

# Keeping Sane at Law School: Tips for Surviving in Hostile Environments

*Robert S. Wright*

*Presentation and Conversation*

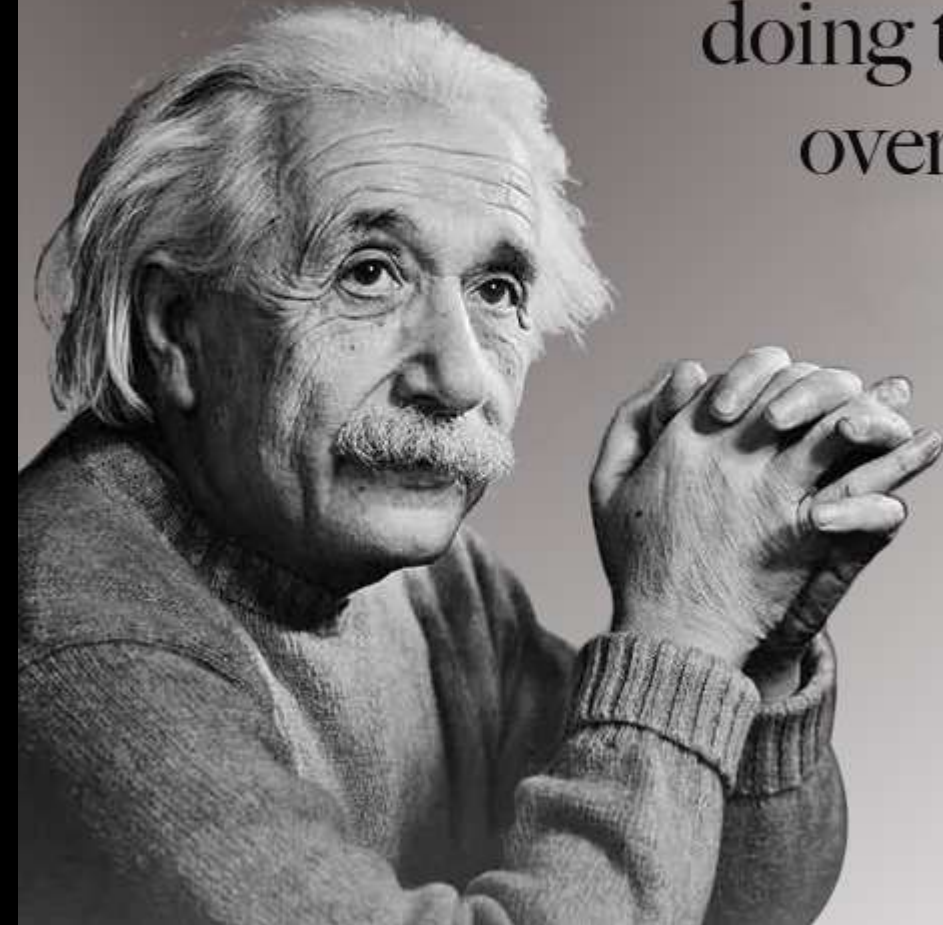
*With IBM Students at the Schulich School of Law*

*October, 2011, reprised and expanded Oct. 2015, Nov. 2016*

# INSANITY:

doing the same thing over and  
over again and expecting  
different results.

*~ Albert Einstein*



# What is a Hostile Environment

A hostile work environment exists when:

- Discriminatory behaviour against a protected class exists in the environment
- The behaviour constitutes a persistent pattern
- The behaviour must be severe enough to disrupt the work of the targeted employee(s)
- It is expected that the behaviour will continue if uninterrupted.



# Hostile Environment: Another Consideration

A hostile environment may also be created structurally when a position exists within an institution that has an antagonistic role within the organization. Consider:

- A quality control officer working in a mine
- An SEC officer working within a security firm
- An officer in an institution responsible for investigating claims of harassment or discrimination

# Are the Schulich School of Law and Other Legal Settings Hostile Environments?

The Marshall Enquiry established that racism is at work within the criminal justice system in Nova Scotia and that it excludes IB&M persons

Given this systemic exclusion it stands to reason that as agents of systemic change (by their very presence), IB&M persons are in a structural conflict with the very institutions in which they study and work

