

BULLY OR BOSS?

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This case was prepared by the author (Thomas) and is intended to be used as a basis for class discussion. The views represented here are those of the case author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Society for Case Research. The views are based on professional judgment.

Introduction

Teresa Sullivan had just started her position as President at the University of Virginia (UVA). One of her highest priorities was to decide what to do with Ted Genoways. She had a number of emails in her inbox complaining that he was a difficult manager, one even alleging that he was a workplace bully. There was also a request from a local reporter wanting to interview her about Genoways and his performance at UVA. Since he was assigned out of the President's Office, Sullivan knew Ted Genoways was the editor-in-chief of the Virginia Quarterly Review (VQR), an in-house journal. VQR had won a number of prestigious awards during his relatively short tenure as editor. However, the economic downturn in 2008 and other organizational factors had put pressure on him and threatened the very existence of VQR. In order for VQR to survive and remain at its current level of excellence, Genoways had found it necessary to "encourage" his employees to work hard and be especially attentive to details in operating the journal. He had also made changes in the publication and staff that some people did not like. Sullivan wondered to herself -Was Genoways, as one employee complained, really a workplace bully? Or was he just a very driven, results oriented manager?

Workplace Bullying

A quick search of the internet found the following information:

According to the Workplace Bullying and Trauma Institute workplace bullying was "*repeated, health-harming mistreatment, verbal abuse, or conduct which is threatening, humiliating, intimidating, or sabotage that interferes with work, or some combination of the three.*" Statistics show that bullying is 3 times as prevalent as illegal discrimination and at least 1,600 times as prevalent as workplace violence. Statistics also show that while only one employee in every 10,000 becomes a victim of workplace violence, one in six experiences bullying at work. Bullying is a little more common than sexual harassment but not verbal abuse which occurs more than bullying.

One of the most popular books on the topic defined workplace bullying as follows:

Bullying at work is the repeated, malicious mistreatment of a Target (the recipient) by a harassing bully (the perpetrator) that is driven by the bully's desire to control the Target. That control is typically a mixture of cruel acts of deliberate humiliation or interference and the withholding of resources and support preventing the Target from succeeding at work (Namie & Namie, 2000).

VQR History

VQR was what some considered a tiny, but respected literary journal initiated in 1925 (Wasserman, 2010). The journal had a staff of 6, including Genoways. Under his leadership, the journal morphed from a small journal publishing poetry and fiction, to a well-respected publication with essays including current events and other high-profile topics. Led by Genoways, VQR became ambitious editorially, sending contributors all over the world. One recent issue included reporting and photographs from Afghanistan, Bolivia, Canada, Chile, Congo, India, Kosovo, and Peru. At least parts of the contributing authors' expenses were paid by VQR (Bazelon, 2010). In 2006, only three years after Genoways assumed the reins, VQR was nominated for six National Magazine Awards, winning two trophies. In the seven years following his becoming editor-in-chief, VQR received nominations for 14 prestigious awards, and won four.

The growth and success of VQR did not come without some employee resistance and replacement. Candace Pugh was VQR's business and circulation manager for over 30 years before she left the position in 2005. She left the position under pressure from Genoways. She stated that "He would constantly accuse me of, or imply that I wasn't doing my job, or criticize me for things that weren't my responsibility. He obviously wanted me out of the office." Pugh left VQR voluntarily, after winning a formal harassment complaint (McNair, 2010b). The suit resulted in her receiving a year's salary, Genoways being admonished for the way he dealt with Pugh, and the President's office temporarily handing the responsibility of supervising VQR employees to Kevin Morrissey, VQR's managing editor.

VQR was only one of the publications used by UVA to meet its mission of scholarly publication. University officials noted "VQR has traditionally been a vehicle for scholarly communication in the humanities, and it has achieved substantial success and national recognition. Scholarly communication is an important aspect of the University's central missions of education, research, and service. VQR should be seen as part of the University's mission in scholarly communication. The university currently fulfills this mission in numerous ways, including the University of Virginia Press, the libraries, and other journals and publications that are edited or published on Grounds" (Internal Audit Department, 2010).

Genoways's Career

Genoways held a B.A. degree from Nebraska Wesleyan and an M.A. from Texas Tech University. He also received a Ph.D. from the University of Iowa where he and VQR associate editor, Molly Minturn, met. He was a reader for the Iowa Review. She was an assistant editor. Genoways later obtained his M.F.A. at UVA (ZYZZYVASPEAKS, 2010).

Prior to becoming editor-in-chief of VQR, Genoways had worked for the Minnesota Historical Society Press. This is where he met the current VQR managing editor, Kevin Morrissey. As opposed to Genoways' multiple degrees, Morrissey had never completed a college degree. Morrissey, a 52 year old bachelor, was considered by most to be a dedicated professional who contributed significantly to the success of VQR and other publications where he had worked. Genoways had thought enough of Morrissey that he hired him from Minnesota shortly after Genoways' move to VQR.

