a lesson from those who survived the Holocaust. When the Holocaust got underway, those who fled early suffered the least and recovered the fastest. The longer a potential target remained in the shadow of the genocide, the more they suffered. Thus, the moment you discern the first scent of mobbing heading your way, lay low; if the mobbing has progressed, play dead. It may be necessary to file internal complaints to preserve potential legal claims, but the more you do, the more the aggression will intensify, so ask yourself if you really want to go that route. You may well lose your job unfairly, even illegally, and suffer grave losses as a result. But battling the grizzly bear can cost you your life.

To save it, consider these tactics:

- The more evidence you produce to defeat your attackers' claims and actions, the more determined they will be to get rid of you – which means finding fault any way they can. Mobbing is not a conflict over facts and reasons, but a conflict over power and emotion. Reserve the evidence for future legal claims if you must, but whatever evidence you provide, keep it to a minimum, fact based, and stripped of emotion or counter-attacks. It may be helpful to have an attorney or pragmatic friend – unassociated with the workplace – draft your complaints or responses for you to be submitted in your name, to minimize the emotion.

- Communicate to your closest friends and colleagues at work (or wherever it is that you are being mobbed) that you want to keep them out of this and will be keeping your distance until this is over. They will be relieved, grateful to you, and have less reason to turn on you. Get your emotional support elsewhere.

- Do not assume that if your conflict involves your status as a member of a group of people (by gender, race, ideology, whatever) that other members of the group will support you, no matter how blatant the discrimination. They will be courted by management, provided rewards, and they will be afraid. They will almost always turn against you. The exception to this rule is when the group has been established within the organization for some time and they are secure with their positions – in other words, they have *critical mass*. The less diversity within the organization and the more recent the diversification of the workplace, the more likely the other members of the group will declare that there is no discrimination and *you* are the problem.

- Similarly, do not expect that if you file a sexual harassment action, that feminists will support you, and do not expect that if you are accused of sexual harassment, that men will support you – no matter how vocal they have been about their views on the topic. For the same reasons that those closest to you and a member of your same group are

likely to turn on you, you will be alone if you file, or are subjected to, any internal investigation.

- Do not expect that a person's political ideology, stated values, or religion will have any bearing on how they respond to your attack. The more they are committed to a moral framework, the more strongly they will likely condemn you so that they can persuade themselves that they are acting within their moral code.

- Beware the bully label. If you are angry, complain, or express anything negative, you can expect to be labeled a bully at some point in the mobbing process. Zero tolerance policies for bullying, sexual harassment, racism, discrimination, and workplace violence might sound like progress, but they enable an organization to justify eliminating anyone once they are accused of any of these offenses. Lay low so that you are not accused.

- Bear in mind that the most effective accusations are those which are outlandish, and/or contrary to everything you openly believe in, a principle which Joseph Goebbels well understood when he advised Hitler that if you tell a lie big enough and often enough, people will believe it. If you openly oppose sexual abuse, you may well be accused of sexual misconduct. If you openly oppose racism, you may well be accused of making racist remarks. This is because people tend to believe an accusation of such nature could not possibly be made unless there was some evidence to support it. Moreover, as people are conditioned to view you adversely and be prompted by "concern" for you and to "watch for" certain signs, they will see what they are told to look for.

- Do not expect threats of lawsuits, appearances by attorneys, internal investigations, transparency, or reporters to calm the storm. It will worsen it. If you consult an attorney, do not let your employers know. An attorney eager for a lawsuit will probably not have your best interest in mind.

- Get out. No matter what the cost, mobbing is not something most survive. Take pro-active steps to protect your health, career and finances by finding new employment, before your reputation and your spirit are destroyed. Whatever the costs of leaving, consider your assets and preserve then. Leave before your reputation is destroyed, your finances wiped out by attorney fees, your spirit savagely attacked. When you are at war, you can win. But mobbing is not a form of warfare, it is a form of group aggression that more closely parallels the social processes of genocide, and the only way to survive genocide is to flee.

Final Thoughts

Mobbing is an abusive relationship and if you are being mobbed, your initial instincts – to fix the problem, reason with management, appeal to your friends and close associates, object to violations of your rights, and reason with your attackers – will work against you every time.

Humans are reasonable people, but when acting collectively, emotion replaces reason and our logic follows a curious path that enables us to act on our emotions – fear – and justify our actions as reasonable whatever lies we have to tell ourselves. For this reason, the people closest to a mobbing target will tell themselves whatever they need to believe about the person they once respected in order to justify surviving – and thriving – in an abusive organization.

If you are being mobbed, take an honest look at yourself and your own behaviors in fueling the aggression. Doing so does not in any way justify the violence that is being directed toward you, but just as you learn not to look a grizzly bear in the eyes if you should come across one, figure out what you are doing that is provoking your attackers. *Don't confront your attackers*. Retreat, quietly document everything, but get your resume together and start applying for jobs – even if you don't want to leave. Protect your reputation, safeguard your security and increase your options for escape. Do not accept any claims that you deserve this treatment, but do not accept the victim label, either. You have been mobbed because you *have* done something – however well meaning, however benign, however unintended to hurt anyone, however legal – but you have done something to trigger a violent reaction in others. The sooner you are able to identify what you have done to trigger these emotions, the sooner you can change your own behaviors and more favorably influence perceptions of you until the mob either diffuses, or you get out of their reach and into a new future.

Take a look at what is going on in the mobbing process in your organization and ask yourself where along the continuum of genocidal violence the collective aggression against you now lies, and you will know what is coming next. If there has been a sudden retreat, particularly one marked by assurances that everything is suddenly rosy, be on your guard. The mobbing may well have retreated to the shadows, where a new attack is underway with rumors, closed-door agreements and paper trails being set in motion.

Never presume that just because the conduct against you is against the law that you should continue fighting. I am not suggesting that you not protect your legal rights – you should do so – but suing an employer takes the mobbing public and will make it even harder to find a job and to recover psychologically. Financial settlements are usually paltry in comparison to the costs you suffer, and if not, they will be appealed into the next millennium and attorneys' fees and taxes will take most of any settlement. If you are fighting for a principle, make the principle your own significance to the world. You can give far more to the world by surviving mobbing than by fighting it.

In closing, if you are being mobbed, don't fight back, fight forward. Fight for your future, and relegate mobbing to your past.

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Janice Harper, Ph.D. is a Cultural Anthropologist specializing in structural violence, warfare and organizational cultures. While employed as a faculty member at the University of Tennessee from 2004 – 2009, she became the target of workplace mobbing. False accusations made against her led her to be investigated by the Department of Homeland Security when colleagues and two students accused her of

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