



# Navigating Workplaces with Professionalism while Prioritizing Wellbeing

J. Melissa Woods, Jackson Lewis, PC  
Deja Kemp, University of Pennsylvania





**J. MELISSA WOODS**

Of Counsel  
JacksonLewis



**DEJA KEMP**

Research Faculty | Director of Legal Policy  
University of Pennsylvania  
Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy

What is the worst place you've ever worked?

What made it awful?

We sent out a survey and gave you the opportunity to discuss your experiences with toxic work environments. We will share those with you, but for now just think about the question.

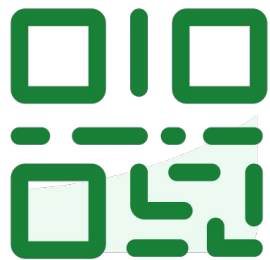


# Share Out.

Grab your cell phone!

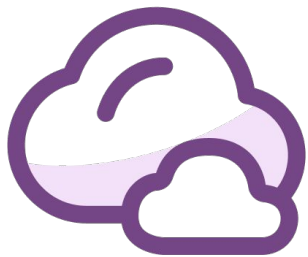
**What is the one characteristic/word  
that comes to mind when you think of  
that place you worked?**





Join at [slido.com](https://slido.com)  
**#5080742**





# What word would you use to describe that workplace?



# Agenda

Identifying Toxic Work Environments

Impacts of Toxic Work Environments

Legal Implications & Solutions

Deciding What You NEED to Survive

Exit Ticket & Final Reflections

Not legal  
advice.



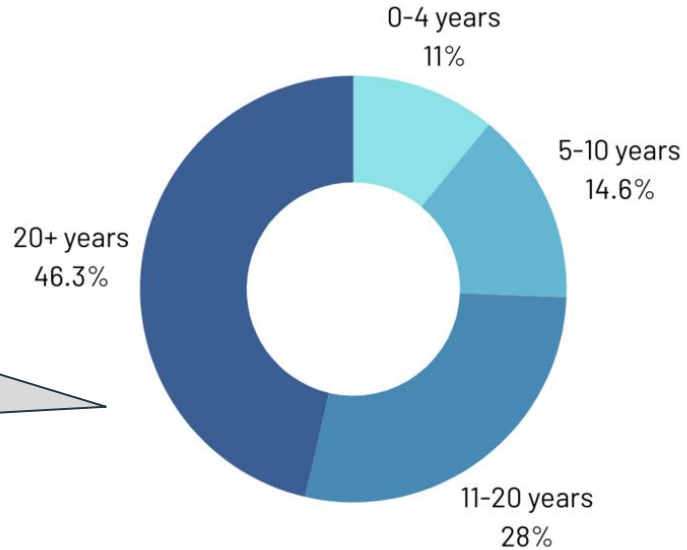


# A Quick Note

- Correlation  $\neq$  Causation
- Survey & study limitations

**Almost half of our  
survey respondents  
have been practicing  
law for more than 20  
years**

## How many years have you been practicing law?



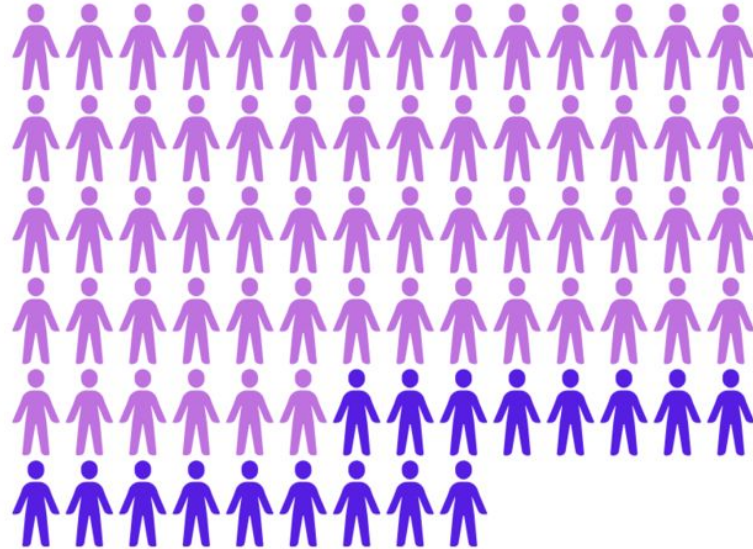


# Identifying Toxic Work Environments



This is not  
new  
information  
for most of  
you.

