

Praise for *The Upstander Leader*

Bullying is rife in workplaces across the globe. Instead of just discussing it, or complaining about it, Jessica Hickman set forth to right this wrong and to help businesses create workplace cultures where bullying cannot exist. Her deep care for humanity is as powerful as it is palpable. Read her book, and follow her lead.

John Toomey, Current Global Chair, Workplace Wellness Initiative

Jessica's ability to take a complex topic and make it easier for leaders to digest and implement is so innovative. By the end of the book, I knew exactly how to be proactive rather than reactive, and develop a positive workplace culture for teams to work together and uplift each other. Every leader should read this book and build a generation of upstanders.

Mia Maze, Director/Owner, Maze Consulting

Standing by while bad things happen to good people is the ultimate absence of leadership. By standing up for being upstanders, not bystanders, Jessica Hickman is walking the talk.

Matt Church, Founder, Thought Leaders; author of *Rise Up: An Evolution in Leadership*

Jess joined Orange City Council's quest for leadership change in 2020 (during the midst of the pandemic) when she designed the Future Focused Leaders program. Jess's Upstander model formed the basis of an extremely successful workforce transformation from which we are still reaping the benefits. I thoroughly recommend this book to all leaders wanting to effect change.

David Waddell, Chief Executive Officer, Orange City Council

What an inspirational and groundbreaking read! *The Upstander Leader* reminds us all that we are the key to transforming workplace culture, and provides leaders with the tools to become genuine upstanders and not just bystanders. It will empower leaders to create change and become champions of workplace culture in their businesses.

Vicki Seccombe, Regional Manager – Western NSW, Business NSW

The Upstander Leader successfully blends the firsthand story of Jessica's own lived experiences with good data and case studies to show the importance of a positive culture in today's workplace and the positive steps we can all take to create such a culture. In an era of fierce competition for talented staff, being equipped to move from bystander to upstander can help you keep your staff and build a business reputation that helps attract new staff.

Scott Hansen, Director General, NSW Department of Primary Industries

THE UPSTANDER LEADER

THE

UP

STANDER
LEADER



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MAJOR
STREET



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Introduction

My breaking point

In June 2017, I was lying in a hospital bed – fearful, burned out and hopeless. I had been admitted after collapsing at work with suspected appendicitis... but the cause was much less easy to remove.

For three and a half years I had been tormented by a bully in my workplace. I had started to develop severe anxiety. My body was in constant fight-flight-or-freeze mode. My bully would nudge my desk, yell at me, berate me in meetings and accuse me of having interpersonal relationships with clients. And so many people did nothing to stop it.

It breaks my heart – but it also makes me incredibly determined – to think back on my hospital admission and my long road to recovery. I was disappointed and hurt that I had given my life to build a culture in this workplace. I had won all these awards and been the public face of the company, yet behind the scenes they could not deal with the one bad apple that was ruining it for us.

I was so traumatised by the experience that I pretended I was going back to the UK, but I secretly moved to Sydney instead. Since then, I have dedicated my career to making sure nobody has to feel the way I felt at the hands of a workplace bully, or like a cog in a toxic workplace.

As the founder of Bullyology and driver of the Upstander movement, I've used my background in human resources, workplace health and safety, coaching and behavioural therapy to guide organisations and individuals on how to create healthier workplaces that are free from conflict.

By leaving Darwin and moving to Sydney, I was able to get a new perspective. I could look back, pause and reflect on the previous three and a half years – a tornado that had swept me up and spat me out.

In this space and time, I was able to think about my experience and about bullying, harassment and toxic cultures. I also thought about why good people – and most of all leaders – would stand by, watch and do nothing. This led me to found Bullyology and go on a journey to uncover some of the reasons why toxic behaviours are allowed to manifest unseen in organisations – and the statistics are alarming.

The way we work (at our worst)

Almost half of Australians will suffer some form of workplace bullying during their career. Safe Work Australia estimates that workplace bullying costs employers in Australia up to \$36 billion per annum, and that the problem is getting worse, not better. Claims of mental stress, bullying and harassment have risen over the past two years. So, what's causing this? Is it the increasing demands of the workplace? Is it the change in working styles and arrangements due to COVID-19?

While leaders today, in organisations small and large, are overwhelmed with to-do lists that boggle their mind, a big problem is brewing. As a leader, you may be struggling to build a business, keep a division or team on track and deliver great products, results and services. Meanwhile, toxic behaviour in your workplace may be going unnoticed and unchecked.

My breaking point

Most leaders I work with are shocked to discover that bad behaviours, bullying and harassment are running out of control like a bushfire across their business or organisation. Not only are these behaviours present, they're having business ramifications because they are damaging employee wellbeing, top-line profits and business successes, as well as leader reputations and future opportunities.

