

Arsonist in the office

Media Kit

THE ARSONIST IN THE OFFICE



FIREPROOFING

YOUR LIFE AGAINST TOXIC COWORKERS,
BOSSES, EMPLOYEES AND CULTURES

PETE HAVEL

Author's Biography

Pete Havel

Author of **The Arsonist in the Office**, experienced lobbyist, political consultant and crisis communications professional who has served numerous leading business advocacy organizations, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, National Federation of Independent Business and Associated Builders and Contractors. Pete grew up in Massachusetts, but now calls Texas home, along with his family.

He received his B.A. in Business Administration from Baylor University and is a graduate of the Institute for Organizational Management. Early in his career, he also served as producer of two radio talk programs and one news/issues TV talk show in the Boston market.

Pete serves as a Sr. Counsel of Public Affairs for a leading communications firm. With skills sharpened in the toughest, bare-knuckled professional environments, Havel is committed to helping leaders and organizations boldly face their challenges and provide tools that sharpen 'smart skills' that improve performance, protect careers and organizational cultures.



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Book Biography

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The Arsonist in the Office

Have you ever worked with an arsonist? That toxic employee that burns down careers, cultures and organizations for fun, revenge, personal agendas, financial enrichment, ego or spite?

They can be your coworker, your boss, or your employee. Male or female. Striking behind closed doors or sometimes right under your nose, and they can torch you before you know it.

Author Pete Havel is an innovative voice for corporate transformation who encourages organizations to 'fireproof' their cultures from the arsonists and build cultures that encourage productivity and employee satisfaction.

Through his unbelievable experience within the most toxic environment imaginable. Havel weaves together a book that educates and provides the tools for dealing with the arsonists and the cultures they corrupt.

Who is this book for?

Employees

It's ideal for the employee wanting to protect themselves from a toxic coworker or boss as they climb up the ladder within organizations

Executives, Managers and Owners

It's also perfect for managers, executives and company owners, who Havel calls on them to place protection of positive cultures at the top of their priority list. It also provides specific tools that companies can have to never let arsonists in the door and, if they sneak through the hiring process, set procedures and warning systems to sniff them out.

Human Resources Professionals

From hiring to firing, getting the 'people part' right is essential to a productive, successful organization.

College students

Students about to enter the workforce need to understand how cultures really work. In these tricky times in the workplace, it's important for students to know and understand what they're walking into on day one. The firewatching chapter on tools to detect a potential toxic employer is a must for them..

Volunteer and Membership Organizations

Whether you're a minister, a board member of a nonprofit, a PTA volunteer or a staff member of any of the organizations mentioned, you are highly vulnerable to taking in the arsonists in your community because firing a volunteer—or a major donor—is never easy. Learn what to do to protect the organizations you care about the most.

Political Junkies

It's not a political book, but you'll see throughout this book glimpses of Pete Havel's experience in politics—and how he applies those principles to dealing with office politics. Never let your opponent define you first. When attacked, always respond. It's what any person in battle should do.

Now, Pete brings those principles in politics to the business world.



Benefits of This Book

- 1- 21 ways to fireproof your career
- 2- Protect your company's culture
- 3- Learn how to deal with difficult people
- 4- 20 ways to determine if your workplace is toxic
- 5- 10 top toxic tormentor types
- 6- Learn about great corporate cultures
- 7- Learn about FLARP—the acronym describing the costs of the toxic workplace
- 8- Learn how to identify arsonists in the office and toxic companies
- 9- Gain resolve to make difficult but necessary decisions
- 10- Determine key factors affecting attraction and retention of employees
- 11- Rebounding from adversity
- 12- How to manage dysfunctional volunteer organizations (PTAs, Chambers of Commerce, Trade Associations, Churches)

Story ideas for The Arsonist in the Office

- 1- How to protect yourself in a toxic workplace
- 2- Can a toxic environment bring down a company?
- 3- What's an arsonist?
- 4- Smoke detectors and whistleblowers—do you speak up when you see bad behavior?
- 5- How can you spot a toxic workplace when you're looking for a job?
- 6- How a job seeker can spot a toxic workplace
- 7- How to fireproof your hiring process
- 8- How to fireproof your culture
- 9- How to discuss why you left your last job
- 10- Life's second acts—rebounding after leaving a toxic workplace
- 11- What are the costs of a toxic workplace?