## Have you ever experienced a toxic work environment?



Yes: 79%

No: 21%

## What the Experts Say

### BEHAVIORS THAT CREATE TOXIC WORK ENVIRONMENTS

- Disrespect
- Exclusion
- Cut-throat/backstabbing behavior
- High Turnover\*
- Nepotism and favoritism
- Blame game
- Disregard for personal life
- Micromanagement
- Gaslighting/Blame Game
- Threatening/Bullying
- Discrimination/Harassment/Hostile work environment
- Unclear Vision/directions

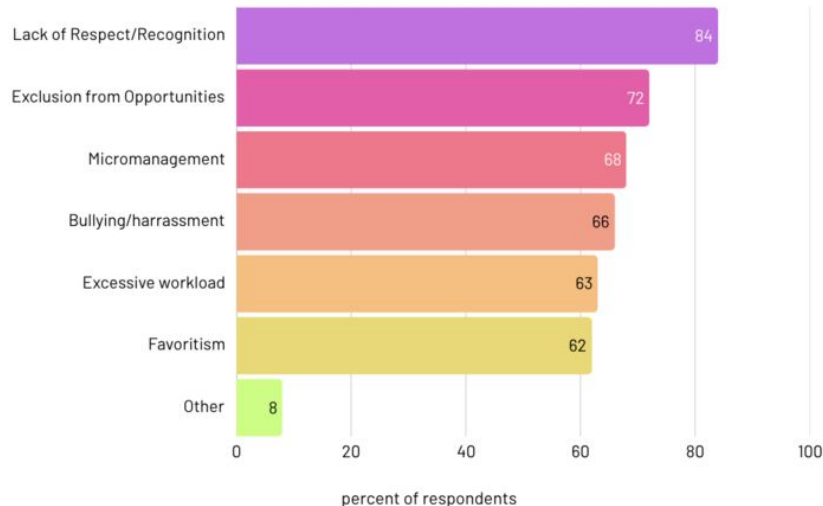
### IMPACT ON THE EMPLOYEE

- Low self-esteem
- Lower productivity/lack of investment
- Avoidance of engaging
- Attempts at over achievement
- Insecurity
- Depression/Hopelessness
- Poor Physical

\*a note about high turnover

# Characteristics of a Toxic Work Environment...What You Say

## What characteristics define a toxic work environment?



# Case Study A

Independently review Case Study A at your table. We will refer back to this.

# Characteristics of a Toxic Work Environment...What Else You Shared

“Lack of empathy, when the bottom line is more important than employees mental health”

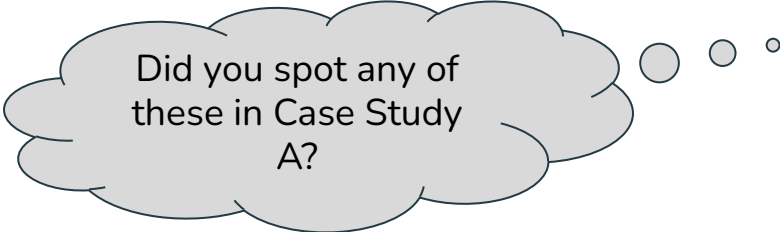
*“Surveillance”*

*“MICROAGGRESSIONS”*

**“Racism”**

“Negative communication”

“Negative, mean spirited attitudes toward other staff, especially those in subordinate positions.”



Did you spot any of these in Case Study A?



How does race  
compound this?

