

Managing A Toxic Workplace Environment

Strategies for diffusing workplace verbal aggression
while maintaining dignity and workplace harmony

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2019

The background of the slide features several thin, curved lines in shades of gray, some solid and some dashed, creating a modern, abstract design.

How common
is workplace
place
bullying?


How common is workplace place bullying?

2017 WBI U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey

“Repeated mistreatment of an employee by one or more employees; abusive conduct that is: threatening, humiliating, or intimidating, work sabotage, or verbal abuse”

Key Findings:

- 19% of Americans are bullied, another 19% witness it
- 61% of Americans are aware of abusive conduct in the workplace
- 60.4 million Americans are affected by it
- 70% of perpetrators are men; 60% of targets are women
- 61% of bullies are bosses, the majority (63%) operate alone
- 40% of bullied targets are believed to suffer adverse health effects
- 29% of targets remain silent about their experiences
- 71% of employer reactions are harmful to targets
- 60% of coworker reactions are harmful to targets
- To stop it, 65% of targets lose their original jobs



Strategies
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Avoidance

- Being aware of situations that will likely lead to verbal conflict and avoiding them

Withdrawal

- Once you have been engaged, making an excuse and exiting the area

Deflection

- Changing the topic or focus on the interaction to avoid further reaction

Compromise

- Seeking ways to placate the attacker

Engage

- To attack back or defend

POLL

- What strategies do you use when you feel under threat
 - Avoidance
 - Withdraw
 - Deflection
 - Compromise
 - Engage

A deer in the headlights



A deer in the headlights

The cost



A deer in the headlights



The cost

Mental: avoidance of responsibility, avoidance of risk, lack of clarity/ focus/ concentration, racing thoughts, worry, poor decisions

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Physical: high blood pressure, low energy, insomnia, headaches, diarrhea, constipation, and nausea



A deer in the headlights

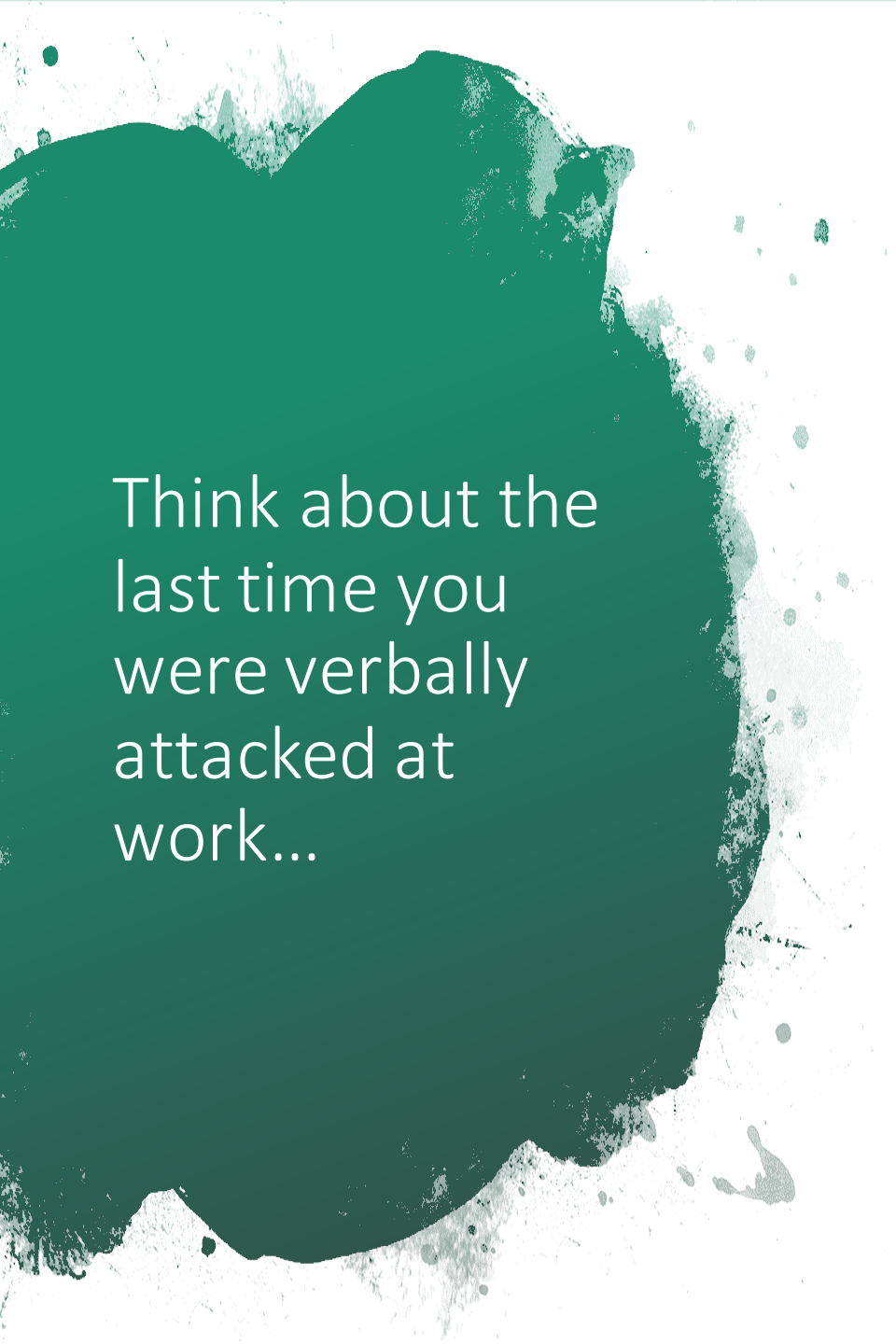
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Mental: avoidance of responsibility, avoidance of risk, lack of clarity/ focus/ concentration, racing thoughts, worry, poor decisions


