

Media Release

## **When the Mob Rules at Work**

You have heard of workplace bullying, now meet its close, ugly cousin, 'mobbing'.

Mobbing is the name given to a particular type of workplace abuse, also commonly known as 'group victimization', being 'ganged up on' and being 'beat up by the team'.

"The phenomena of mobbing has historically been seen as a type of workplace bullying", says Hadyn Olsen, manager of WAVE (Workplaces Against Violence in Employment), "however, the dynamics of mobbing have their own unique patterns and need to be recognised as such."

Hadyn and his wife, Liz have just returned from a two day conference in Brisbane on the subject of mobbing. The conference was addressed by speakers from Canada and Australia, including Dr Ken Westhues of Canada and Tasmanian Anti-discrimination Commissioner, Dr Jocelynn Scutt.

Mobbing is originally an ornithological term (from the study of birds). It was initially observed as a behaviour that birds engage in toward a newcomer. When a new bird joins the group it may be mobbed and is pecked at by the others. This may continue until the bird is either killed or driven out of the flock. No one bird is responsible. It is death by 1000 pecks.

"The same behaviour happens in the workplace", says Olsen, "people are ganged up upon, targeted by a group of other employees, with the common purpose of forcing them out. It involves a pack mentality and a total lack of empathy and care. Those who suffer it are usually significantly harmed. Some choose suicide."

The recent case of the suicide of Greg Maddock, senior manager in Brisbane's Energex organisation, overshadowed the conference. Many of the conference attendees who specialise in the field of workplace bullying, believe Maddock may have been a victim of mobbing. His widow spoke at his funeral in September saying, "You believed that you were about to be targeted in a personal way and your integrity brought into question."

In Europe 10 countries have passed laws against mobbing. Victims are often suicidal or may 'go postal', a term used to describe employee retaliation by the gun. They are so angry they take it out by returning to work and getting vengeance with blood.

Liz Olsen, who manages the ZEROBULLY helpline in New Zealand believes many employees are victims of mobbing. "I believe more than 50 per cent of our callers are experiencing mobbing at work. The areas where it appears most prevalent are health, education and the public service."

Liz, who has personally experienced mobbing says, "Mine came when a manager tried to force me into stepping down from my work on suspicion of stress. When I refused the manager got nasty and sent out a fictitious set of minutes that falsely represented me. I complained and was staggered when others in the management team took sides against me without hesitation, refusing to accept what had happened. Their actions added up to a huge wall of attack. I then became the problem."

“No-one believes you when you are mobbed”, says Liz Olsen. “The ranks close against you and the only choices are to leave or fight it out. Unfortunately fighting it out is an immensely difficult thing to do. The mob is always right – even when they are wrong.”

Hadyn Olsen, who specialises in helping employers throughout New Zealand deal with workplace bullying and mobbing says, “No decent employer wants to have this kind of behaviour happening in their workplace, but it may happen under their noses without them realising it.”

“Employers need to recognise mobbing and bullying and take a stand against it. Having fair policies that ensure natural justice and fair processes are very important. Too often mobbing and bullying take place under the guise of performance management and reinforcing managerial control.”

Mobbing also happens from below. Managers are often mobbed by their staff. The subordinates close ranks, refuse to communicate constructively, turn up to meetings late, ignore requests to do their jobs and use verbal abuse to make the manager’s life hell.

What can you do if you are mobbed at work? “Speak up” say the Olsens, “Keep going higher until you find a person of integrity who will listen and take responsibility to stop the behaviour. If you don’t find that person, then the best choice is probably to leave. I don’t offer this advice lightly,” says Hadyn, “but it is a matter of survival. It’s not fair, but sometimes staying and fighting is too damaging”.

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## **PROFILE**

In 2002 Hadyn Olsen formed and launched WAVE (Workplaces Against Violence in Employment), a nationally focused project initiated under the Challenge Violence Trust. The vision was to create an awareness of violence issues in the workplace and assist employers to address it effectively. The formation and purpose of WAVE was welcomed by New Zealand’s Department of Labour and the Human Rights Commission. This initial phase has been completed, and now WAVE is continuing in a stand-alone commercial capacity.

Hadyn Olsen is recognised as an expert in the field of workplace bullying in New Zealand. He has 10 years of experience reforming bullies. He is a regular conference speaker and has acted as a consultant to government departments as well as major New Zealand companies running educational seminars, leadership training and developing procedures and policy (among other areas).

Based in the Bay of Plenty, Hadyn has worked in both corporate and not-for-profit organisations, therefore, he is well versed in a variety of workplace cultures and ethos. Hadyn believes that people are an organisation’s number one asset, and that like plant and equipment, employees need the right environment and controls to contribute most effectively.

In November Hadyn will run the introductory “Dealing with Workplace Bullying” workshop in Wellington, Dunedin and Christchurch to a variety of companies and organisations. This provides attendees with the skills to recognise workplace bullying and mobbing, and offers simple steps to address it.

Further information about WAVE and the services provided can be accessed through the website:

[www.wave.org.nz](http://www.wave.org.nz)