

Stories from the Workplace

Andrea C.



Everyone thought Andrea C. had the "perfect marriage." Everyone was wrong.

Ms. C. – a senior executive with a large regional financial company– stayed in her marriage for 25 years, even though for most of it she was verbally, and later, physically, abused by her husband. He even tried to choke her to death on more than one occasion.

No one at work suspected anything. "I was outgoing, confident, and very capable," she says. "I could sit in a meeting opposite a CEO and not be flustered in the least. At home, it was a totally different story.

"Your home is supposed to be your safe haven, but it wasn't for me."

Like a lot of women who are victims of domestic violence, Andrea was embarrassed and afraid to let people at work know about the situation. "A lot of women choose just to take it, because they're afraid they would lose their jobs if people knew."

Andrea was able to separate the chaotic, dangerous life she led at home from the more organized, structured world she moved in at work and quickly made advances in her profession. Still, that didn't make her life any easier.

So, why didn't she just leave her husband? "There's something in a woman that wants to believe that the man you married was really the man you thought he was. It is said that a woman in this situation will leave her husband up to seven times before it sticks. You're ashamed of the fact that you've been putting up with this garbage and you're emotionally ground down.

"It's hard to start over. Sometimes you think it's just easier to stay and deal with it."

Andrea was fortunate in that her company offered counseling and other forms of confidential services, some of which she took advantage of. "My company was very good about it, but they didn't know what was going on with me. A company can only do so much."

Andrea was able to get good advice from various sources, including her family and a helpful police officer. She decided to file a protection from abuse order, and it became the first step toward regaining a stable personal life. She is glad for all the help she received along the way, but she also realized she wouldn't have fixed anything without the "chutzpah" to do it herself.

Now, she tells her story openly and counsels any woman who needs or asks for her assistance. Her story is most notable for not being all that unusual, she believes.

"Women don't have to stand up and wave their arms and call attention to themselves, but people need to understand that domestic violence does happen to all people. Just because you're a professional woman, or in what appears to be a 'perfect' marriage doesn't mean it can't happen to you.

"Women need to recognize, first, whether they are in a healthy relationship. Are you afraid to speak up? Has he hit you? If he hits you once, he will hit you again.

"When women come to me for advice, I tell them, 'Tell someone, please.' Once a light is shined on domestic violence it can look different.

"I know by telling my story I've been able to help a few. If it were only one, that would make it worthwhile. Somebody has to step up and talk about it. If it's me, so be it."