

WBI Blog Entry on Kevin by Gary Namie

Institutions that created or allowed toxic work conditions to flourish out of sheer laziness (laissez-faire, indifferent, management) should be responsible for cleansing the destructive environment of perpetrators who are discovered to be responsible. In worst-case situations, conditions become intolerable for any human trying to hold onto a shred of personal dignity. Some workers take their lives, seeing no way out, typically after years of frustration by the disbelieving employer who accepts the perpetrators' version of reality.

The major difference in suicide cases is whether they leave behind a note to loved ones specifying why they made the choice they did. Some do. Most do not. Sadly, without a note, it becomes hard to do the post-mortem detective work that connects workplace factors to the suicide decision. We at WBI can make that inferential leap, but without our experience, it is too hard for legal professionals and the general public to agree to see the role played by repeated exposure to unfathomably stressful work.

Employers are mired in a state of deliberate denial about their contribution to an individual's demise. The argument is that the person was taking anti-depressants (no duh) and therefore mentally unstable (having been driven to that state). They brand the poor soul — "disgruntled." They say in the context of all potential contributors to stress, work is but a minor factor (not for those for whom their work is everything). Employers want to erase memories of the departed employee — to duck responsibility, to assuage guilt from not having given the oft-requested protection, and to undermine that person's legacy by not allowing new employees learn about what happened long ago, to put a bright shiny face on a dark chapter of life and death at the organization.



Kevin Morrissey

One such employer is the University of Virginia — contributor to, and host of, the Kevin Morrissey suicide in 2010. [You can read the early story in this blog about Kevin](#), the managing editor of the literary magazine, the Virginia Quarterly Review (VQR). His boss, and former friend, was Ted Genoways. Over the years, Genoways began to change his habits at VQR. Morrissey and other staff complained to Human Resources (a full 18 times), to the President's office (Genoways' boss), and to the feckless campus Ombuds (Brad Holland, sworn to confidentiality by the profession and helpless to advocate for beleaguered employees). In short, the University knew about Genoways. Nothing was ever done. Morrissey took his life on the last day of UVa president Casteen's reign, a symbolic rebuke for having his plight ignored for so long by Casteen.

A new president, Teresa Sullivan, started the day after Kevin's suicide. A radio reporter who interviewed me at the time spoke highly of her and how different she would be from the tyrannical Casteen. Sullivan canceled VQR's next edition and commissioned an investigation. However, [the report was a typical whitewash](#). The fact finding focused on perceptions about Genoways style, but omitted references to Kevin Morrissey's suicide and the accusations about Genoways' "unacceptable workplace behavior" as the impetus for change. Thus, erasing Morrissey had begun shortly after the suicide.

The conclusion from the report simply changed the people to whom VQR would report. Genoways kept his job and his six-figure salary and faced no consequences.

Sullivan then responded with a new policy with polite, positive words. My review of that project can be read in a separate blog.

VQR staff fled because of editor Genoways. In a way, he never lived to see, Kevin was vindicated. Five years earlier a 32-yr. VQR veteran filed a harassment suit against Genoways and accepted a severance package. She told *The Hook's* David McNair, "I can understand why Kevin did what he did." Other staffers moved to other positions on campus. Genoways characterized the moves as a protest against the university's half-hearted investigation, but Molly Minturn told the Hook, ""It's quite simple: I changed jobs within the University because I did not want to work for Ted Genoways anymore." Said Sheila McMillen, the last employee to leave, "We all left because of the editor." Earlier, Genoways had sought tenure as an English professor but had been rebuffed. It's important to remember that Genoways operated under the protective umbrella of Casteen, the campus president which made him untouchable. The numerous complaints to HR by Morrissey, which triggered sympathy from HR staff according to discovered e-mails, could not be acted on because HR had no power to confront senior administrators, especially Casteen, the president.

The final erasure of Kevin's life at VQR, the place to which he reportedly devoted all of his attention, talent, and love came when the delayed winter 2010 issue was published. Morrissey was reportedly very involved in all of the editing of all materials for 2010 publications, the year of his death, though he died in the summer. In 2011, VQR won National Magazine Awards for three 2010 issues. *The Hook* reported in April that the University press releases announcing the awards had omitted Morrissey's name despite his role in winning the prizes. Worse still, as of the date of this essay, the archived press releases for VQR issued by UVa show no 2011 references to the National Magazine Awards. The links redirect to old 2006, 2009 releases instead. Talk about a cover up!

The final insults to Kevin's legacy came Genoways sympathizers, who must include UVa Sullivan and [a commenter to an April 2011 article in *The Hook*](#), named "that guy," wrote, Is Ted Genoways a bully? I know him on a personal level, and I have a hard time believing it. That said, of course, it's possible that he harbors a Jekyll/Hyde management style—except that I've seen him at work, and he's been nothing but professional. I admit that he is rather direct and expects a high standard from his staff, but I do not see how that makes him a bully. I didn't know Kevin Morrissey except through your reporting. He sounded like a pretty lonely guy who felt entirely misunderstood, as though he didn't quite fit in with the rest of the world. I'm going to say something now that sounds harsh, but isn't: **congratulations on your death, Kevin—you finally managed to do the thing you thought would bring you the greatest relief. I sincerely hope it has. I'm sorry nobody has said that until now.**"

Thank goodness, another commenter, "formersubscriber," replied with my exact feelings. "Whoa—that guy—congratulating someone on his death! How very kind of you. Now I know why you and Genoways are friends—you're both heartless a-holes without an ounce of empathy or compassion for anyone else. You two deserve each other. Hang out together and spare the rest of us your soulless snakelike company."

Many of the facts for this article are based on [McNair's April 2011 article for *The Hook*](#).

Dear Kevin, you are not forgotten. Requiescat in pace.