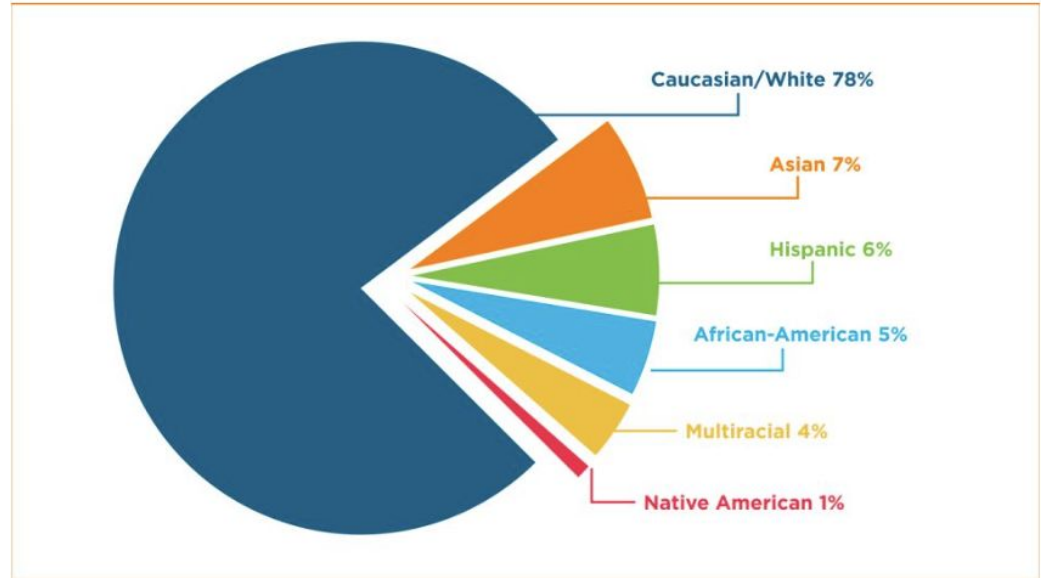


# Case Study B

Independently review Case Study B at your table. We will refer back to this.

# What you probably already know...

5% of the  
lawyers in the  
US are **Black**.



Lawyers by race and ethnicity: 2024

Source: ABA National Lawyer Population Survey

# What You've Experienced...

## Workplace Experience Frequency

Experience	Average
Unclear or unrealistic expectations from management	2.81
Discrimination or bias	2.76
Micromanagement	2.72
Having a colleague, client or superior express surprise at your language	2.37
Being undermined or made to look incompetent	2.37
Being interrupted or spoken over by someone more than others	2.20
Public shaming or humiliation	1.43

# Gaslighting

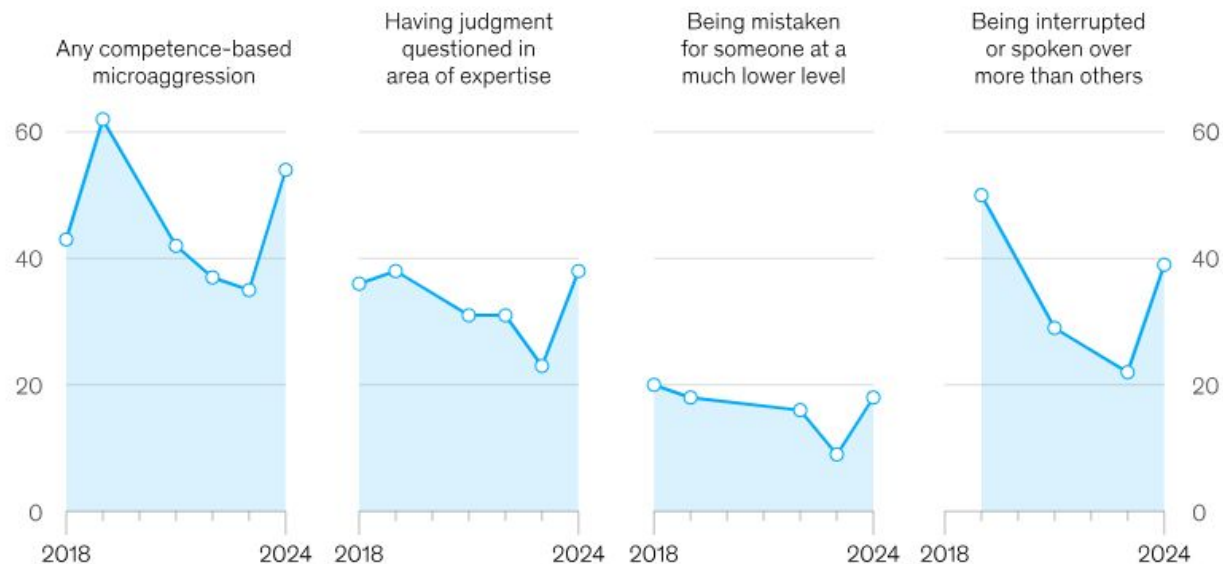
“Describe[s] the effort of one person to undermine another person’s confidence and stability by **causing the victim to doubt [their] own senses and beliefs.**” (Kline 2006).

