



Am I the Only Sane One Working Here?: 101 Solutions for Surviving Office Insanity

Albert J. Bernstein

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... the most comprehensive guide I have ever read for solving any conceivable trying scenario!"

--Julie Jansen, bestselling author of *You Want Me to Work with Who?* and *I Don't Know What I Want, but I Know It's Not This*

You can't stop office madness, but you can stop the madness from getting to you.

Gossipy coworkers, unmanageable managers, and cranky clients have got you pulling your hair out and gnawing your nails down to nubs. From teammates who drop the ball on deadlines to corporate bullies who try to run your show, your work environment can be lethal to your health and your career.

Change Your Reaction, Not Their Actions

When things get crazy, you may not be able to control how others behave, but you can change how you respond. Al Bernstein shows you how understand the situation, how to keep the craziness from bothering you, how to keep things from getting worse, and how you can make them better.

Problems/solutions discussed inside:

Coworkers who don't like you? Feed them!
Hidden agendas? Unleash the power of "cc: " mail!
Unpleasant supervisors? Tell them only what they want to hear!
Office gossip? Dish out positive gossip about other people!
Lying coworkers? Buy into their lies and watch what happens!
And ninety-five more!

Am I the Only Sane One Working Here?: 101 Solutions for Surviving Office Insanity Details

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From Reader Review Am I the Only Sane One Working Here?: 101 Solutions for Surviving Office Insanity for online ebook

Candace says

The chapters dealing with Worst Case scenarios was a bit weird. Having situations like, "I had an affair," seemed weird to me. Overall, there were some decent bits of advice. I didn't like the comments about appearance though, having green hair is like wearing your immaturity on your head? I didn't like that.

Anne says

(had to read for school) - this book really attempts to be funny, sometimes it even succeeds. It was still interesting to read, hope the knowledge in this book proves to be useful in real life, because at this point I'm really not sure if it does.

Levent says

Best book I've read in a while. I would love to recommend it to anyone and everyone I know except for the unusual title. In fairness, it did sell me the book. The book is way better than my expectations and useful for anyone working in a corporate environment. (In fact, it would even be useful to people close to such people). Definitely worth reading!

Dianna says

Catchy title for a book full of drivel.

Kaishauna says

This is an incredible book and should be mandatory reading for anyone going into the workforce!!! It's sarcastic, relevant, and dead on with what actually happens in the workplace. This book gives accurate scenarios, and extremely useful tips on how to deal with each circumstance and/or type of person you encounter. Incredibly useful read!!

Dorsch and Navarre Branch Libraries says

Good Self Help Book – purchase own copy – and read through again and highlight!

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10 Listening

- everyone has their own perceptions so will hear different things in the story
- why is she telling me this story
- what is the purpose behind the words
- does the person want something from me or want me to do something for them?

11 Motivation

Know what moves people

- recognize instinctual patterns
- fight or flight
- dominance
- territoriality
- sexuality
- see through their perception filters
- recognize their habits and yours
- sometimes bad habits yield more reinforcement than good habits
- make conscious choices – when everyone else is going crazy – continue to make rational choices for yourself

Do the unexpected – recognize patterns, but do not participate in them, Most interpersonal difficulties are dances that cannot continue if one person purposely stays out of step. The rest of the book is a series of lessons on declining dances that will drive you crazy.

13 Autopilot

Most of the time most of us are on autopilot.

Learn how to override

Recognize emotional situations by your level of arousal

Slow down

Make sure goal is realistic

Be aware of habitual traps

- blame
- anger
- avoidance
- being overly nice
- perfectionism

16 Anger

Defusing anger

- ask for time
- Know your goal
- Never try to reason with a person who is yelling
- Don't explain
- ask "What would you like me to do?"

