

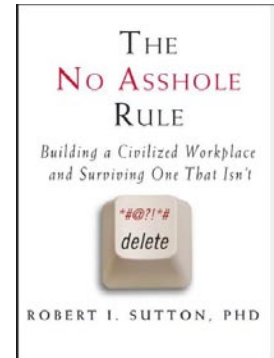
Sutton, Robert I., PhD, *The No Asshole Rule: Building a Civilized Workplace and Surviving One That Isn't*

New York, 2007. Business Plus, ISBN-10: 0446526568

Reviewed by Dr. George F. Simons at www.diversophy.com 26 July 2008

A quick read, a quick review. Perhaps Pogo said it all, “We have met the enemy and he is us.” Abusive, bullying, venomous, loud, egoistic, selfish, contentious—all the things you might not like about someone else or someone else might not like about you—these are the characteristics that define the asshole.

Admitting that betimes we are all occasional assholes, (there is a chapter on how to your “inner jerk” from getting out) Stanford University Professor Sutton campaigns to ban chronic assholes from the workplace, though he suggests retaining a token *trou de cul* or two will remind us of what assholes are and why we need to ban them. He researches the cost of assholes to workplace morale, productivity, retention, and other bottom lines.



Though there is a peek at international dimensions of workplace bullying, this is an essentially US American book, rife with US cultural values

- Law and order—make rules and laws to resolve conflicts and discomforts—call the police on your neighbor rather than confront, discuss, and resolve the issue. Ban assholes
- Speak up, take the initiative, blow the whistle, and break the rules and the taboos for a good cause (*Beverly Hills Cop*). Use the forbidden words where they are needed
- Market capitalism—assholes are costly, and the 10k report comes first
- Psychological omnipotence—assholes are bad because they “make others feel bad”
- Dichotomous thinking—there are assholes and non-assholes, good guys and bad guys, and we know who they are
- Self-help, take control—survival where assholes reign means reframing your thinking, forming support groups, “heading west” away when necessary. It is after all, a self-help book full of tips and personal development agendas.

Sutton waxes biographical at times to illustrate his personal efforts to overcome assholism (Alcoholics Anonymous style). His is the dilemma many of us wrestle with, “I’ve had multiple incidents where I thought I was involved in ‘constructive confrontation’ but later found out that I had hurt someone’s feelings.”

Missing in Sutton’s treatment of assholes was serious consideration of the chronic assholes that specialize in being hurt. There is very little about the creators of “catch 22’s”, the perpetrators of passive aggression, whose repeated and often morally smug undermining can lead to occasional loud “asshole” outbreaks on the part of non-chronic assholes who “have had it up to here” and are no longer willing to “turn the other cheek.” Perhaps we can challenge Sutton in his next literary endeavor to take a closer view of this other side of the picture of contemporary “civilization and its discontents.”

Anyway, on my next read list is *Beyond Bullsh*t: Straight-Talk at Work* by UCLA prof Samuel Culbert—maybe this will shed more light on my questions. BTW is it just guys who write books with titles like this? Guys in California?