Physical: high blood pressure, low energy, insomnia, headaches, diarrhea, constipation, and nausea

Emotional: Depression, anxiety, anger, irritability, restlessness, hopelessness, shame






Think about the
last time you
were verbally
attacked at
work...




Think about the
last time you
were verbally
attacked at
work...

- How did it make you feel?




Think about the
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- How did it make you feel?
- How did you respond?




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- How did it make you feel?
- How did you respond?
- How did you feel about your response?



Think about the
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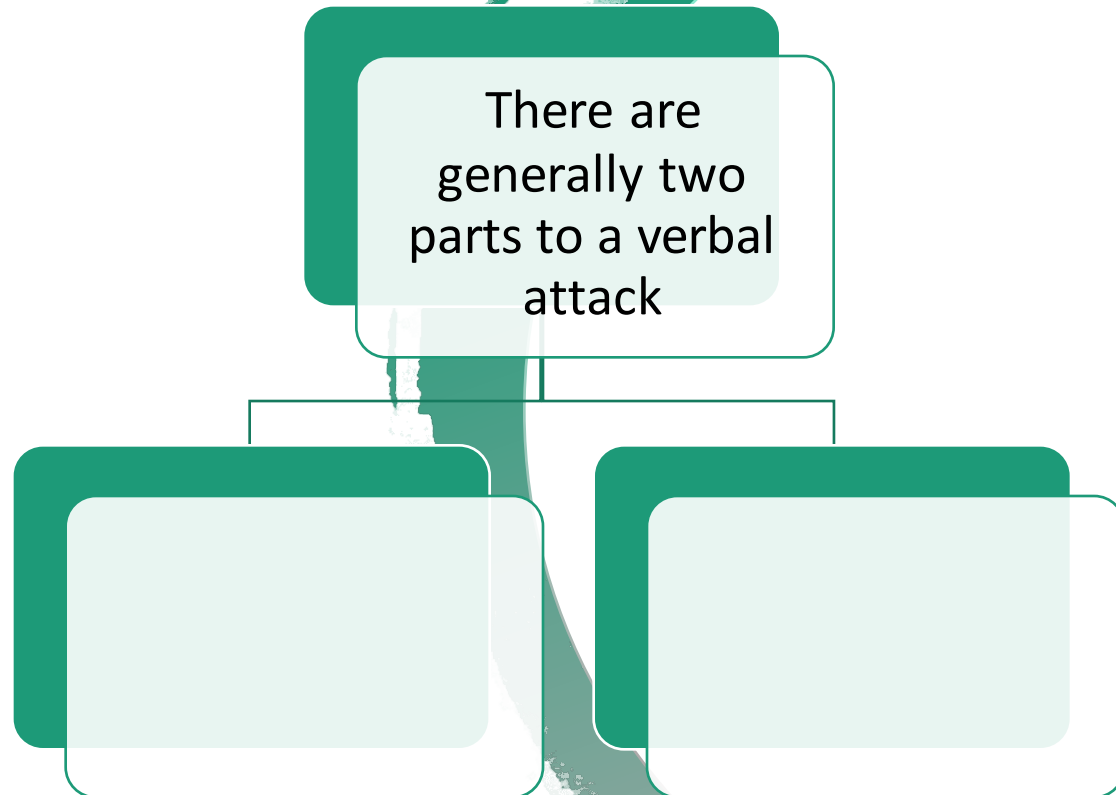
- How did it make you feel?
- How did you respond?
- How did you feel about your response?
- Were there positive or negative consequences from your response?



