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Q12

Case study. Pawan is working as an officer in the State Government for the last ten years. As a part of the routine transfer, he was posted to another department. He joined in a new office along with five other colleagues. The head of the office was a senior officer conversant with the functioning of the office. As a part of general inquiry, Pawan gathered that his senior officer carries the reputation of being a difficult and insensitive person having his own disturbed family life. Initially, all seem to go well. However, after some time Pawan felt that the senior officer was belittling him and at times unreasonable. Whatever suggestions given or views expressed by Pawan in the meetings were summarily rejected and the senior officer would express displeasure in the presence of others. It became a pattern of the boss's style of functioning to show him in bad light highlighting his shortcomings and humiliating him publically. It became apparent that though there are no serious work-related problems/shortcomings, the senior officer was always on one pretext or the other and would scold and shout at him. The continuous harassment and public criticism of Pawan resulted in loss of confidence, self-esteem, and equanimity. Pawan realized that his relations with his senior officer are becoming more toxic and due to this, he felt perpetually tensed, anxious and stressed. His mind was occupied with negativity and caused him mental torture, anguish and agony. Eventually, it badly affected his personal and family life. He was no longer joyous, happy and contented even t home. Rather without any reason he would loose his temper with his wife and other family members. The family environment was no longer pleasant and congenial. His wife who was always supportive to him also became a victim of his negativity and hostile behaviour. Due to harassment and humiliation suffered by him in the office, comfort and happiness virtually vanished from his life. Thus it damaged his physical and mental health. - What are the options available with Pawan to cope with the situation? - What approach Pawan should adopt for

bringing peace, tranquillity and congenial environment in the office and home? - As an outsider, what are your Suggestions for both boss and subordinate to overcome this situation and for improving the work performance, mental and emotional hygiene? - In the above scenario, what type of training would you suggest for at various levels in the government offices?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · GS IV · 20 marks · Ethics Case Studies

Case Studies on above issues.

Core demand of the question

- Pawan, a State-government officer of ten years, joins a new office. The boss is known as difficult, with a disturbed family life. After a calm start, the boss belittles Pawan, rejects every suggestion in public, scolds without work-related cause, and humiliates him. Pawan loses confidence and sleep, becomes tense and hostile at home; his wife suffers his displaced anger
- (a) Options for Pawan to cope
- (b) Approach for peace at office and home
- (c) Suggestions for boss and subordinate on performance and mental hygiene
- (d) Training at various levels. Do not match abuse at home; use documentation, grievance, transfer, counselling

Revision summary

Pawan's boss humiliates him without a work cause; the injury has reached Pawan's wife.

Silent endurance, matching abuse, a clique, and unrecorded flight all fail.

Cope with documentation, grievance, transfer request, counselling, and a stop to displaced anger at home.

The boss must quit public scolding and get help; both need a witnessed work review.

- **Training:** 360 feedback, EI for seniors, workplace dignity, ARC-style organisational ethics.

Introduction

A toxic boss is an organisational ethics failure, not a personality quiz Pawan must fail alone. Matching the shout at his wife is a second injustice. The path is record, lawful grievance, help, and a request to move - not a duel and not silent collapse.

Body

Stakeholders

- Pawan, his wife, and other family members now living under his displaced temper.
- The senior officer, whose own family disturbance is context, not a licence.
- Five colleagues who joined with Pawan and the rest of the office who watch the humiliation.
- The public whose files slow down when an office is a theatre of fear.
- The department's administration and training institutes.

(a) Options to cope

- **Option 1:** Endure in silence until the body or the marriage breaks.
- **Option 2:** Match the boss - public sarcasm, leaks, and shouting at home as "release".

- **Option 3:** Informal clique against the boss, without a file.
- **Option 4:** Sudden medical leave forever, with no record of cause.
- **Option 5:** Contemporaneous documentation, internal grievance, counselling, a written transfer or posting-protection request, and a disciplined refusal to import office poison into the house.
- Reject 1-4 as coping. Silence trains the bully. Matching abuse spreads the injury. A clique without paper becomes the next drama. Leave without a record helps the boss's story that Pawan was weak.