Ironically, these behaviours add hours to leaders' schedules when left unchecked. They become the elephant in the room in workplaces and industries across Australia and beyond. Thankfully, it's getting harder and harder for bullies to hide, especially in high-profile organisations: from tech startups to government agencies, toxic workplaces are making headlines.

While writing this book, a prominent example came to light. A team from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation spoke to 100 current and former staff of Sony Music Australia, who shared allegations of the toxic culture of bullying and harassment at one of Australia's biggest record companies. Long-time CEO Denis Handlin allegedly dressed as Hitler (which was captured on video), threw tantrums over a meat pie, took trips to brothels and participated in bullying, sexual harassment and discrimination. The company was willing to turn a blind eye for decades. We're living in times when this behaviour can no longer be tolerated.

Knowing what you know now and reflecting on the behaviours you have seen or experienced in your career, what cost to your workplace productivity are you prepared to tolerate? Are you prepared to just stand by?

Today, toxic leaders who might have swept the issues under the carpet in the past are being called out in the newspapers and social media. You are a leader who is choosing to be proactive before events become reactive. And this book will help you to do just that.

The flow-on effect of a toxic culture

Bullying in the workplace affects not only the target – it also causes missed opportunities and lost profits. Leaders who are ill-equipped to deal with the bullying scourge permeating their culture and affecting morale and employee wellbeing are less efficient in the business's growth.

Let's take the bottom line, for example. The Australian Human Rights Commission noted the following consequences employers face when workers are bullied:

- higher absenteeism and turnover
- lower morale and decreased productivity
- legal and workers compensations
- time lost for managers dealing with the issues.

Bullying costs the Australian economy up to \$36 billion per year, with the average case amounting to \$17,000 to \$24,000 for employers – and this is even if it doesn't escalate to a legal battle. Workplace stress alone costs the nation more than \$14 billion annually. If I reflect on my own workplace bullying experience, I was sick a lot more. My body was run-down and fatigued. A Safe Work Australia report linked depression to increased absenteeism and low productivity, amounting to an \$8 billion annual cost to the Australian economy. The same study found that mitigating bullying and strain could save 8.66 per cent of this financial burden.

Employees who have faced bullying in the workplace may experience a number of issues, including stress, depression, illness, insomnia and even suicidal thoughts. As the House Standing Committee on Education and Employment reported in 2012, this indicates that the consequences influence the worker's life outside the office as well,

My breaking point

infiltrating all day-to-day activities, from family life to broader social engagement.

In my own bullying experience, everything was impacted. I was so unhappy at work that I would spend my time on the weekend either drinking copious amounts of wine to numb the pain of another week of hell, or burnt out in bed, unable to socialise or communicate.

Why should you read this book?

After my lengthy personal ordeal of workplace bullying, I found the courage to become an advocate for change. I educated myself in the fields of bullying and mental health in workplaces, schools and online environments. In my position, I became aware of the toxic cultures that permeated organisations and industries, and of the sheer lack of conversations around psychological safety, wellbeing and effective upstanding leadership, especially with regard to creating thriving workplace cultures.

I learned the core lessons and values that would later spark and inform my mission to be a change maker dedicated to creating safe and supportive work environments. My internationally recognised efforts in advocating for workplace safety, cultural change and proactive, future-focused leadership has led me to receive numerous ministerial and industry awards.

I believe that from adversity comes power, and I now help others understand the complex nature of modern bullying. I spend my days speaking, consulting and running workshops for C-suite executives, business owners, leaders and employees on how to create psychologically safe, thriving workplace cultures free from bullying, harassment and toxicity. My work centres on modernising mindsets, challenging unconscious biases and building upstanders who are future-ready leaders.

I am reinventing the way anti-bullying is taught, with a strong focus on cause and effect that prioritises employee productivity, psychological safety, health and wellbeing. My time-tested techniques and real-world strategies incorporate the latest in bullying and harassment research, giving every level of an organisation the knowledge, culture and confidence it needs to tackle a complex, health-harming global issue that can massively impact performance and success.

We are in an era in which outrage agendas, division and selfishness have been considered to be more productive for success than kindness, empathy and understanding. *The Upstander Leader* is timely. Toxicity is a game with no winners. The notion of teamwork gets derailed when voices of the loud and intimidating override the rest. Broken cultures and leadership seeking ultimate power lead businesses to self-destruct.

A workplace that actively promotes a positive culture and proactively handles bullying incidents is much better equipped to protect what matters the most – the staff and the business reputation. Failing to address bullying costs money, wastes time and alienates employees.

In this book, I share my personal story of workplace bullying and help you, as a leader, to understand how damaging bullying can be for your personal, company and team success. I share this story not for therapy nor for revenge, but for education and awareness. My intent is to mitigate risk and protect you as a leader.

I have a dream of seeing employee wellbeing and mental health being prioritised within companies, and education around such topics being provided to employees in an accessible and affordable manner. I have a vision that my work can encourage people to take ownership of their personal and mental wellbeing, which will in turn see a decline in the levels of workplace bullying. I want employees to feel empowered to be upstanders.