## Racial Gaslighting

*“The political, social, economic and cultural process that perpetuates and normalizes a white supremacist reality through **pathologizing those who resist.**” (Davis & Ernst 2017)*

## Despite efforts, competence-based microaggressions have persisted from 2018 to 2024.

Share of women who report experiencing microaggressions, %



Source: *Women in the Workplace 2024*, McKinsey & Company and LeanIn.Org

# Racism & The Workplace

- Black women **assigned to Whiter teams** are more likely to be labeled as **low performers** and **report fewer billable hours** (Linos & Sanaz, 2024)
- Women and people of color are assigned more **“office housework”** and have less access to **“glamour work”** than white men (Ely & Thomas, 2018)



Did you spot any of these in Case Study B?

# Racism & The Workplace

- Black women are **less likely** to have managers **showcase their work, advocate for new opportunities** for them, or **give them opportunities to manage people** and projects. (LeanIn.Org & McKinsey & Company, 2020)
- Black workers receive **extra scrutiny** from bosses, which can lead to worse performance reviews, lower wages, and even job loss (Cauvonidis & Lang, 2019)
- Black new hires are 32% **more likely to turn over** within two years of hire and 26% **less likely to be promoted on time** than white new hires (Linos & Sanaz, 2024)



# Health Impacts of Toxic Work Environments

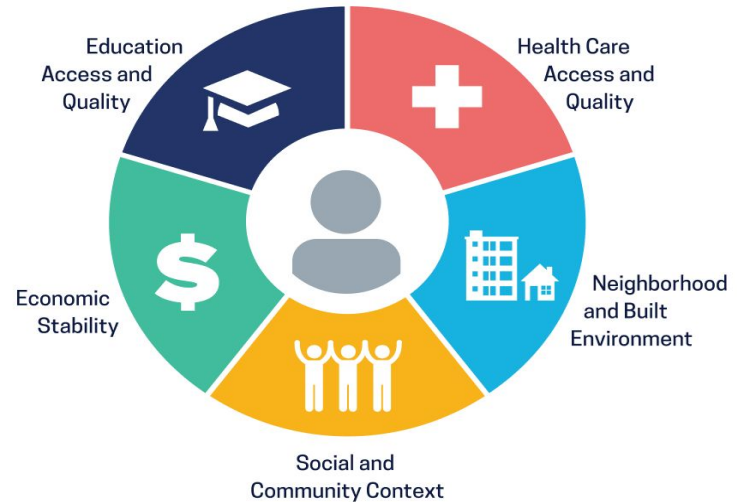


# The Bigger Picture

Where we work is a key determinant of health.

Graphic from *Healthy People 2030*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion.  
<https://odphp.health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/social-determinants-health>

## Social Determinants of Health



Social Determinants of Health  
Copyright-free

 Healthy People 2030

## What you probably already know...

- Toxic work environments can cause stress, anxiety and depression
- Toxic work environments can decrease decision-making capacity, cause difficulty concentrating, decreases productivity

## What you might not know...

- Racial discrimination can cause **significant “wear and tear”** by increasing **“allostatic load”** ongoing strain from chronic adaptation to stress. Allostatic load can **increase the risk of chronic health conditions.** (Chae et. al, 2020)
- Black people who experience discrimination **age faster** (Chae et. al, 2020)
- Black people have a “biological age” that is **2.6 years older** than their “chronological age” compared to whites at **3.5 years younger** (Forrester, et. al, 2018)
- 31% of Black lawyers reported **contemplating suicide** during their legal career(ALM 2021 Mental Health and Substance Abuse Survey)

# Weathering

Dr. Arline T. Geronimus introduced the term "weathering" to describe how racism impacts the body over time.



# The Sad Facts

Black people are...