(b) Approach for peace at office and home

- **Office:** short, factual notes of each public humiliation - date, words, witnesses - stored outside the boss's drawer.
- Use the department's grievance and vigilance-for-conduct channel, and the CCS/State conduct expectation that a senior shall not harass.
- Ask in writing for work instructions by email so oral ambush is harder.
- Do not sabotage files; competence is **Pawan's shield** and the public's right.
- Seek a routine transfer on record of a hostile environment, not a whispering campaign.
- **Home:** tell the wife the true source, apologise for displaced anger, and stop using her as a junior officer.
- Counselling or a staff clinic for anxiety; alcohol as self-medication is not peace.
- Separate office hours from home hours with a walk, a ritual, a phone-off meal - **emotional intelligence** as self-regulation, not as charm for the boss.
- If facts approach sexual harassment of anyone in the office, the **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013** door is additional; dignity of men is still a conduct issue even where POSH does not title the case.

(c) Suggestions for boss and subordinate

- **Boss:** public scolding is not leadership. Take feedback in private. Get help for the disturbed family life so it is not exported as office sadism. Apologise where you humiliated. Judge work, not ego.
- **Boss:** **360-degree feedback** should have reached you before Pawan broke. Treat a silent room in meetings as a red flag, not as discipline.
- **Subordinate:** stay civil, keep minutes, do not grovel, do not bait. Document. Seek peers as witnesses, not as a mob.
- **Both:** agree a weekly closed-door work review with a third officer present if trust is gone.
- **Mental hygiene:** sleep, no humiliation as humour, and a rule that family is not a dumping ground. The boss needs this as much as Pawan.
- **Performance:** fear reduces reporting of errors; a humiliated officer hides a mistake until it is a scandal. Psychological safety is efficiency.

(d) Training at various levels

- **Induction:** dignity, the Conduct Rules, and that shouting is not "old school toughness".
- **Mid-career for seniors:** **emotional intelligence**, anger, and the cost of a disturbed private life brought to the dak.
- **360-degree feedback** that actually affects the ACR of a chronic humiliator.
- POSH-adjacent modules on workplace dignity for all genders, so public belittling is named as misconduct.

- Counselling skills for heads of office; mandatory after a cluster of transfer requests from one desk.
- **Second Administrative Reforms Commission organisational-ethics idea:** systems, not only a saintly junior.
- Peer-support groups and a confidential ombudsperson so Pawan is not the only file.
- **Simulation:** how to give negative work feedback without character assassination.
- Family-wellness sessions that warn about displaced aggression - for Pawan's pattern and for the boss's.

Flow diagram

Public humiliation -> Dated record
 Dated record -> Grievance and transfer request
 Dated record -> Counselling
 Shout at spouse -> Second victim
 360 EI dignity POSH-adjacent -> Organisational ethics

Conclusion

Pawan should record, grieve through channels, seek transfer and counselling, and keep the house off the battlefield. The boss must stop public humiliation and treat his private wound. Training should install 360 feedback, dignity, and EI for seniors so the next office is not another toxic posting.

Facts & figures

Central and State conduct rules

Require courtesy and prohibit behaviour unbecoming of a public servant; chronic public humiliation is a conduct issue, not a management style.

Emotional intelligence

Self-regulation and empathy are how Pawan keeps the injury from becoming domestic abuse, and how a boss should have led.

Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013

The POSH statute for sexual harassment; adjacent dignity training is still needed for non-sexual public humiliation of any officer.

360-degree feedback

A personnel tool so that only downward ACRs do not hide a toxic senior; it must have career consequence.

Second Administrative Reforms Commission

Treated organisational ethics and example from the head as systems, which is the right level for a pattern like this boss.

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