Book Excerpts

“You may be one rogue employee away from burning down your organization and your culture. Or one wrong move from seeing your career go up in flames. I know. It happened to me. Do you wonder if you could be next? Or maybe it will be your reputation that’s destroyed. Or your company’s culture and productivity attacked. All it takes is encountering the arsonist—the destructive employee with the mindset and the tools to light things up and burn you down and a culture that lets them thrive.”

I won’t belabor the details too much, but as Cecil explained it, it was the volunteer firefighters who were setting the fires. “Some lit ‘em for kicks, others lit ‘em because they knew they would not get extra equipment if they didn’t have enough fires in their county, and others just liked watching things burn. A few burned things down because they didn’t like the people who owned certain properties, and some others liked being called into city hall and called heroes. Some were even helping their buddies by torching buildings for insurance money,” he said, looking me square in the eye. “All that? That’s Hazel.”

“You just described an arsonist,” I said, mentally dry-heaving.

Cecil chuckled. “Yeah, she’s kind of the arsonist in the office, and now she’s your arsonist too! Careful she doesn’t set you on fire!”

Toxic workplaces are created when decision makers either behave badly themselves or look the other way and do not address bad behavior from others. Toxic employees are of course responsible individually for their behavior, but management has a responsibility to step in if the behavior affects others. Management has sole responsibility for workplace culture and is responsible for dealing with bad behavior. Management shapes cultures—both through action and inaction.

Just like tuning a few isolated keys in a badly out of tune piano does not make beautiful music and aligning only part of your car’s suspension does not make the car handle better, solving only half the problem of sexual harassment and male-female interaction in the workplace doesn’t fix things. We need to fix sexual harassment in the workplace. To do that, we need the grown-ups in the room and ask the extreme voices to step aside.

We know the motives of arsonists in the criminal sense. Arsonists in the office have similar motives. They just have different tools and targets.

- Arsonists sometimes cover up evidence of other bad acts. Arsonists in the office are motivated to act out to distract from their own failures.
 - Arsonists can have a super-hero complex. Office arsonists like to be seen putting out fires, even though they started them!
 - Arsonists often act for financial gain. In the office, how much trouble is created because people want to leapfrog over others to get a promotion, cut corners on ethics to pump up their numbers to trigger a bonus or a raise, or attack coworkers they view as competitors?
 - Arsonists act out of revenge. Created out of jealousy or badly formed views of justice and entitlement, arsonists in the office burn down other people around them to right the wrongs they see.
 - Arsonists do things for attention. Arsonists in the office torch things for recognition. They are adrenaline junkies who love to light the match and see sparks fly!
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We have two realities today in the #MeToo era. First, women are being harmed because some companies with a large percentage of men in the senior ranks are now in defensive mode, and women are losing out on networking, leadership, and mentoring opportunities. Some companies—mainly smaller operations—are moving to a “no women” staffing policy once you reach a certain level of the company. Second, men are concerned and have reason to be with a believe-all-women mindset among some activist groups that get a sympathetic ear from the media.

Arsonists are a cancer in a toxic workplace, but so are their enablers. And the enablers usually wield some level of power. They hold the matches and the gas can while the fire is being lit. Wittingly or unwittingly, they accelerate and spread an arsonist’s fires.

Imagine it. In any normal office, your coworkers might haze you about how badly your favorite football team played over the weekend. Or they might decorate your office on your birthday. You might get a magazine article left on your desk or stuck on your bulletin board when somebody reads something interesting. But me? I got books about the danger of sociopaths.

HR departments serve as a reflection of the organization’s management style. They can be ethical and “by the books,” or they can be used to protect certain management within the company at all costs. I was about to find out what type of HR department I was working with.

Knowing this, if you are facing attacks from one of your toxic organization's arsonists, you need to be careful. You may be facing a battle you cannot win because the deck is intentionally stacked against you. As perverse as it sounds, arsonists may still be in their position for one of two main reasons—someone either wants them there because of their productivity, or someone is afraid to remove them because of obvious reasons or things you will never know.