32 Unwritten Rules

- how to figure them out
- is work suppose to be the center of your life
- how important is the bottom line
- are people expected to walk the walk

- which is more important: quality or quantity
- are decisions influenced more by the long run or the short run
- is there a conception of corporate responsibility
- what is your company's attitude toward being a good citizen? Are people encouraged to involve themselves in civic projects on company time, or is community service just for those guys by the roadside who get DUIs?
- how are you suppose to behave toward authority
- who is accountable for what
- are there expectations about demeanor
- what is kept secret
- is it safe to be creative
- what is your company's position on aggressiveness
- are managers responsible for employee relations

Corporate myths teach unwritten rules – listen to them

50 Decisions

- how to make a decision
- know your options
- know who wants what
- trust your gut, but don't let it make decisions for you
- immerse yourself, but don't drown
- set a time line
- jump
- make your decision the right one

61 The Interview

- How to stand out
- know the impression you want to make
- create your legend
- play to your audience
- HR Screeners want facts, figures, and details
- managers are generally more interested in forming global impressions about working directly with you
- rehearse answers to standard interview questions
- tell me about yourself
- what is your greatest strength
- what is your greatest weakness
- what can you do for us
- expect a few trick questions
- rehearse and rehearse some more
- overdress
- arrive early
- shake hands firmly
- take control
- demonstrate that you are a regular person
- keep 'em talking
- never say anything negative about your previous job
- ask about money
- ask a few probing questions

- schedule the next contact
- write a thank you note

81 Doing a good job and succeeding are not the same thing

Doing a good job

- working directly with customers
- serving on committees and task forces with people at your own level
- training
- coming up with ideas that improve quality or morale but cost money

Succeeding or may lead to corporate advancement

- bringing in new business
- cost cutting
- doing anything with people of higher rank
- taking the management side on controversial issues
- generating text
- socializing

82 Good Attitude

How to fake a good attitude

- come in
- identify with the company
- have a professional appearance
- be pleasant
- accept direction and criticism
- do your job as if it were worth doing
- know you boss's priorities and follow them
- be circumspect with ideas you put forward
- don't make them have to tell you everything
- have a sense of humor
- come in on time

85 Negotiation

How to be a tough negotiator

- with whom are you actually negotiating
- what are your goals for your company and yourself
- what are the other guy's goals
- for his company
- everyone wants to get as much as they can for as little as they can
- his personal needs
- give something to meet personal needs with out giving in
- if he wants to win – let him score points – take a hard stand and back down in an unimportant area
- if he wants to be the smartest guy in the room – make a few mistakes – they will find it hard to resist correcting you – act mad – but know inside you are gaining control by giving them what they want
- if he wants to be fair and reasonable – they want your approval --- give it --- compliment them on being reasonable
- if they want to intimidate you – chew antacids – it gets them every time
- what are the outside pressures on you
- what limits are there on your decision-making authority
- what is the pressure on your opponent

- on what premises do you agree
- what might be considered win-win
- is any of this personal

86 People Skills

Workout

- warm-up listening
- exercise it – making small talk
- exercise it – using praise
- exercise it – remembering
- exercise it – being tactful
- exercise it – validating problems before offering advice
- exercise it – showing empathy

95 The language of management pgs 266-267 word for word so use quotation marks!

Language is the primary tool of management. Guys on the shop floor would get into big trouble if they used their tools as imprecisely as managers use words. Beneath the jargon and the buzzwords are some important concepts that need to be understood and communicated.

Managers need to understand the distinctions between words and concepts that are often used interchangeably in day-to-day conversations at work.

Problem and Dilemma.

- A problem can be solved, and with luck, it goes away.
- Dilemmas are not solved; they must be constantly balanced. More of one means less of the other. Eg quality vs cost, speed vs accuracy, and profit vs market share dilemmas are good things for managers, if there were no opposing forces to balance, there would be no need for managers.

Supervising and Managing.

Supervisors organize the work and solve whatever problems get in the way of doing it. Supervisors see that the job gets done.

Managers balance opposing forces so that they can set clear priorities for supervisors. Managers decide which of all the possible jobs deserves the most attention.

Adequacy and Excellence.