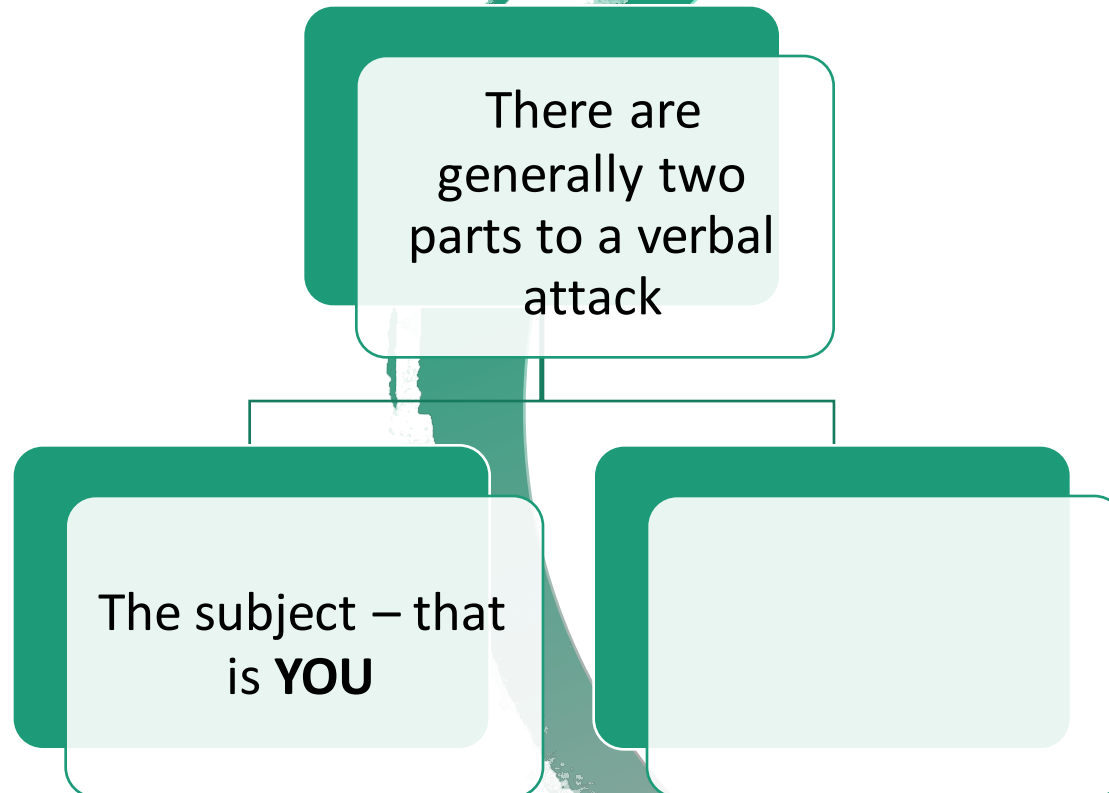
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- How did it make you feel?
- How did you respond?
- How did you feel about your response?
- Were there positive or negative consequences from your response?
- Is there anything you wish you had said or done after the fact?