Incredible studies have been done about the effect of group think and mob mentalities. They have found that decent people can do incredibly destructive things if they feel pressure or self-interest to act like the rest of a group. I witnessed it. In acts to keep a toxic culture from destroying them—otherwise decent people did incredibly cruel and destructive things.

The Alices of the office are affected every day by bullies and agendas within the toxic workplace. They're nameless, faceless people who are collateral damage for those who look at bigger pictures or turn their heads to look at different pictures entirely. They don't have the trappings of power, the levers to pull, or the dirt to spread. They're simply individuals caught up in games they didn't even know they were playing.

A line had been crossed.

I didn't know if my next action should involve the firm or law enforcement.

Water heaters have pressure release valves. They're used to reduce overheating and alleviate pressure. If the valve isn't operating correctly, water heaters can turn into bombs. Cars have speed governors to ensure stability and safety. Most of us have a governor of sorts on our internal engines—it's called our conscience. It's often exhibited through our personal moral codes or our faith. Hazel's actions made me question whether her governor was operational. I didn't think I could be surprised by anything Hazel did anymore, but this action left me speechless.

In organizations you have many levels of people with responsibilities: the rank and file employees, the executive leadership, and those with fiduciary roles like members of boards of overseers. The board is supposed to be the backbone of the organization—those who guide the ship when no one else can or the ones who are charged with bringing an organization back to its true north when things go South. But when fiduciaries are abdicating their responsibilities? Game. Set. Match. The culture is cooked.

There's no reason to guess or wonder about what a company is like when you can find out much of what you need to know. Information is out there, whether on the internet, within easy reach, or by using simple skills you already have. The information I'll share is also useful for companies trying to protect their reputations.

If you want to avoid working for a toxic company or reduce the need for a reboot of your company's reputation, become a firewatcher.

Whether you have a concern about the arsonist in the office, the financing practice that doesn't seem legit, or you just tripped over someone's dirty little secret, you need to understand you may become a target if you mention the matter in even an informative or supportive way. Remember, in a war zone, collateral damage happens.

I'm not talking about leaking to the media, recording conversations, or other aggressive, outward-facing actions that would make any organization more than a bit concerned. I'm talking about warning someone in responsibility about a problem and becoming targeted for dismissal.

Secrecy is common in toxic workplaces, and cover-ups can be just as common. Often the covering up involves your job being covered up—by dirt, in a shallow grave.

I learned that the culture is one of the most powerful things going in an organization. Culture can be the tie that binds, or it can be the hurricane that rips through a community. It's like good health—you don't always appreciate it until it's no longer there. Without it, there is weakness and a downward spiral.

Can you imagine me telling some unsuspecting hiring manager what had occurred at the firm to spur my departure? Beginning an interview with "Are you sitting down?" is not a great way to get hired.

There are people today forced to deal in nearly surreal work conditions with people whose behaviors insult logic and reason and whose cultures defy most anyone's sensibilities. I'm just a guy with a strong backbone and a heck of a business network who said, "No more. Not if I can help it."

I am proof that from the worst experiences can come some of life's greatest opportunities. The wheels-off culture that I experienced for a short period of time will now be used to inspire thousands of people to do better for their organizations. It hasn't been easy for me, but what I learned and endured will benefit others by protecting good cultures and help others rise again.

Are you ready to join the fireproofing movement?

Interview Questions

- 1- What motivated you to write this book?
- 2- What's an arsonist and why do you call them arsonists?
- 3- Why do companies keep arsonists within their organizations?
- 4- What's your definition of a toxic workplace?
- 5- How can people determine if their company is toxic?
- 6- What's the impact on a company if it's toxic?
- 7- How can people protect themselves against the arsonists in their office?
- 8- How is your book different from a lot of other books on culture?
- 9- You talk about sexual harassment and the #MeToo movement in your book. What are your thoughts?
- 10- You talk about your career in politics and as a lobbyist being a great background for becoming an authority on culture. Tell me about that.
- 11- How can companies identify toxic people before they hire them?
- 12- You describe this book as a leadership book. How so?
- 13- How can someone applying for a job find out if the company they just applied to is toxic?