Excellence is close to perfection. Perfection, though admirable, is frightfully expensive.

It is the job of management to set the standards for adequacy and specify the jobs that are so critical to the overall goals of the business that only perfection will do.

Product and Process.

Product is what you do.

Process is how you do it.

When a manager can clearly describe the product, he or she does not have to meddle with the process. This descriptive ability is known as “vision.” Managers without vision keep tight control over the process.

Sales and Marketing.

Sales means persuading customers to buy the product you have already produced.

Marketing is asking customers what they want to buy, so you will know what to produce in the future.

Working hard and Doing What's Most Important.

Working hard involves putting in a lot of hours and doing a lot of stuff.

Doing what's most important always involves making tough choices.

No amount of hard work can compensate for avoiding a difficult decision.

Delegation and Task Assignment.

You delegate power, not tasks.

Telling people what to do is task assignment.

Giving them the power to do it is delegation.

Reverence and Respect.

Whatever-and whoever- is perfect and cannot be improved deserves reverence.

Anything that can be improved deserves the respect of open discussion about how it can be improved and whether it should be.

Cooperating and Competing.

The difference between these two involves information.

If you're sharing it, you're cooperating. If you withhold it for whatever reason, you're competing. How much information should you share with your supervisor and your subordinates? It is just one of the many dilemmas a manager has to balance every day.

96 Breeding for the wrong characteristics

On teams, why brightest and most creative most difficult to manage. Would be easier to hire all easy people who don't ask questions or want to do things their own way. Tempting to avoid them and try to get by with less talented people who are easier to work with. "You know enough not to give in to this temptation, but it definitely makes your job harder. Nobody said management was easy."

"To stay sane and get ahead, you have to fit in, be cheerful, and please your boss."

"Businesses need people at all levels to be flexible and creative, to anticipate problems, and to make decisions for themselves."

Some of the important attributes that managers should make an effort to nurture:

Creativity – creativity and rebellion grow from the same roots. Both are characteristics of people who see things differently than other people might. Creative people may be exasperating in their stubborn unwillingness to conform. They may seem to be more trouble than they are worth until you need a radically different approach to a problem, and then they are life savers.

Critical Thinking – people who notice problems and point them out are necessary to keeping a business healthy. These people often make life uncomfortable for other employees and especially for their managers. If we ignore the complaints or pass them off as a bad attitude we teach everyone to keep their mouth shut. Then no one points out problems that could affect the bottom line.

Initiative – Nobody likes mistakes but they can be the result of employees taking initiative. Do not treat mistakes like sins or you will breed a strain of employees who are better at covering their tails than seizing opportunities.

“The temptation is strong to hire and promote people based on how easy they are to manage rather than how well they supply the critical traits that a company needs.” “Nobody said good management was easy.”

98 Teamwork Pg 272

“Most people would agree that teamwork implies a group of people working together, pooling their resources to accomplish mutual goals, and placing their own needs secondary to the needs of the group. Easy to define, hard to do.

The problem is that people don’t automatically know how to work as a team. Unless the common needs are explicitly defined, the group’s needs will end up being synonymous with the desires of the most assertive member or of the boss.

People who ride over other people are seen as having leadership qualities; people who bring up problems are seen as not being team players.”

Businesses are full of frustrated, somewhat assertive people who, having thought that being part of a team meant they would have a part in making decisions, offered an opinion and then discovered that teamwork really meant keeping your mouth shut, smiling, and doing what you are told.

Managers are not taught how to get their people to play as a team, and were not able to figure it out for themselves.

98 How to encourage teamwork

Unless something is done to prevent it, teams have a way of drifting in the direction of hierarchical management. They are easier to run that way, but their main advantage – that of having many brains working on the same problem – is canceled out for the expediency of having one brain thinking – and many hands following directions.

