

Jacob's Story - 'Voluntary' Redundancy: An APS Oxymoron

My story will likely resonate with many other APS employees in the current climate of workforce reduction in the APS.

The APS agency I worked for was looking to cull many positions in our division, with the rumour being that the positions reserved for culling were filled by employees who had joined the agency from a different agency in a recent restructure. Rather than engage in a transparent process of simply making positions redundant due to human resource directives, my agency preferred to use sneaky tactics to force employees out by humiliating them, degrading them and damaging their reputations. By the time the targeted employees had reached their tolerance threshold for mistreatment, they took the 'voluntary' redundancy packages constructively forced on them.

My push out the door started with an unjustifiable unsatisfactory performance review by my supervisor. After nearly 20 years in the APS, I had never received an unsatisfactory performance review. When I asked what the grounds were for the unsatisfactory review, I was criticised about a legitimate strategy I had used to try to address negative publicity of our agency. At the time, I had actually been praised by my colleagues for making the best of a bad situation. When I put this to my supervisor, she then said there were other things that were also wrong with my work performance. When I asked for her to elaborate, she said she couldn't remember the other things. I told her this wasn't good enough and refused to sign the performance review.

I was subsequently allocated to a new supervisor who had a reputation for engaging in bullying behaviours towards subordinates. Most of the work I had previously excelled at was taken away from me. Instead, I was given either work that did not suit my professional training and skill-set or, alternatively, mundane or little work to do. I was excluded from important group work and excluded from leadership forums that junior staff to me were invited to attend. My valid expert opinions and ideas, once embraced, shortly began to be frequently disregarded and ignored.

My new supervisor would look for any opportunity to publicly berate and belittle me in front of my colleagues. I reported one of the more severe occasions that my new supervisor and her supervisor publicly attacked me to Human Resources. The matter was apparently investigated, but it was quickly decided that the supervisors did nothing wrong because they claimed that they did not intend to bully me, despite the fact that our agency's bullying and harassment policy stated that intention is irrelevant.

As a result of the daily mistreatment I received, I naturally began to underperform, thereby giving management the ammunition they needed to push me out the door. The division's Harassment Contact Officer was very helpful to me, but she was quickly 'warned off' by Human Resources, stating to her that she was stepping outside the boundaries of her role. I was subsequently left isolated with no real support mechanisms to fall back on.

Eventually a 'voluntary' redundancy was 'offered' to me in exchange of being sacked, which naturally was the more appealing option. I was also told that, either way, it was unlikely I would ever work for the APS again, as the form of my exit from the APS would be permanently recorded in the APS Gazette.

My experience has made me realize that the APS spouts its motherhood statements about the APS Values, but they are no more than platitudes. Management in my case had no regard for my career and reputation that I worked hard to cultivate and protect over many years, and no regard for my well-being and home-life.

Staff surveys show time and time again that bullying and harassment is rife in the APS, which are quickly followed by the ubiquitous 'zero-tolerance' statements, but nothing changes.