44% more likely to die from **stroke**

20% more likely to have **asthma** and 3x more likely to die from it

25% more likely to die from **heart disease**

243% more likely to die from **pregnancy or childbirth related causes**

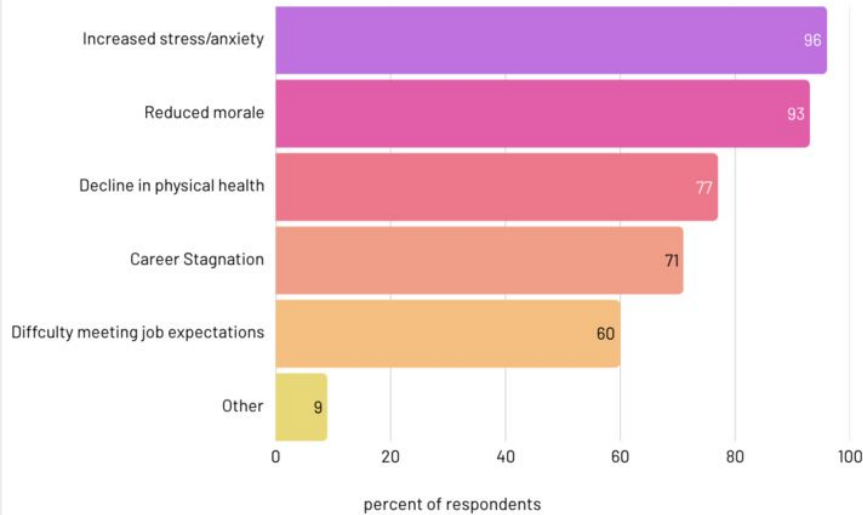
Our law degrees will not save us.

“Even educated Black people are sicker and die younger than their educated white peers.”

(Winters, *Black Fatigue* at 72.)

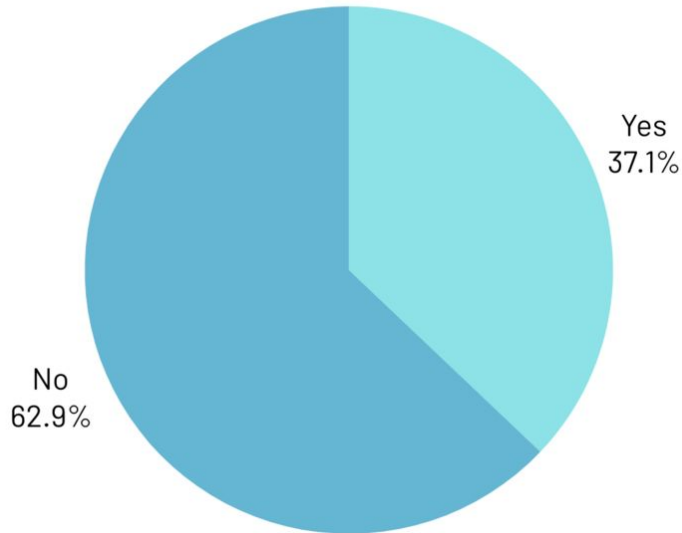
# What you shared...

## What are the impacts for those in a toxic work environment?



# Why are we not talking about this?

**If you experienced toxicity in the workplace, did you report it?**



**Turn and Talk.**



What do you make of these results? Why do you think these things go unreported?



# Legal Impacts for Toxic Workplaces

# What protections do employees have under the law?

- Title VII Claims
  - Hostile Work Environment
  - Discrimination (Race, Age, Sex)
  - Constructive Discharge
  - Harassment
- Retaliation
- ADA
- FMLA
- State Claims
- Administrative Claims
- Internal Processes



# What can employers do to avoid legal claims?

- Have a strong HR department
- Clear/objective performance management system
- Dispute Resolutions procedures
- Surveys (if they take action)
- Update policies regularly to comply with laws
- Avoid avoidance
- Hold management responsible
- Consult legal counsel (and follow advice)
- Document, document, document

# Let's Return to the Case Studies

Do either Maggie or Dena have any legal remedies?

How would you advise each of them?