Genoways took over as editor of VQR in 2003, replacing Staige Blackford who was in the process of retiring when he was killed in an automobile accident. At the time, VQR was a black-and-white publication with its primary emphasis on poetry and fiction. Its offices did not have internet access. Genoways started hiring well-known authors and photographers and taking on timely nonfiction projects. He paid journalists to write about high stakes international conflicts like the war in Afghanistan and the violence of the Mexican drug cartel (Wilson, 2010).

Genoways was respected by many in the publishing business, at least in part due to his successes at VQR and his numerous personal publications. These accomplishments led to him receiving a prestigious Guggenheim fellowship. The fellowship allowed Genoways to take a leave of absence to extend his work on a project about American poet Walt Whitman and the Civil War. The fellowship also meant Genoways was not in his office on a regular basis. While Genoways had not intended to give up his editorial authority while on leave, Morrissey was asked by University officials to serve as “acting editor” in Genoways’ absence said Associate Editor Sheila McMillen. She also recounted that Genoways had told the staff they could make changes in VQR while he was away. However, a recent change angered Genoways. The change involved replacing two articles Genoways had planned for publication. The articles were not completed in time to meet the publication schedule and were replaced without the specific approval of Genoways (McNair, 2010b).

Financial issues and the new Assistant

The VQR was experiencing some financial difficulties. In 2002-3, prior to Genoways becoming editor, the VQR budget was approximately \$200,000 per fiscal year. Expenditures had nearly quadrupled to \$796,000 in 2009-10. While the magazine was winning awards, subscriptions had fallen from an estimated 4,500 readers to about 2,500. Genoways attributed the declining sales to the recession and noted that other publications were experiencing declining sales. McMillen, Morrissey, and some subscribers attributed declining sales to a shift from a literary magazine to one more grimly topical. Three of the last four covers featured soldiers carrying weapons, a significant change from the pre-Genoways magazine publishing fiction and poetry (McNair, 2010b).

In November, 2009, Alana Levinson-LaBrosse was hired by Genoways to aid in fundraising to support VQR. She was given the title of assistant editor/development manager. The 24-year-old was from a wealthy Silicon Valley family with ties to UVA. She had previously donated \$1.5 million to UVA. Her father, Frank Levinson, a Forbes 400 fiber optics entrepreneur and three time UVA graduate had pledged \$20 million (Bazelon, 2010), including a “tentatively committed” \$150,000 to VQR. Genoways was able to hire her without going through an official advertising and recruiting process. The exemption was granted by President Casteen, in part, because UVA’s Development Office had raised no money in the past 6 years to support VQR (McNair, 2010b). Levinson-LaBrosse had a desk in Genoways’ office and appeared to some staff members as second-in-command (Wilson, 2010).

Shortly after accepting the position, Levinson-LaBrosse was given responsibility to prepare VQR for a possible transition from the President’s Office to the Office of the Vice President for Research. The position gave her undefined authority over the staff of VQR. While her authority was not specified, she was able to get Kevin Morrissey, Managing Editor, and Waldo Jaquith, Web Editor, banned from their office for a week. She had complained to Genoways that “their

pattern of unprofessional and, at times, explicitly rude behavior toward me in the office was preventing us, as a staff, from getting the transition materials together” (McNair, 2010b). Without hearing their side of the issue, Genoways sent an email suspending both editors for a week.

However, other staff members questioned the allegations and thought Genoways and/or Levinson-LaBrosse had over-reacted. One associate editor, Molly Minturn, commented that Morrissey “always seemed to work hard to bring people together in the office, to be professional, and to make himself a model for how people should treat each other” (McNair, 2010b). Minturn and other staff tried to minimize interaction with Levinson-LaBrosse “because she was ‘extremely’ sensitive, a major donor to the University, unaccustomed to working in an office, and because they believed she was reporting to the on-leave Genoways” (McNair, 2010b).

President’s pending retirement

UVA President John Casteen III hired Genoways to head VQR. In his introductory remarks, Genoways was praised for his “energetic intelligence and visionary thinking” (McNair, 2010a). Casteen was even more confident of his choice when in 2006 Genoways and VQR won a National Magazine Awards for General Excellence. At the same ceremony, VQR also won the Fiction Award, edging out heavyweights like *The Atlantic Monthly*, the *New Yorker*, *Esquire*, and *Harpers* (Wasserman, 2010). Genoways and most of the UVA staff were proud of the awards. Genoways told a local paper “The awards are a tremendous honor. That’s as high as it goes in the magazine world, our Pulitzers. Or as actress Meg Ryan said at the after-party, I guess every industry has its Oscars” (McNair, 2010a). The success raised the bar for the level of performance expected of the VQR staff. The staff seemed to respond as VQR was able to win two more awards in the following three years.

VQR had operated as a separate line in the President’s Office. Funding for the publication came from multiple sources. The President’s budget (University/State funding) accounted for about one-third of VQR’s budget. Another third came from endowment funds. The remainder was generated by the journal through subscriptions, advertising, and licensing (Fitzgerald, 2010). Genoways was hired by and reported directly to President Casteen. Casteen had supported Genoways financially, with a current salary of \$170,000, about double the salary of a UVA associate professor. Casteen had also renewed Genoways contract twice.