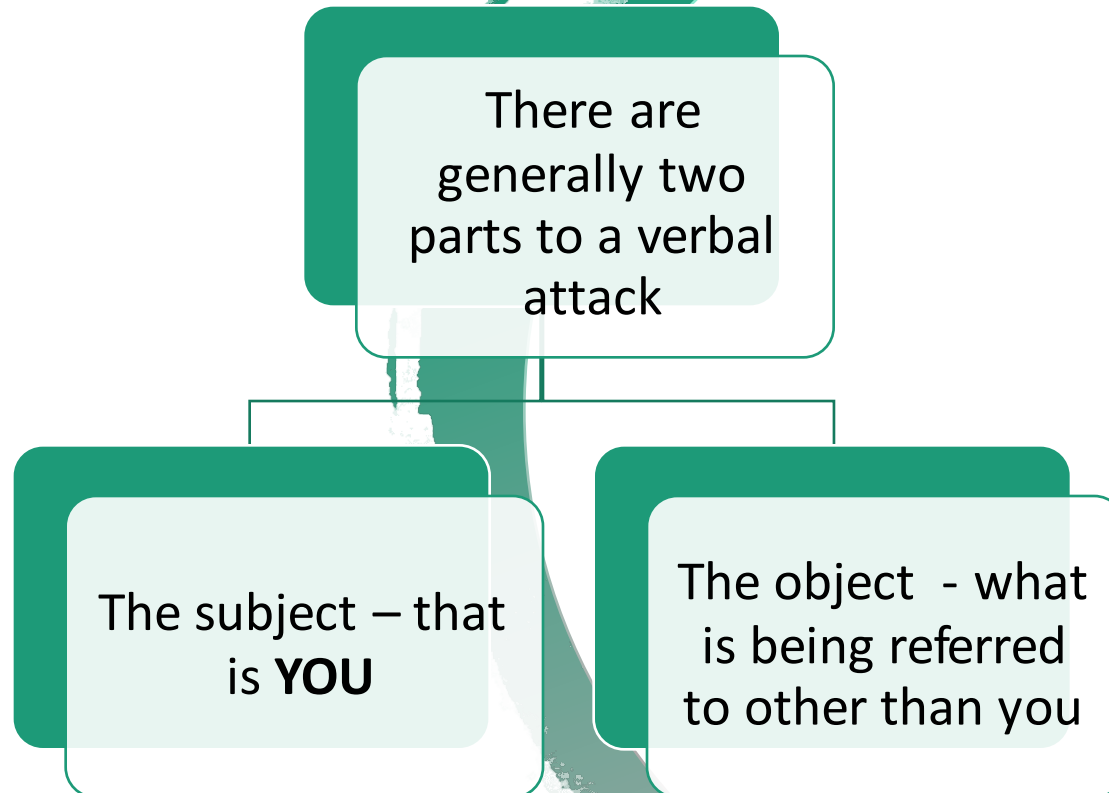
Verbal Attacks



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Verbal Attacks



Verbal Self-Defense

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This means you never start a response with “I” or “you”



*If you really
wanted this
project to
succeed, you
would attend
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THE BAIT/SUBJECT:

THE OBJECTS:




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THE BAIT/SUBJECT:

- **You** don't show up

THE OBJECTS:




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THE BAIT/SUBJECT:

- **You** don't show up

THE OBJECTS:


- The project (success)
- Meetings (are important)



*Even that new
girl on the 4th
floor could
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THE BAIT:

THE OBJECTS:




*Even that new
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THE BAIT:

- **You** are not competent / **You** are less competent than a new girl

THE OBJECTS:




*Even that new
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THE BAIT:

- **You** are not competent / **You** are less competent than a new girl

THE OBJECTS:


- New people
- Girls
- “This”



*If you're after a
promotion, I
suggest you get
things in on
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THE BAIT:

THE OBJECT:




*If you're after a
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THE BAIT:

- **You** don't get things in on time/
you are a poor time manager

THE OBJECT:




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THE BAIT:

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THE OBJECT:


- Promotion
- Timelines
- Timeliness



*For a smart
person, you
make a lot of
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mistakes*

THE BAIT:

THE OBJECTS:




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*For a smart
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THE BAIT:

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THE OBJECTS:


- Smart people
- Mistakes
- Carelessness



*Don't worry,
your colleagues
can carry you
when you drop
the ball*

THE BAIT:

THE OBJECTS:




*Don't worry,
your colleagues
can carry you
when you drop
the ball*

THE BAIT:

- **You** are going to let everyone down

THE OBJECTS:




*Don't worry,
your colleagues
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THE BAIT:

- **You** are going to let everyone down

THE OBJECTS:


- Your colleagues
- The 'ball'



*Why do you
always have to
argue?*

THE BAIT:

THE OBJECT




*Why do you
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argue?*

THE BAIT:

- **You** are always argumentative

THE OBJECT



*Why do you
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THE BAIT:

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THE OBJECT

- Arguments

The background of the slide features several thin, curved lines in shades of gray, some solid and some dashed, creating a sense of movement and depth. A large green speech bubble is positioned on the left side of the slide.

