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Workers employ ways to vent feelings

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In an economic era not so long ago, if an employee hated his or her boss, it was off to Kinko's to copy the resume and eventually depart for greener pastures. Not so, anymore. The economic downturn has meant fewer jobs, less movement and the reality that many employees have no choice but to stick it out, despite their feelings.

What has increased is the number of ways irritated workers can let off steam. Sure, there are the old standbys - having a beer with co-workers or watching reruns of "The Office" and realizing if you worked for Michael Scott you would be a whole lot unhappier.

However, now one can post feelings anonymously online (complete with swear words), play virtual darts with the boss's face or send an anonymous snail-mail "Nasty Gram."

In San Diego, disgruntled workers stop by Sarah's Smash Shack to break plates and glasses to feel better. Nationwide, at Pump It Up play spaces, usually a site for children's bounce-house birthday parties, entire offices take corporate outings to climb and slide and hit one another with inflatable baseball bats.

Others are relieving stress the old-fashioned way. The job site Vault.com recently conducted its annual office-romance survey and found that "workplace hookups are still going strong."

"As the economy barely continues to tread water, and worries over job loss increase, something has to keep office morale afloat," the Vault survey says. "For 58 percent of you, that means engaging in an office romance (or failing that, gossiping about your co-workers' more sordid shenanigans)."

"Why wouldn't you?" one office Lothario asked the surveyors. "It adds a little excitement to your day."

John Hoover, an executive coach in New York and author of the book "How to Work for an

Idiot," says tension release in all forms is a sign of the times.

"This economic crisis has reframed the context in which we are operating," he says. "Some people think it is two years ago and they can pick up and go. That is not the case. Just by having a job, you are in an enviable position."

Still, the paycheck may come with anxiety, frustration and annoyance. Take this post from www.workrant.com, an anonymous site for employees to vent.

"My boss constantly undermines me and really annoys me. In addition, this pretends to be a fun place to work, but it is not true. The hours I work in the exchange for the pay I receive are a joke because the systems and methods are so stupid."

Or this one: "Dear stupid brainless twit who takes up space and wastes my time day after day after day: Once again I had to fix your mistake! Oh, but at least you thanked me - how thoughtful that you appreciate that I constantly take my time to fix your mistakes."

Mr. Hoover says working for an idiot is easier than working for a boss with a Machiavellian complex.

"Just being clueless is much easier to deal with," he says. "You can learn their language, their values, what makes them tick. That's much easier than working for someone with an emotional agenda or who is paranoid. If your boss is simply clueless, you can go about engineering your relationship. It can be fixed."

If it can't, there are a number of ways to vent your spleen. Gene and Gina Sawyer of Las Vegas got the idea for the Spite Site (www.thespitesite.com) when they were on a 10-month trip around the world a few years ago. They dealt with frustrating situations in 32 countries and wished there were a better way to express that frustration despite language barriers or political correctness.

"I'm a believer of giving people a taste of their own medicine and poking at people's nerves with a smile on my face," Mrs. Sawyer says. "However, there are certain situations in life where people feel they are unable to confront those they despise due to familial relationships, the risk of losing their job, fear of confrontation. The Spite Site was developed to offer an outlet for people to release some pent-up frustration and anger on the person who caused it, without having to worry about the repercussions of confronting the person directly. "

The Spite Site, launched six months ago, sends anonymous "Nasty Grams" via U.S. Mail. What better way to say "Everyone Hates You" than with a cheery red greeting card? The Spite Site also offers \$10.99 voodoo dolls ready to personalize with a slot for the boss's picture.

Business is good, Mrs. Sawyer says.

At the site Hateboss.com, employees can rant and shoot - virtually, of course. The site has a function where one can upload a photo of the boss and tap a few keys to turn him into a

shooting-range target. It also tells how to minimize the function immediately on the computer screen should the boss happen to look over your shoulder.

Gini Graham Scott, author of "A Survival Guide to Bad Bosses," says it can be quite therapeutic to know there are others out there who feel the same way. They can be in the next cubicle, or they can be a continent away, working, equally miserably, for a different company.

"If you don't like your boss, chances are others don't, either," she says. "Meeting with others is a way of releasing tension. I've had people who were going to quit their job ... but now they are afraid they won't find another one. They have to do what they can. People might say, 'But I am not standing up to my principles.' Realistically, we have to do what we need to do to keep the job."

Sometimes, though, doing what we need to do involves breaking a plate, posting an anonymous rant or stabbing a voodoo doll.

Feel better? Good. Now, get back to work.