However, Casteen had announced his retirement scheduled for July, 2010. He had also advised Genoways that VQR needed to find a new home on the UVA campus. There had been initial conversations with the English Department about VQR becoming part of that branch of the University. However, the Department voted not to give Genoways tenure and discussions ended.

The most recent reorganization plan, and the one that currently seemed the most promising, was to move VQR into the Office of the Vice President for Research. Plans under discussion called for the creation of a Center for Reporting and Research. The Center would include VQR, the currently independent LOOK3 Festival of the Photograph, and UVA’s Young Writer’s Workshop. The plan called for significant funding for directors in charge of each venture, faculty status for the VQR editor, and a \$6 million fundraising initiative (McNair, 2010b).

While such plans appeared to be coming together, only Levinson-LaBrosse and, occasionally, Genoways were involved in the discussions. This left VQR staff uncertain about their potential role at the magazine and University. Minturn commented that “In terms of whatever Ted’s long-term vision for the magazine was, we wanted more information. And we were hopeful that we would be a part of his long-term vision” (Fitzgerald, 2010). Genoways used email extensively to be in contact with his staff and others at UVA. Some of the emails leaked to staff members, including one about “eliminating redundancies” through the restructuring. The lack of information added to staff members’ fears of the restructuring and their futures (Fitzgerald, 2010).

Genoways was on leave while the discussions were occurring and did not feel totally included in the planning. In an email to the Assistant Vice President for Research, Genoways stated that he “would ‘hope to continue to have a say in the staffing and location of VQR.... I understand and support the desire to eliminate redundancies at staff levels and to create coherence within the new center as it develops. I would ask only that I continue to have a role in how those decisions are made’” (Fitzgerald, 2010).

Email Issues

There had been a number of complaints to officials throughout the University about Genoways’ “management-by-email.” Some employees appeared to believe Genoways would rather send an email than to talk to them personally about problems. As noted earlier, he had used email to suspend editors Morrissey and Jaquith for not cooperating with Levinson-LaBrosse in her efforts to prepare the journal for transition to another position in the university. During their week-long suspension from the office, Morrissey and Jaquith were expected to continue to take care of VQR business. During this week, Morrissey sent 14 emails to various UVA officials including the President and Human Resources complaining about the suspension and Genoways’ management style.

Genoways realized emails sometimes resulted in frustrations for his staff. Even though the reason for Morrissey’s suspension was stated in the email, Morrissey apparently did not understand exactly what he had done wrong. Delays in employees forwarding emails and Genoways responding to them sometimes created friction, occasionally inhibiting employees’ abilities to do their work. Still, being on paid leave meant that he could not be in the office to answer every question every day and he had other responsibilities besides those at VQR.

One specific example of employee frustration involved Molly Minturn. Genoways electronically chastised Minturn, an associate editor, for not responding to an email from an author being sent on assignment to Iraq. The author had requested travel money, but had not received a response. Minturn sent Genoways an email stating she knew nothing of the arrangement and that she did not normally handle contracts. Genoways responded with an email stating in part, “...my collegiality is a little threadbare. So let me rephrase: Please see to it that one of our authors has the money he needs to travel on our behalf” (McNair, 2010b). This email was the culmination in a number of exchanges between Minturn and Genoways. Minturn subsequently took the emails to the President’s Office and Human Resources. She was unofficially diagnosed with “post-traumatic stress syndrome” by an HR counselor certified in diagnosing such things and advised to go on medical leave (McNair, 2010b).

Another recipient of a Genoways email was a Temple University professor and former literary journal editor. The professor contacted Genoways to encourage VQR to review a story submitted earlier by one of his students. However, the following day, the professor contacted Genoways to inform him that the story had been accepted elsewhere. Genoways responded with a heated email saying, “What the f***, Don? I forwarded this message with instructions to read the story right away to one of our interns, the chair of our fiction board, and to one of our associate editors. You added hours of unnecessary work to an already overburdened staff.... This behavior would piss me off no matter who perpetrated it, but I can’t believe it coming from you...” (McNair, 2010a).

Genoways had also been known to be critical of others in the profession. In a commentary on the 9/11 Commission, Genoways was critical of one reporter’s performance. He referred to Jeff Rossen as “the swarmy reporter in Bowling for Columbine who fixates on his hair between takes as he reports the tragic school shooting.... Like all young reporters, [Mr. Rossen] fairly exudes get-up-and-go, but he is driven by an insatiable thirst for the most vicarious thrill and an aching desire to be first, not a sense of duty to be most considered and most correct” (Bissell, 2010).

However, as a UVA report noted, “It is sometimes difficult to define where the line gets crossed between a tough manager and an unreasonable one. Nationwide, identifying uncivil (e.g. violent) and inappropriate workplace conduct is more difficult; no laws exist as they do for sexual harassment and other forms of illegal discrimination” (Internal Audit Department, 2010). Sullivan wondered to herself – Had Genoways been unprofessional in dealing with his employees and others with whom he had contact? Were his emails misinterpreted? Had he put too much attention on performance and not enough on teamwork? Had he allowed himself to become a workplace bully?

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