

Waking up my senses

I just finished reading the latest issue of *University Affairs* (January-February 2021). I am a big fan of the magazine and take my time to read the paper copy from cover to cover. Reading UA this evening made me even more aware of how much the pandemic has impacted my life, and this was not caused by anything particular that I read. Rather, it was how my senses got woken up: I could feel the tactile quality of the paper, I could smell the print and I could hear the sound when leafing through the pages. It also, parenthetically, got me thinking how much I miss seeing my students in person and hearing the noise of my classroom.

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Workplace harassment

An open letter to university leadership: having experienced workplace bullying, I found myself uncontrollably emotional when I heard the news that Governor General Julie Payette resigned after she was found to have presided over a toxic work environment at Rideau Hall. What struck me about Ms. Payette's resignation was her subtle denial that she had done anything wrong, stating instead that, "we all experience things differently." In other words, the victim is also to blame.

I too, along with others at my university, have been the target of repeated intimidation and a toxic workplace created by a certain individual in our midst – let's call him "Jacob." As a full professor and (former) senior administrator, Jacob's frequent verbal assaults, deceit and demands of personal loyalty in all matters have touched not only me but many of his former graduate students and work colleagues over a period spanning many years. Jacob touts himself as a champion of the underprivileged and of the underrepre-

sented. But, in fact, he is an exploiter of these people, who he finds especially easy to control.

As a junior faculty member, it took me a long time to understand how Jacob was influencing my own perspective about individuals around campus, to his own advantage. In exchange for his tutelage, he expected unwavering support of his perspectives on university matters, and successfully controlled my vote at faculty and department meetings. I feel ashamed to have been such a fool. But, Jacob is clever, convincing and instils fear. And then, I defied him.

When Jacob no longer controls a person, he then resorts to controlling how other people see them. He does this by spreading untruths about his quarry, usually behind the scenes. I have experienced this too, first-hand, and it leaves one feeling hopeless.

Many formal complaints have been made during Jacob's tenure at my university – he told me this, proudly – and yet he remains. In fact, he has since been appointed to a number of high-profile governing bodies at my university. This

is shameful and disturbing, particularly because those who have promoted him have not been ignorant of his behaviour, nor of the toxic workplace environment that he has cultivated.

Therefore, I write this open letter to you, our university leaders, not because I think you will take action to change things in the case of Jacob. But rather, I write to remind you that workplace harassment is real and that it does not manifest itself in singular events, but instead more subtly – in repeated, sometimes small, inconspicuous actions, over time. When we turn a blind eye to its existence because it is inconvenient or unclear, or because we are afraid, then it continues. And, for some of us, just like those who chose to not file official grievances against Julie Payette, the toxicity haunts us every day at work. As a university leader, please be on the watch for Jacob.

Anonymous

The writer, a professor at a Canadian university, requested that their name be withheld.