

ARE YOU A TALL POPPY? BEWARE OF POPPY SHEARERS!

“Tall poppies” is a term that originated in Australia to describe a phenomenon that is by no means restricted to that continent. It happens when a high achiever who rises above the rest – like a poppy that grows taller than the others in a field – becomes vulnerable to those who want to undermine or destroy their achievements or reputation. “In a society that prides itself on egalitarian principles, rising above the pack is considered antisocial and countercultural,” says Carol Vallone Mitchell, author of a book on the subject.* “Tall poppies generate hostility and elicit a host of undermining behaviours to bring them down a peg,”¹ she says.



There are many ways a person can undermine another’s achievements. It could be anything from idle gossip or trolling on social media to making false accusations or outright defamatory statements – in which case the solution is to take legal action. Negative comments can be damaging because they can be repeated, and then they become gossip. The more people say something the more people will think it is true. This behavior is generally driven by envy, jealousy, resentment and fear of failure. For some people, it is easier to knock someone else down than it is to pull themselves up. Leaders tend to stand out, and that makes them susceptible to the urge among those less successful to deflate them.

The consequences of tall poppying can range from getting someone fired or crushing creativity and innovation within an organization, and even damaging personal relationships. It can keep children from developing to their full potential. We all know someone who wants to spoil our fun, just because they aren’t having any themselves.

¹ https://www.huffingtonpost.com/carol-vallone-mitchell/a-cautionary-tale-for-tal_b_11266084.html

HERE ARE SIX WAYS TO DEAL WITH SITUATIONS WHERE YOU FEEL SOMEONE IS TRYING TO “TALL POPPY” YOU.

Remember if the situation is one that is a course of harassing behaviour, you should follow your organizations violence and harassment protocols to address this situation.

- Depending on the severity of a comment that is being made about you, one option is to rise above it and ignore it. However, if the rumour leads to gossip, and it is causing damage, it will be necessary to confront the perpetrator. Be calm, speak to them in private, do not threaten them or show anger. Simply tell them you are aware of the gossip and that you expect it to cease immediately. Remember that they are probably doing it out of fear: fear of their failure to achieve their goals. In a way, their behaviour is an affirmation that you have succeeded where they have failed. Showing them sympathy, even offering to help them, may diffuse the situation.
- Social media attacks can be painful because they are so public. The best response to being trolled is to unfriend or block the perpetrator and move on, rather than responding and lowering yourself to their level. Do not be provoked, and don't argue with someone who is unlikely to change their mind. It just takes time and energy away from your true goal, which is to rise above and be an achiever.
- If the social is serious – if someone is threatening your life or safety, take it to the police, tell your employer if it is occurring at work and, if appropriate, alert your social media provider.
- If you are being slandered or falsely accused of something, seek legal advice. A cease-and-desist letter may be enough to shut down an attacker. Bullies are usually cowards as well.
- Surround yourself with people who support rather than try to tear down your cause. If you keep company with critics and naysayers, they will eventually drag you down. If you surround yourself with people who celebrate your successes and appreciate your achievements, it can only bolster your success. Provide the same support in return, and watch the magic happen. You will leave the haters behind in the dust.
- Object to the tall-poppying of others. Sometimes we witness or hear other people being criticized or gossiped about. Do not indulge the naysayer by engaging in the conversation, and do not repeat it. Avoid being the vehicle of someone else's poppy shearing ambitions.

REFERENCES

<https://www.huffingtonpost.com/carol-vallone-mitchell/a-cautionary-tale-for-tal b 11266084.html>

<https://www.cio.com.au/article/612461/tall-poppy-syndrome-holding-back-innovation/>

<https://spinalresearch.com.au/haters-gonna-hate-kick-tall-poppy-syndrome/>

<https://www.thebusinesswomanmedia.com/tall-poppy-syndrome-can-undermine-you/>

<https://www.annemariemcross.com/victim-of-the-tall-poppy-syndrome-what-to-do-when-things-get-nasty/>