

Foreword

At least once in your career, you'll likely experience the gut punch of being let go unexpectedly. The room spins, you stop hearing what's being said to you and your innards begin to churn like a snake pit. But it's even worse if you've also been bullied and belittled on the job, and then terminated, adding insult to injury. Maryann Kerr has experienced this more than once, and what she went through at the time and where she has subsequently arrived have led her to write her groundbreaking work, *Tarnished*.

I met Maryann in 1994, when I joined the Ontario Lung Association as Director of Communications. Maryann was Director of Development, guiding more than 30 provincial offices in fund development and leading the notable, multi-million-dollar annual Christmas Seal Campaign. She was earnest and warm, quick to help whenever I asked and never shied from sharing insights or opinions. In those days, there was no email, no Zoom; we would travel across the province and country on many a memorable road trip and flight to meet with colleagues and volunteers. Wherever she went, when Maryann had the floor, people listened; she was a talented, capable and respected development professional who has gone on to become a stand-out consultant and leader in the social profit sector.

When Maryann left the Lung Association to take on her next career challenge, the office felt empty without her big personality, bleak without her kindness. Our paths crossed again later when we were both consulting, and we partnered on feasibility and development work for the YWCA Elm Centre in downtown Toronto and on several other projects. Today, we're taking on projects with Barnes Management Group, where Maryann's extensive experience is invaluable across several teams.

As my long-time colleague and friend, Maryann shared with me the incidents of bullying and the anguish of her terminations that were taking a toll on her and her family. What she experienced, and worked doggedly to process and move forward from, resulted in serious, long-lasting trauma. Her extensive research illustrates that toxic workplaces in the social profit sector are far too numerous and commonplace.

The bitter irony, as she points out, is that most who take on roles within the charitable sector do so, at least in part, to channel their efforts and skills towards missions that align with their values. But all too often, they instead find themselves in poorly managed workplaces, their goodwill stopped in its tracks. The fulfilling experience they anticipated turns into an abhorrent mess.

In writing this book, Maryann has boldly drawn a line in the sand: enough is enough. She bravely speaks of her own experiences and trauma to demonstrate that we can and must do much better. Where others have had to remain silent about their mistreatment, often afraid of the repercussions of speaking out, Maryann has stepped forward to give voice and credence to their stories.

Drawing on research from multiple local and international sources and interviews with dozens of experts and spokespeople, Maryann has pulled back the veil on some of the shoddy practices in sector management and goes the next mile to discuss some better ones, citing what some are doing now, and working on, to strengthen our sector's workplaces. She also offers up a trove of resources on leadership, culture, teamwork, collaboration and more, to build organizational health and performance.

Reading *Tarnished*, you may feel a sense of dread, reminded of times in your career when you were mistreated. You may feel guilty, reflecting on incidents when you treated others harshly. I experienced both emotions in reading it. I hope, like me, you also feel optimistic that sector workplace betterment is possible.

The cruel, bizarre months of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as BLM and Indigenous reconciliation have caused us to re-evaluate and scrutinize work and the workplace. We yearn for balance, fairness and decency. Diversity, equity, inclusion, reconciliation, access and kindness are more than just buzzwords now. There are both raised consciousness and demand for momentum; the movement may be slow and imperfect, but the dial is moving.

Tarnished plays a vital role in revealing the truth about social profit workplace mismanagement and offers a wealth of resources to enable and empower us to create a better sector.

Jill Palmer