Here are some suggestions for encouraging real teamwork:

Arrange Contingencies, and Enforce them Carefully- If you want to maintain the spirit of teamwork, make sure that all team members share in rewards and punishments equally. If someone can advance by being a member of a team ... some of the more assertive members will use the team as a vehicle to do so. As soon as one of the players starts putting his or her own needs ahead of the needs of the team and getting rewarded for it, the whole team concept is out the window.

“Continually Redefine Teamwork- To keep a team functioning as a team, you have to talk continually about the definition of teamwork on this project and in this setting. Team goals must be clearly specified, as well as each member’s responsibility for meeting those goals. It needs to be clear in everyone’s mind which behaviors are characteristic of cooperation and which are characteristic of vying for control. It’s hard to specify these behaviors in advance, but it is easy to see them when they occur. That’s why you have to talk about it on a regular basis. Being a team leader means leading these discussions.”

See that Each Member can be Heard- To keep a team working as a team, you also have to ensure that each member can be heard by the group at any time. If several people become dominant and others fear retribution if they disagree, people with alternative ideas merely keep quiet and grumble to each other as the team falls apart. It may be helpful to have some anonymous way of getting

“Teamwork can be a real benefit to a business, but, as with any other equipment, it continually needs to be adjusted, monitored, and improved. It also helps to know how to operate it.” Pg 275

99 Evolution of a Manager

You are newly promoted

You know your goals and objectives

You'd like to talk it over with your boss or other team leaders, but there never seems to be time ...

Since you were promoted ... maybe you should know all about managing already ...

No one knows how to manage immediately

Managers are people and "they grow and develop and evolve."

"As managers grow, their conceptions of what managing is evolves as well."

Most managers reinvent themselves as they collide with the harsh realities of existence.

Development in human beings -- and managers -- follows certain predictable patterns. "We all move from self-conscious fits and starts to fluid grace in performing our tasks, from seeing only black and white to recognizing subtle shades of gray, and from wanting all we can get to wanting to be useful." pg 275

"Some people can get stuck at a certain stage, but most people grow and develop throughout their career. With experience, we learn better ways to do things and better ways to think about things. This is the quiet joy of our careers -- not the accolades, testimonials, and promotions, but the knowledge that we are actually getting better. One of the great thrills of life is using yourself to full potential." pg 276

Survival Solution: How managers grow and develop

There are 5 things you can manage:

Money

Tasks

People

Image

Power

To be a mature manager you must be able to manage all 5.

"Managing Money: managers who don't manage money don't last long. Cost control is the minimum. If a new manager does nothing more than stay within budget, he or she will eventually discover that merely avoiding costs does not create anything new. As managers mature, they begin to conceive of money less as treasure to be hoarded and more as a tool to be used. It takes money to make money. Managing money well involves a clear conception of what you'll get for what you spend." Pg 276

"Managing Tasks: as people mature, their conception of managing tasks moves from doing the job themselves, or telling other people exactly how to do it, to encouraging people to do it their own way. A beginning manager is a single person with many sets of hands. As a manager matures, he or she becomes more able to use excess heads as well as hands.

Immature managers attempt to control the process as well as the product. They manage every task as if it were the rapid, orderly production of hamburgers at a fast-food restaurant. IF you manage for hamburgers, you get hamburgers. Forget new ideas and groundbreaking insights: the best that you can hope for is that your work comes out cooked on both sides. " pg 277

"Managing People: The simplest way of managing people is by telling them what to do. Mature managers develop a complex understanding of the people who work for them so they can lead these people to places they never would have gone themselves. There is a huge difference between being a taskmaster and being a

leader.” Pg 277

“Managing Image: the world no longer beats a path to the inventor of the better mousetrap. To get anywhere, you have to be able to promote yourself and your product. As people mature, they management of image moves from manipulating other people to think what you want them to think, to presenting yourself and your product as they really are to a market – either superiors, constituents, or customers – that really needs what you have to offer.” Pg 277

“Managing Power: To the immature manager, power is an end in itself. It is something that you use to get your own way. The temptation is strong to use power to make life as pleasant and comfortable as possible. This is kind of using a Ferrari only to commute to work. It looks good and feels good, but its potential is wasted on the task. The mature use of power is in creating a vision, an idea that is bigger than the person thinking it, and bringing it to life in the real world.