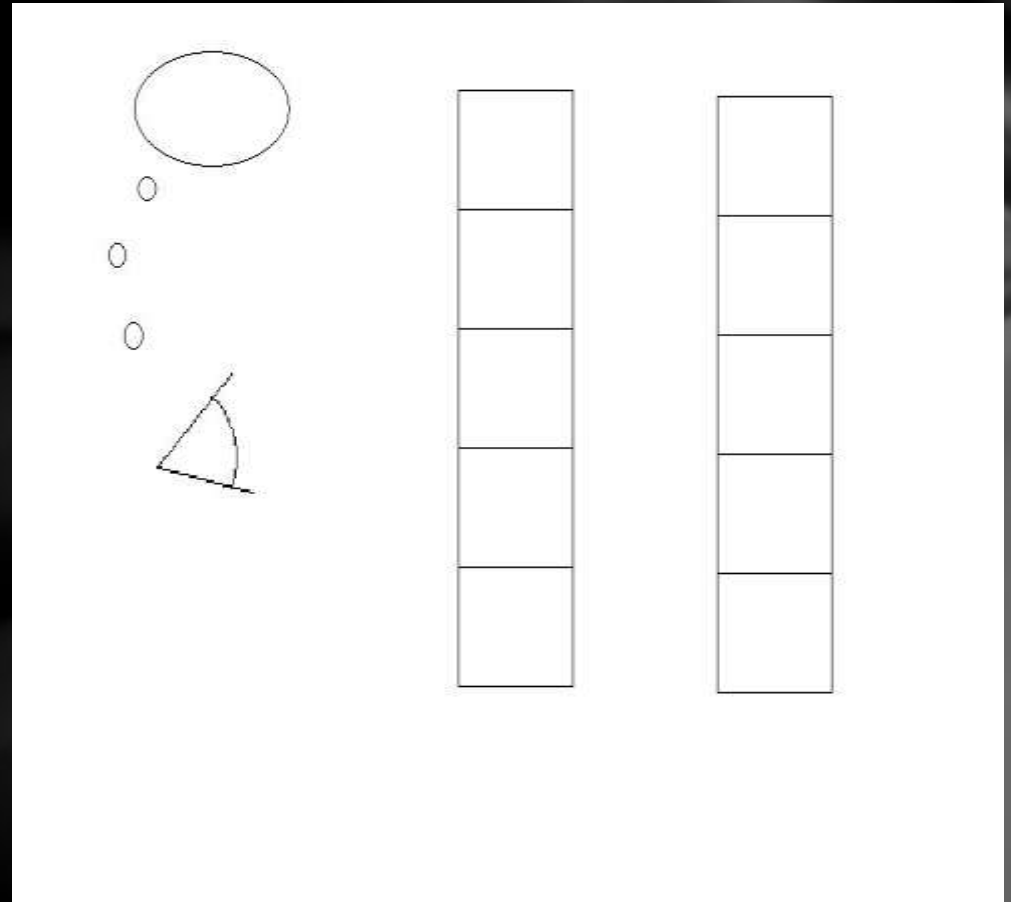
# How do you Stay Sane in a Hostile Environment?

I have developed a 6 point plan for my personal sanity preservation (you can be the judge of my success):

- Identity
- Competence/Excellence
- Analysis
- Independence
- Process
- Action

# Identity

- Not exclusively about race
- Identity insecurity comes from dissonance between ideal and actual self





# Erikson's Chart

Group	Age	Virtue	Crisis
Infants	0 to 18 mo	Hope	Trust vs. Mistrust
Toddlers	18 mo to 3 yrs	Will	Autonomy vs. Shame & Doubt
Preschool	3 to 6 yrs	Purpose	Initiative vs. Guilt
Childhood	6 to 12 yrs	Competence	Industry vs. Inferiority
Adolescence	12 to 18 yrs	Fidelity	Identity vs. Role Confusion
Young Adults	19 to 40 yrs	Love	Intimacy vs. Isolation
Middle Adulthood	40 to 65 yrs	Care	Generativity vs. Stagnation
Seniors	65 yrs +	Wisdom	Ego Integrity vs. Despair

# Wright's Chart

Stage	Age	Critical Issue	Process for Resolution	Significant Relationship(s) & Resources
Pre-school	0-5yrs	comfort with visible racial differences	Adequate and enlightened physical care	primary physical caregiver
Early school	5-9yrs	understanding of personal equality & competence	Facilitated success in social and academic pursuits	extended family members/school personnel
Early adolescence	11-14yrs	ability to appropriately negotiate racial dynamics	Knowledge of history and politics of race	same race role models, culturally specific and anti-racist education
Later adolescence	15-18yrs	personal choices in context of race	family values re: race, sex, reproduction and vocation	role models, community censors and informal agents

# Competence/Excellence

- Do you have the skills you need to compete?
- Are you taking every advantage to improve?

# Analysis

- Do you know what is happening around you?
- Do you know what is happening to you?
- Do you have a race analysis?
- It is structural, historical, not personal

# Independence

- It is critical to live with a strong sense of independence
- Feeling trapped undermines your wellness
- Live below your means!
- If you haven't figured out money yet, get crack-a-lackin'

# Process

- You need to have a place to talk about, and work out the race specific challenges that you will experience in the workplace.
- Who are your go-to friends that understand this?
- If you don't have a strong network, get a therapist, or organize a relationship with a mentor.

# Action

- Remain connected to those activities and engagements that support and preserve your identity.
- Engage in equity activism in another setting if it is unsafe to do so at work.

# What About Thriving?

IB&M persons are perched in positions of tremendous opportunity:

Just as increasing demand for bilingual skills privileges native French speakers, demands for cultural competence privileges IB&M persons

- Changing demographics creates demand within organizations to diversify their employee roster in order to position to meet demands of new markets
- Increasingly it is recognized that “different ways of thinking” are needed in the market and in government to address complex challenges in fluid/dynamic environments: Nichols talks about “systemic congruence through cultural competence”



# Acknowledge Your Value

Recognition that your “location” is an asset will prepare you to thrive rather than just survive.

- Document and articulate this value in your cv
- Cultivate expertise in known areas with a twist
- Maintain authentic relationships in your community and be a natural bridge without being a sell-out
- Where structural tensions exist, model professionalism and the value of your analysis and skill

# Conclusion

Those are the six points to surviving and the four suggestions for thriving. I hope that this brief introduction to the topic allows for spirited and productive conversation.

Please look up the two resources:

- Keeping Sane . . . And
- Judicial Appointments . . .
- [www.robertswright.ca](http://www.robertswright.ca)

# Q&A



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