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OPINION

The law is full of alpha bullies who can no longer be tolerated

By **Jacqueline Haski**

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When news broke of Dyson Heydon’s alleged rampant sexual harassment, it became clear that even a former High Court judge could not dodge the juggernaut that is the #MeToo movement.

Ironically, in law – an industry where power and money are often regarded as more important than integrity – stories of unwanted sexual attention or the

"innocent" hand on knee are all too common. Whether it be on the bench, at the bar, or in the solicitor's office it is rife.

Thankfully, it seems, enough is finally enough. These predators will have their just(ice) deserts.



Everyone knows bullying is rife in the law but little is done about it. PETER RAE

But what about other forms of harassment? I'm talking about partners and others higher up the corporate ladder who blatantly harass (although often it is covert), torment, intimidate, micro-manage and belittle. Everybody knows about it, yet nothing is done to fix it. As long as these partners are making money, they are praised, even promoted. They become the untouchables.

So what's a young lawyer to do?

Confront the source? Chances are you'll be managed out and gradually given less and less work until you are, quite literally, redundant. Dare approach HR? A file note may be made, a meeting scheduled. But it's career suicide. Tell the managing partner? You'll be told the firm takes these issues seriously. And then you'll suddenly find yourself working for a new partner, in a different team. You're an experienced litigator. Well, congratulations, now you're a property lawyer! And trust me, this "strategy" is akin to Russian roulette – your new boss may be just as bad, perhaps worse.

As one equity partner once told me, working in law is akin to the Hunger Games: kill or be killed. And he was one of the nice ones who respected and valued his team.

Law is full of alpha bullies, male and female. It is pervasive due to its inherent intellectual and adversarial nature. Recent headlines demonstrate the use of

immense power for sexual kicks is, at long last, considered deplorable. The same must now be said about every other type of harassment and tacitly accepted bullying culture.

What will it take for management to no longer turn a blind eye or make excuses for very bad behaviour? No one, no matter how good their billings are, is irreplaceable. Putting aside the cost of recruiting new staff, if a bad egg is left to rot, the stench permeates through the whole firm. If there are no consequences and victims are silenced or move on, it's just a matter of time until the cycle repeats.

How many more talented lawyers will be scarred from a bad experience such that they leave the law? And most importantly, when will law firms take harassment claims seriously and manage them with more than just lip service?

It is certainly no longer good enough for complaints of a sexual nature. Nor should it be when harassment and bullying occur in any other way, shape or form.

Jacqueline Haski is a solicitor who has worked in mid and top tier firms for 16 years.