

Silent Race Wars: Ground Zero for Federal Abuse

Dec. 12, 2006

By Syndicated Columnist Cathy Harris

According to psychologists, federal managers and others abuse their employees for two reasons: 1) One is the normative sources, which comes from pressure by other managers to abuse, 2) The other is from the internal source that is an accumulation of past injuries that they now have an opportunity to offload.

There has been a silent race war for quite some time now in the federal government. But unless you have a relative, friend, or neighbor that works there, no one will ever hear of the workplace abuse.

What's even more eye-opening is that because of the economy, many employees are now meeting the same fate as federal employees. Because of the current administration, the outsourcing of jobs and downsizing of corporations have made many employees: 1) file for bankruptcy, 2) get a divorce, 3) lose their health and life insurance, 4) lose their health and spirit, and 5) have become homeless.

It is easy to be cynical about the federal government. Trust in the federal government, as measured by many public opinion polls, declined sharply during the last few years. The trust declined even more when Hurricane Katrina occurred. Remember the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) (www.fema.gov) is located under the Department of Homeland Security and even if Bush had given orders, there is no way FEMA could have responded.

Today, many believe that federal government jobs are the most secure jobs in the country. They believe that it's hard to fire or lay-off anyone in the federal government. But those who work there especially African Americans and women can tell you a different story.

After leaving the military, many are picked up for federal jobs. The federal government is clearly the largest single source of jobs in the country. Many believe they pay good starting salaries, offer good quality training, and practically guarantee promotions through the middle ranks. But minorities and women do not meet that same fate.

There are many reasons that discrimination (workplace abuse) takes place in the workplace. One of the most common reasons is the unfair hiring and promotional practices using nepotism, cronyism, and favoritism.

In the past this was called the Spoils System in the United States. This was the practice of making appointments to public office and of giving employment in the

public service on the basis of political affiliation or personal relationship (nepotism) rather than on the fitness or merit of the appointees.

Nepotism occurs when relatives are in the same chain-of-command. You, as a management official with authority to take personnel management actions, may not select a relative for a position anywhere in the organization under your jurisdiction or control. Also, management officials or other public officials having the authority to appoint, employ, promote, or advance persons or to recommend this action, may not advocate or recommend a relative for a position in the same chain of command.

Cronyism occurs when these same management officials appoint a friend to certain positions.

Favoritism occurs when management officials' show favoritism in placing employees into positions regardless of their background, training or experience.

Years ago the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) in Washington DC (www.opm.gov) gave the "Direct Hire Authority" to all the federal agencies - which lasted for many years. The most common way the new hires interviewed were referrals from relatives (nepotism) and friends (cronyism).

The federal managers and supervisors were then in a position to use nepotism, cronyism, and favoritism to bring who they wanted to bring into the agencies.

This practice which is still condoned and carried out in each federal agency today has lead to a cesspool of corruption in the federal government. Many of the federal offices have entire family household members (husband, wife, daughter, son, son-in-law, first cousin, etc.)

Every time a black person trains someone - the position of course goes to someone's relative or friend. That's why EEO complaints are filed. When they give out awards on the job - awards as high as \$30,000 are being presented to wives by their husband.

The Merit System Protection Board (MSPB) (www.mspb.gov) is an independent quasi-judicial agency established to protect Federal merit systems against partisan political and other prohibited personnel practices and to ensure adequate protection for employees against abuses by agency management.

The MSPB thinks that allowing federal agencies to do their own advertising, examining and candidate referral rather than obtaining these services from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has helped improve the process of recruiting new employees. It also credits the creation of a single electronic database, USAJOBS, (www.usajobs.gov) which enables applicant to access government-wide vacancy and job qualification information.

Federal agencies are appointing fewer outstanding scholars. Why? The government's use of the Outstanding Scholar Program (OSP) is on the decline. The number of new hires selected through the outstanding scholar program, which is under close scrutiny by OPM, dropped dramatically over the last few years.

The Outstanding Scholar and Bilingual / Bicultural programs is a non-competitive hiring authority including students who held a grade point average of 3.45 or higher, or retained a 4.0 scale for all undergraduate courses completed toward a baccalaureate degree. The program was established by a consent decree approved by the United States District Court for the District of Columbia on November 19, 1981.

The decree resolved a class-action suit that was filed in 1979 and is now known as Angel G. Luevano, et al., v. Janice R. Lachance, Director, Office of Personnel Management, et al. The plaintiffs alleged that the Professional and Administrative Career Exam (PACE), which the Government had been using to hire into about 120 occupations at the GS-5 and GS-7 levels, had adverse impact on the employment of African Americans and Hispanics for reasons that were not job-related.

Although the Outstanding Scholar and Bilingual/ Bicultural programs are aimed at addressing under-representation of African Americans and Hispanics, the programs have never been restricted to those designated minority groups. The history of the programs' use is consistent with that openness.

White men who run the government have created a hostile working environment for any employees who they did not personally help to get into the agencies.

The Department of Homeland Security (www.dhs.gov) which merged 22 federal agencies totaling over 180,000 employees in March 2003, is in the process of designing their own personnel system. The undersecretary of management said the group wanted to make sure employees are hired on merit and held accountable for their work. We still know that it's all just talk.

For instance let's look at the breakdown of employees in the Customs and Border Protection (www.cbp.gov), an agency that has made it clear that they don't like scholars. If you end up working as a Customs and Border Protection Officer (the old Immigration and Customs Service) and they know you have a degree, chances are you will see yourself without a job within a six months period. This does not apply to Agriculture officers who have a degree but don't carry weapons so they don't pose a threat to their control.

Statistically:

- 60% of the employees came from the military, some were military police;
- 30% were former police officers.

The majority of the above represents those hired and promoted to positions because of nepotism, cronyism, and favoritism. What's wrong with this picture?

This breakdown and mentality makes it impossible for qualified applicants to be hired on their merits. If anything, this department should launch a "war for talent." Creating a process for hiring and staffing other than utilizing nepotism, cronyism and favoritism will help the department place the right people in all of the key positions throughout the organization. But will that ever happen?

Many people look to Washington, DC as the answer to the workplace abuse because most federal offices are headquartered out of DC. What's even more shocking is that Washington, DC where the OPM and EEOC (www.eeoc.gov) is located is **GROUND ZERO** for federal abuse. The OPM and EEOC offices have just as many discrimination complaints as any other federal agency.

Now that many of you have a better understanding on why the federal government isn't capable of rescuing anyone - the corrupt practices along with the incompetent level of management have reached an epidemic proportion. The "internal war" against good, hard working, honest employees has produced a federal workforce which is "not fit for duty."

Many feel unless there are massive: 1) forced retirements, 2) terminations, 3) Civilian Review Boards formed, or 4) a public outcry – the workplace abuse in the federal government will continue.

My advice to anyone who is dealing with federal or private industry workplace abuse is to remember the world needs people with knowledge who have been through the process. Now you hold specialized skills that can very well set you up to become an entrepreneur. Use the workplace as a stepping stone to open your own business and find that peace, joy and happiness that you so deserve.

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