



# Trump, Tweeting, Safety, Harassment, Judgement and Will

Insights

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The President's Tweeting dominated our discussions throughout June, with many people asking why does he Tweet? Was it a crafted strategy? A reasonable response to a biased media? A lack of Judgment? Emotional Outbursts?

While the media has not handled this Administration well, I do not believe that the President's Tweeting has advanced his agenda, and has in fact further coarsened politics. Only a modest percentage of supporters seem to like his tweeting approach. As a regular Tweeter, I curse the difficulty of making nuanced comments in only 140 characters, and therefore I think that most subjects handled by the Leader of Free World cannot be addressed in one sentence.

If this Tweeting is a result of poor judgment, we see similar actions every day in the work world. Why do executives and laborers alike make often stunningly bad decisions?

Why do ALL of us make bad decisions and wrestle with self-discipline? January Resolutions are a sick source of humor. Unfulfilled to-do lists haunt us. Even the Apostle Paul conceded problems with making the right decisions, albeit from a spiritual standpoint:

*I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.*

Romans 7:15 (NIV)

The question of why do we make bad decisions is not an academic subject to me. I've handled over 560 workplace death cases and catastrophes, many of which involved often inexplicable bad employee decisions.

Despite years of public litigation and employer training, we continue to see powerful executives commit colossal blunders involving female employees. Most of these incidents involved people making bad decisions ... or to use a term from another time, not exercising their **Will**.

First we had the Fox Roger Ailes controversy, and then Bill O'Reilly was fired from Fox News amid troubling allegations of recurrent sexual harassment. Then, while processing these seismic developments at a major media outlet, we see a major shakeup at pioneering Uber after an internal investigation involving their workplace culture.

Although it received less press, I saw an article the other day about someone hanging a noose in the workplace as a supposed “joke” with African American coworkers. There is no more explosive action in the workplace. I’ve written on this topic before.

One is tempted to exclaim, are we making any progress in workplace culture?

To me, an equally imperative inquiry is **why** do these successful, often innovative people make such horrendous bad decisions?

Even more importantly, why do normal people remove a guard on an operating machine, not tie-off, or cut corners in day-to-day ethical decisions?

Enough questions. Let’s talk over the next few posts about why normal people make poor decisions that translate into workplace fatalities, harassment claims, toxic workplaces or embarrassing Tweets and Facebook posts.

### **He’s an Idiot is not an Adequate Explanation for Bad Decisions.**

I’ve written about validated studies showing a correlation between bad decision-making and fatigue, lack of sleep, and low sugar. See also Part II.

Let’s talk about the effects of stress, mental exhaustion and a corresponding lack of will or “self-regulation.”

### **Is the Issue a Problem of Willpower?**

I have been impressed by the book, Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength, by Roy F. Baumeister, Professor of Psychology, Florida State University and NYT Journalist John Tierney.

From the NYT book review:

*Together with intelligence, self-control turns out to be the best predictor of a successful and satisfying life. But Baumeister and Tierney aren’t endorsing a return to a preachy puritanism in which people are enjoined to resist temptation by sheer force of will and condemned as morally irresolute when they fail. The “will” in willpower is not some mysterious “free will,” a ghost in the machine that can do as it pleases, but a part of the machine itself. Willpower consists of circuitry in the brain that runs on glucose, has a limited capacity and operates by rules that scientists can reverse-engineer — and, crucially, that can find work-arounds for its own shortcomings.*

I found Willpower to be far more than another self-help book. This book addresses many of the problems being played out in our news. From the article, The Power of Self Control (Baumeister):

*The practical significance [of Willpower] is enormous. Most of the problems that plague modern individuals in our society — addiction, overeating, crime, domestic violence, sexually transmitted diseases, prejudice, debt, unwanted pregnancy, educational failure, underperformance at school*

*and work, lack of savings, failure to exercise — have some degree of self-control failure as a central aspect.*

I was especially intrigued by the discussions of how our will is depleted, which are also discussed in the above article:

*Can you walk us through a typical example of willpower depletion?*

*A dieter may easily avoid a doughnut for breakfast, but after a long day of making difficult decisions at work, he has a much harder time resisting that piece of cake for dessert.*

*Another example might be losing your temper. Normally, you refrain from responding negatively to unpleasant things your romantic partner says. But if one day you're especially depleted — maybe you're trying to meet a stressful work deadline — and the person says precisely the wrong thing, you erupt and say the words you would have stifled if your self-control strength was at full capacity. What do you call this process?*

*My collaborators and I use the term “ego depletion” to refer to the state of depleted willpower.*

And don't lose hope, willpower, like muscle strength, can be recovered and increased:

*Self-control resembles a muscle in more ways than one. Not only does it show fatigue, in the sense that it seems to lose power right after being used, it also gets stronger after exercise. (The fatigue effect is immediate; the strengthening is delayed, just like with muscular exercise.)*

Baumeister's article, [Self-Control, the Moral Muscle](#).

Read the linked articles and we'll discuss the role of Willpower and ego depletion in employment law and safety challenges in our next post.

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