So, what is an upstander?

In my workshops, talks and digital resources, I focus on moving people ‘from bystanders to upstanders’. So, what is that exactly?

The term ‘upstander’ has been around for a little while now. It refers to an individual or group that makes the conscious decision to stand up for their beliefs and values, and be proactive about positive change. An upstander recognises when something is wrong and acts to make it right.

The term has popped up in the vocabulary of human rights activists and organisations worldwide, including former United States Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power and the non-profit group Facing History and Ourselves.

In 2014, a petition was created by a school organisation to bring the word ‘upstander’ into the dictionary. They commented: ‘This past year, the words “selfie,” “twerk,” and “badassery” made their way into the English dictionary. While these words have interwoven themselves into everyday speech, there is another far more important word that deserves proper recognition: **upstander**’.

Fast-forward to today, and thousands of people are now understanding and embodying the term ‘upstander’ and taking action to help others in their workplaces, schools and communities.

Every leader can become a true upstander, whether by challenging negative stereotypes within their workplace, standing up to a toxic bully or championing cultural change. As a leader, you have the power to make choices that will shape history, your organisation’s culture and your leadership legacy. You risk damage to your reputation if you don’t pay attention to the big-picture trends affecting global and local workplaces.

We have seen an upswell of global change driven by upstanders – people who want to create social change. We are in the midst of the

fourth industrial revolution and the digital revolution, and the future of work is shifting and changing. This book touches upon our innate desire as members of an evolutionary society to inspire change, positively disrupt the status quo and have our voices shared.

I created my company Bullyology and have written *The Upstander Leader* to promote lasting and necessary change in the workplace. I currently deliver programs that can be adapted to an organisation's specific needs, putting the employer in a position to be a change maker and upstander. I am seeking to ensure that the organisations I work with are optimally productive, safe, legally compliant, and free from bullying and harassment. It has been repeatedly shown that targeted education is the best way to counteract the high social, health and financial costs associated with toxic environments, whether online or in corporate or educational environments.

What's coming up?

I have structured *The Upstander Leader* around my five-step methodology. To introduce this, I unpack the upswell of global change being caused by upstanders and how it's impacting your workplace, and I explain the bystander effect in detail.

I want to help you understand that, as a leader, you hold the key to transforming your workplace culture. In my experience, people are promoted to leadership positions because they are good at their trade or an expert in their area, but they're often not given the essential information on big-picture trends that would enable them to understand their role and responsibility as a leader. You must understand the trends that are emerging and evolving in this decade of disruption to impact your workplace culture. Otherwise, you risk potential damage to your reputation, your leadership and your employees' growth and productivity.

My breaking point

In 2021, I moved from Sydney out to Orange in the Central West region of New South Wales. This was four years after I started Bullyology, and the movement was beginning to grow. At the time, I was conducting a range of workshops and lectures, and facilitating training sessions across multiple industries. They centred on psychological safety, future-focused leading and upstanding.

Through this, I worked with a local council. When I started working with the council, we were looking at both global and local trends that could impact their workplace culture. Throughout that process, the number-one factor I found was that leaders didn't have an adequate awareness of some of the big-picture trends that were happening on a global scale, such as emerging technologies; the rise in movements against injustice; bullying and harassment conversations; and other trends we will discuss in this book.

I have found this throughout many industries that I have worked with, both in regional towns and in cities across Australia and beyond. It's important to understand and conduct conversations about what it means to be an upstander and a future-focused leader.

As a leader, it's your responsibility to learn, grow and evolve – to be a model for your employees. I have found in my work that leaders who don't pay attention to these big-picture trends fall behind and alienate themselves or their employees through a lack of communication. This results in a toxic, outdated environment and culture that can cause psychological, emotional and physical damage to all parties. When working with leaders, I always tell them how important it is to maintain your reputation, because shit sticks. If you are allowing or participating in toxic behaviours, that ultimately can lead to reputation damage within your team and organisation, and externally.

In this book, I explore the times you might have become a bystander in your own life, and challenge your thinking, including your own unconscious biases. I introduce you to the upstander effect,

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and show how bullying, harassment and toxic behaviours are the problem and the upstanders are the solution. It's about reframing our language. This is not about whistleblowing; this is about building champions of workplace culture. Our focus is on the proactive rather than the reactive, and on understanding that empathy, ethics and equality are the bedrock for success.

I will never forget how I felt in that hospital bed. I was so depleted, so worn down and so broken. I never want anyone to feel that way, even to a lesser degree: to fear speaking up in a Zoom meeting, or feel their stomach drop when a certain colleague walks into the elevator with them.

We can all play a part in changing workplace culture and become upstanders, not bystanders. By the end of this book, I hope you will feel proud of your role in changing how colleagues and leaders can work together and uplift each other. Employees, leaders and consumers, the time for change is now!