Remember....

- **Verbal self-defense** has four basic parts:
 - Identify the subject (that is easy because it is always you)
 - IGNORE the attack on the subject (you) (DO NOT bite)
 - Identity the 'object'. What you are being attacked about (laziness, thoroughness, timeliness, cooperation etc.)
 - Respond ONLY about the OBJECT, avoiding the SUBJECT (you)

A large, textured orange watercolor splash on the left side of the slide, with various shades of orange and brown, creating a painterly effect.

*If you really
wanted this
project to
succeed, you
would attend
every meeting*


THE BAIT/SUBJECT:

- **You** don't show up

THE OBJECTS:

- The project (success)
- Meeting (are important)
- Priorities

THE RESPONSE:



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- **You** don't show up

THE OBJECTS:

- The project (success)
- Meeting (are important)
- Priorities

THE RESPONSE:

- *This project...*
- *This meeting...*
- *My priority is*



*Even that new
girl on the 4th
floor could
handle this*


THE BAIT:

- **You** are not competent / **You** are less competent than a new girl

THE OBJECTS:

- New people (are less competent)
- Girls (are less competent)
- “This” (is easy)

THE RESPONSE:



*Even that new
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THE BAIT:


- **You** are not competent / **You** are less competent than a new girl

THE OBJECTS:

- New people (are less competent)
- Girls (are less competent)
- “This” (is easy)

THE RESPONSE:

- *Our new staff...*
- *“Girls” are..*
- *Actually this project...*



*If you're after
a promotion,
I suggest you
get things in
on time*


THE BAIT:

- **You** don't get things in on time/
you are a poor time manager

THE OBJECT:

- Promotion
- Timelines
- Timeliness

THE RESPONSE:



*If you're after
a promotion,
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THE BAIT:


- **You** don't get things in on time/
you are a poor time manager

THE OBJECT:

- Promotion
- Timelines
- Timeliness

THE RESPONSE:

- *A promotion...*
- *I'm glad you brought the
timeline up. The timeline...*

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*For a smart
person, you
make a lot of
careless
mistakes*


THE BAIT:

- **You** are careless/ you make a lot of mistakes

THE OBJECTS:

- Smart people
- Mistakes
- Carelessness

THE RESPONSE:



*For a smart
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THE BAIT:

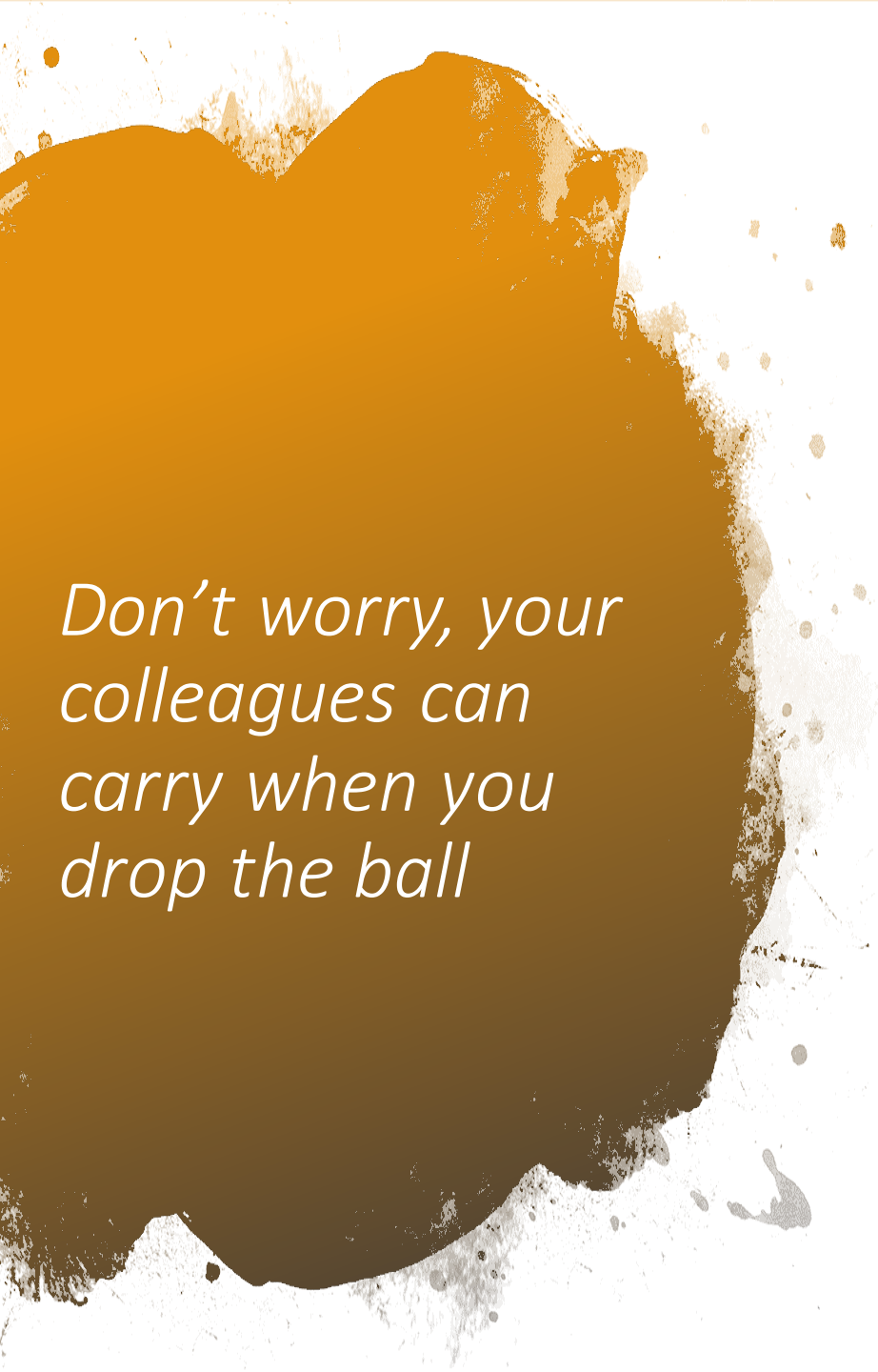
- **You** are careless/ you make a lot of mistakes

THE OBJECTS:

- Smart people
- Mistakes
- Carelessness

THE RESPONSE:

- *Actually research confirms that smart people...*
- *Mistakes aren't...*
- *Better to make careless mistakes, then purposeful ones...*



*Don't worry, your
colleagues can
carry when you
drop the ball*


THE BAIT:

- **You** are going to let everyone down

THE OBJECTS:

- Your colleagues
- Worry
- The 'ball'

THE RESPONSE:



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THE BAIT:


- **You** are going to let everyone down

THE OBJECTS:

- Your colleagues
- Worry
- The 'ball'

THE RESPONSE:

- *My colleagues...*
- *Worry isn't my concern...*
- *Let's talk about 'the ball'. This project...*



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- **You** are always argumentative

THE OBJECT

- Arguments

THE RESPONSE:



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- Arguments

THE RESPONSE:

- *Arguments are/ aren't*

Helping others

The same strategies can be used to deflect heat off of others

Also consider asking to:

- Hear more from someone when they have been spoken over
- Circle back to an idea that was dismissed and is then presented by someone else

The Benefits and Risks

Benefits

Out of the spotlight

Target off your back

Less stress

Higher productivity

Higher workplace satisfaction

Risks (possible but not likely)

Angering your boss/ colleagues

- Increased shaming
- Reporting behaviors to superiors
- Loss of responsibility

References

Elgin, S. H. (2000) *The Gentle Art of Verbal Self-Defense at Work*. Prentice-Hall, Inc. NY, NY. 1980.

Satir, V. (1972) *Peoplemaking*. Science and Behavior Books, Inc. Palo Alto, CA.