Maturing as a manager means moving from a conception of the world that is no larger than yourself to seeing a larger system and knowing you have an important place in it. It is the drive to attain this state of balance and usefulness, far more than greed and ambition that is responsible for the great things that business, and people in business, can do.” Pg 277

101 Taking that next step

Why haven't you done it already?

We all have things that we know we should do but haven't done them yet ...

We do something else instead so we don't do what we really need to do ...

“As a sane and successful adult, you have to be able to make yourself do things you don't want to do”

Survival solution:

Accept that you really need to do it

Just do it

Know exactly what you need to do now – break it down if it is too big

Do it or Else –

Do it for a reward – figure out small steps and short term rewards and it will work

Short term Rewards are the only kind of rewards that work!

Do it for someone else – and make sure you have no strings attached to the endeavor

Do it for internal rewards – do it if it will make you feel like good people – which raises your self-esteem ...

stormhawk says

Slightly different approach to those management and corporate problem-solving books. Identifies 101 different office dilemmas and what to do about that ... and what to do does not involve hanging up a picture of a sailboat with a motivation word under it.

Kristen Byers says

I was already skimming and only reading the lines highlighted in bold, but I stopped reading altogether when I got to the part about how anyone at the office with green hair and piercings obviously has the maturity level of a teenager.

Audrey says

The title caught me since it often seems like i am the only sane one working. It gives a good perspective on what motivates people and how to use that understanding to deal with them.

Diane C. says

I like albert Bernstein's book and his emphasis on solutions for dealing with certain kinds of people. Humorous, frank and useful!

Salaryman63 says

A fun read-especially if you work in the crazy ward like I do. People in the office are strange. Lots of the insights are common sense and things you have seen, done, or read before but its a new spin on the emotional black hole that modern white collar work has become.

Sandy Yang says

It's my first book written by Al Bernstein, and the first book worth-reading this year. I am going to make practising the survival solutions in the book my new year resolution.

Rick Conti says

Wish I'd had this while I was working. Although it's dated--anything related to business or technology becomes antiquated within a couple of years of publication--there's lots of practical advice here for dealing with other people, sane or insane. I recognized myself in a few of these scenarios.

Friscomama says

This is a great book about surviving and thriving in a dysfunctional institution, if you feel that you must. I was still processing my recent experience in such a place when I read this book. I was not looking for ways to play the game (can't beat 'em, join 'em, learn to hoard information and share it only with co-conspirators,

lie if it helps you, focus on making yourself perceived as an ally of your boss, try to appear productive even when you are not . . .) because I could see how the "successful" players did it.

Sadly, there is no mention of why you might feel that you must endure this kind of environment. Sometimes, SANITY REQUIRES LEAVING THE TOXIC ENVIRONMENT. If the people at top levels seem to have read the book "Snakes in Suits: When Psychopaths Go to Work " and used it to hire psychopaths for important positions, it's time to look elsewhere. When malfeasance at the top hits the national news in 2009, but they bring in new snakes and more scandal hits the news in 2013, having positive feelings about the mission of the institution only makes staying more painful.

What about keeping your skills up-to-date, learning to play well with others, staying out of debt and putting aside a little fed-up (AKA FU) fund to allow you to walk out if the current job is leaving you too depressed to find another spot?

Mitja Rupnik says

Albert J. Bernstein uses 101 scenarios to depict, analyse and explain office relations through anecdotes, jokes and clever wordplay.

It is a book I'd definitely include into my list of universally applicable philosophies, along with the works "The Art of War" (since nearly everything can be understood as a battle or campaign) and "20 Keys" (as it by far increases productivity). This one, on the other hand, serves pretty much only to further understand human relations - especially in cramped office spaces.

Definitely worth a read.