**Turn and Talk.**



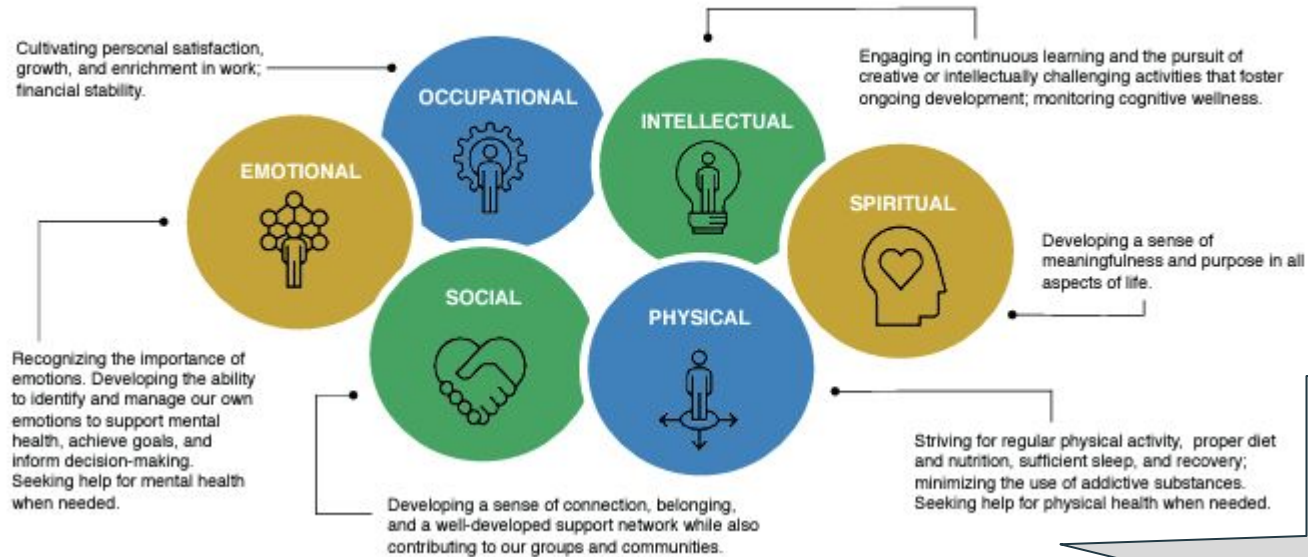
What does this all  
mean in practical  
terms?



# Surviving a Toxic Work Environment

## Defining Lawyer Well-Being

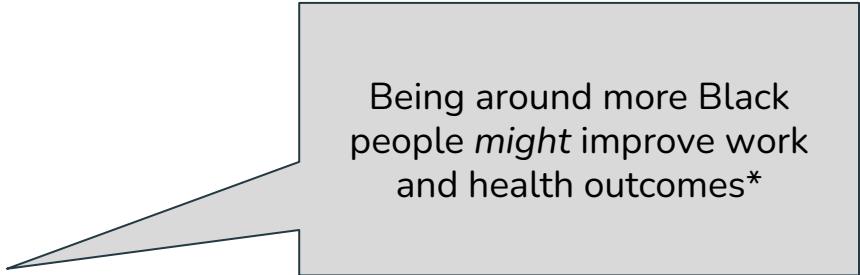
A continuous process in which lawyers strive for thriving in each dimension of their lives:



Work is just **one** driver of well-being. We can optimize other areas!

# Protective Factors

- Having **more Black coworkers** significantly **decreases the turnover** of Black female employees (Linos & Sanaz, 2024)
- Attending an historically Black college or university (HBCU) versus a PWI may **reduce long-term dementia risk** and **lower the risk of metabolic syndrome** in mid-life Black adults (Colen & Barnett, 2020)



Being around more Black people *might* improve work and health outcomes\*

# What You Said...

The top 3 most effective strategies for eliminating toxicity:



Leadership accountability and transparency 85%



Establishing clear channels for reporting and addressing concerns 77%



Encouraging open communication and feedback 70%

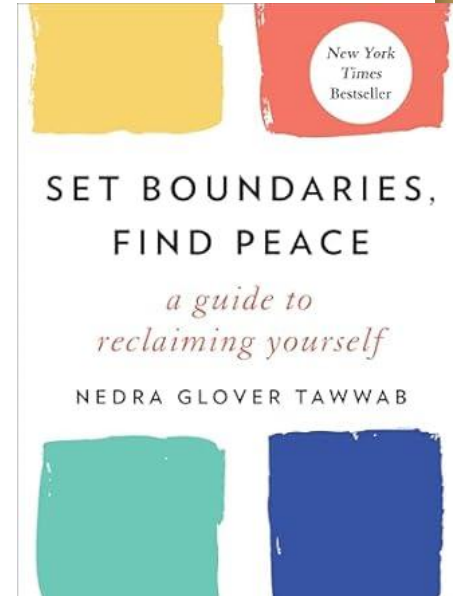
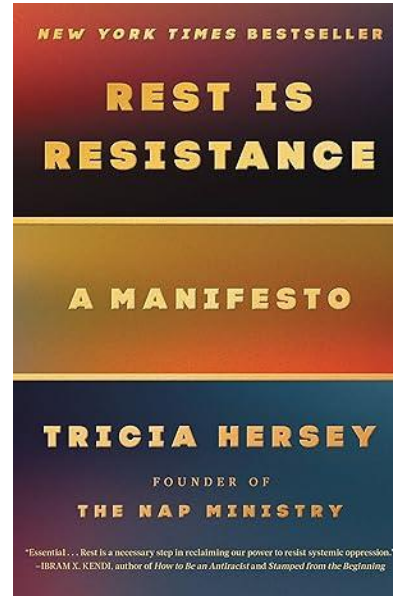


Sometimes leaving is  
the only option.

# Survive while you search

- Establish **personal** and **professional boundaries**
- Maintain the status quo @ work = do the **bare minimum** to not get fired or commit malpractice (ie. Quiet Quit)
- Seek out **support** (friends, family, Lawyer Support hotlines)
- Come up with an **exit plan**

These are great reads!





# Our Stories



Case Study A



Case Study B

# Exit Plan

## Know Thyself

- Keep a **“brag” list of accomplishments** at work
- Identify your **personal strengths, likes, dislikes** and **core values**
- Identify your **non-negotiables** for work
- Consider **early and mid-career exploration fellowships/workshops**

Mission Collaborative Career Design Fellowship is a good resource

## Fortify and Expand Your Existing Networks

- Find a **mentor!**
- Utilize your **Alumni Offices** at your undergrad & law schools
- Make a plan to have one **networking coffee/lunch** 1x a week
- Don't forget to **network laterally!**

Don't have a mentor? Check out Meck County Bar Mentorship Alliance & Black Career Women's Network

# Leverage Tools to Market Yourself



Create a Profile



Set up Job Alerts



Identify Contacts &  
Build Your Network



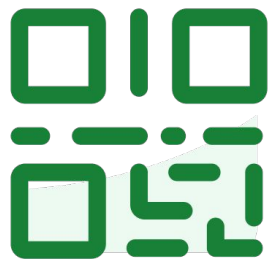
Share Thought  
Leadership

## Don't Forget about AI

- Resume optimization
- Cover Letter Generation
- Job Matching
- Interview Preparation
- Market Analysis



Exit Ticket

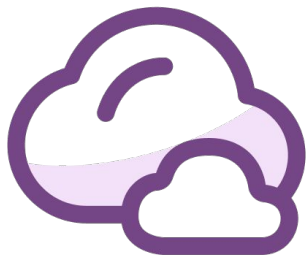


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**What is one word to describe the best place that you have ever worked? (This can be aspirational)**



Final  
Reflection: Do  
not give racism  
your minutes.

**"THE FUNCTION, THE VERY SERIOUS  
FUNCTION OF RACISM IS  
DISTRACTION.**

**IT KEEPS YOU FROM DOING YOUR  
WORK. IT KEEPS YOU EXPLAINING,  
OVER AND OVER AGAIN, YOUR  
REASON FOR BEING..."**



**TONI  
MORRISON**

# References

Can be accessed [here](#)





# Stay in touch!

[dejak@upenn.edu](mailto:dejak@upenn.edu)

[Melissa.Woods@jacksonlewis.com](mailto:Melissa.Woods@jacksonlewis.com)