

“The Incestuous Workplace,” by William White

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“The Incestuous Workplace,” by William White is a book that I would recommend. It depicts that dysfunction occurs when there is stress and distress in the organizational family. I will attempt to explain what needs to be examined, who is responsible to change it and what can be done about this problem.

What needs to be examined?

When communication breaks down in the workplace, the work environment, the administration's role, training (or lack thereof) and the employees' health need to be examined to achieve solutions. To examine excesses, poor problem solving, role breakdown and coping strategies of all parties in the workplace can determine the final cost to the health and the careers of all involved.

Ultimately it is important to look at all the issues and players in the process. Management approach can determine the success of the solution of workplace dilemmas. In the book,

The Incestuous Workplace, White prefers the systems approach to solve workplace issues; in his opinion, it is the most proactive and solution-oriented and less limited than the other approaches. White evaluates individual stress response from their point of vulnerability. He believes it provides a framework of survival to each individual in the organization.

From the time of hire, the new employee's presence can change the norm. This change creates the need for an organization to adjust. As the system adapts, it is important for all involved to adapt to the change. Internal and external boundaries as to role and job delineation are important for a healthy system.

One person being all-important or all staff being insignificant creates dysfunction and eventually a distressing environment. Lack of communication, lack of problem solving, no team building, disrespect and role breakdown are warning signs.

Who is responsible for leading with organization change?

It is management's responsibility as the gate keeper to maintain the physical and social environment in the workplace. Management should provide professional education, maintain boundaries and ensure unnecessary stress reduction is maintained. Management could focus on self-care, team care and client care as a guide to help with each individual's growth. Although it is management's responsibility, it does not negate the importance

of each individual's responsibility to develop, both in and out of the system.

What needs to be done?

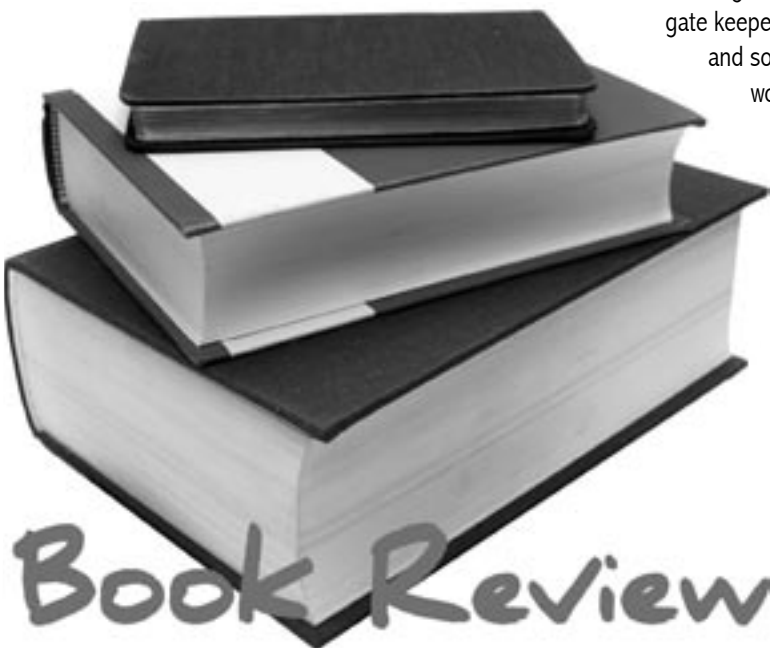
This book affirms the need for clear job description's and personnel policies. This will help professionals define their tasks and increase their ability to adapt to the inner workings of the system. Adequate job descriptions and policies and procedures ensure survival in the workplace. It is also important for the gatekeeper to use these as a guide and to orient all employees upon hire for the health of the whole unit.

Relationship building with all the stakeholders is important. This book is a great reminder to look at the role you play and the system's health as a deterrent to the need to disengage or leave. The author points out the role you play and the support you have will determine your ability to cope within the system.

Even in a healthy system, this book would provide tools to ensure our survival in relation to stress. Stress reduction is important because when pushed beyond our limits, self-inflicted or job inflicted, it could threaten our self-esteem and the effectiveness of our performance in the workplace.

White gives us tools to ensure professional stress does not corrupt or harm the quality of our personal life. Each individual needs to know how to disengage from work to home and home to work. The use of rituals to ensure there is not spillover from one environment to the others as well as maintaining healthy boundaries and detachment is essential.

Team building is important, and survival is determined by the ability to reflect, repair, focus and commit to the process. As professionals, we take control, assume responsibility of ourselves and develop respectful profes-



sional relationships in the workplace. If the organization is not a good fit, we need to be able to assess our part in it. If it is not repairable, we need to leave the relationship with the least bit of harm to ourselves and our career.

The author makes a strong case that personal and professional support is encouraged by involvement in professional groups. Our personal health is contingent on building personal and professional support, maintaining self-esteem and ensuring self-care. When we are pushed to our limits, it is wise to consult other professionals to gain objectivity.

Ultimately, following professional and ethical standards is the bottom line

behavior to exhibit. Whether you choose to change the situation or to remain, you should be aware of the energy it takes to decision. Lastly, it is most ethical to focus on doing no harm — or the least harm.

If you find yourself with a dilemma, do not be afraid to consult. The Ethics Committee is a great resource. Contact a member of the Ethics Committee if you feel you are at the end of your resources.

White, William L. 1997 *The Incestuous Workplace*, Second edition, Hazelden