

The first week I started at Northern Seminary, I knew it was an incredible mistake. The president Bill Shiell immediately began to point out to me the individuals he targeted for adverse action because of his belief they were non-performers. His actions went beyond just holding these individuals accountable. He took pleasure in their discomfort and their anxiety around not meeting “his expectations” - which were unrealistic and unattainable. The two individuals he targeted most often were Pam Sheldon and Ingrid Faro.

My first day on the job, during what I supposed was my onboarding, he informed me that we needed to “get rid” of Pam Sheldon. Immediately, I began a search for a Controller. In the meantime, since Pam had made an error, Bill began to pressure her, and this made Pam more nervous/anxious, and as a result she began to make even more errors.

He did not tell me that Ingrid was targeted, but his behavior was the same as that for Pam. He would be very negatively incisive and laser-focused on her in our L10 meetings, and if she was unprepared or didn’t answer him to his liking, he would land and stay on her causing her to be flustered and anxious throughout the meeting.

I began to witness Bill’s true character flaws while I was working on the Controller search. We had decided to go with a few search firms since we were conducting the search confidentially. We had a couple of women Controller candidates who withdrew from the process due to Bill’s behavior and demeanor during the interview process. One such candidate was an African-American woman who had both a CPA and an MBA. She met all the qualifications and competencies we noted in the job specification. I prescreened the candidate, as well. I spent time building up the organization, and the opportunity to work for the Seminary President directly. The candidate was excited and positive about the opportunity. The day of the interview, Bill spent approximately 15 minutes with the candidate. I asked him what happened. He said that she didn’t have enough experience in managing grants – a very small portion of the requirements. I said okay. Later, the search firm called me and shared very disturbing information with me. The first candidate shared in her debrief with the search firm that Bill was very cold, distant, and did not even make eye contact with her. The second candidate – the African American woman, said that Bill again, was distant and unfriendly, did not even seem interested in her discussion, and picked up an apple and ate it – crunching it while she was talking. I was appalled at this behavior, apologized profusely, and told the search firm that I would share this feedback. Needless to say, they chose not to work with us further. I shared what I was told with Bill and told him respectfully that this type of response to our candidates was not good, and as the President of the Seminary it reflected poorly from an external perspective. Additionally, I reminded him that it is not good decorum to eat at all during interviews, and especially not an apple. Upon hearing this, Bill laughed derisively, and did not take the feedback seriously. Additionally, he continued to demean the feedback by telling me after each future interview, “you’ll be glad to know that I did NOT eat an apple during the interview” from that point on.

The next incident was when we hired Mary Mayo as Bill’s Executive Assistant after Christine Kolb left the organization. He did not like Mary from the very beginning, and he almost immediately began to pressure her about deliverables. We were out at our quarterly Traction meeting with Bobi Siembieda (consultant), and Mary received a fraudulent email (seemingly from Bill) requesting that she purchase gift cards on his behalf for a list of trustees.

Granted, this was a horrible mistake – and she was able to get the charges reversed from the corporate card, but this was unforgivable in Bill’s eyes. He wanted to fire her – and said so, and he systematically went about overloading her with work and pressuring her. There were many times that Mary came to

my office in tears trying to determine how to correct the relationship with Bill after that. I was shocked when I received a text message from Bill on July 28, 2020 (still have it) where he states, “what would you think about doing another fake email test to see if she falls for it again?” I simply replied, “Nope – she is on alert. Time needs to pass for her to learn from the first.” I was extremely disappointed in Bill and wondered if he actually sent the first email.

Working with Bill in what I determined was a toxic and hypocritical environment made me decide to not only leave Northern Seminary as an employee (after exactly one year), but also as a student. I did not believe that I could thrive when I began to lose my passion for the study because of the hypocritical behavior of the President.

When I went to discuss my departure with Bill, I told him I was leaving the organization because I could not work in an unwelcoming and toxic environment – he did not receive that I was talking about him, and he said, “I am sorry that you felt marginalized in this culture.” Please be clear, I left Northern because I did not have to work with someone like Bill Shiell, and I also believed that he was not only a bully, but also a hypocrite – and I have never allowed myself to feel “marginalized” in any culture.

The final straw came when after I had left the organization, and I spoke with an employee. This employee asked me if my husband and I were “still together”. I was taken aback, and stated, “Of course...why?” This employee shared that Mary Riordan (outside attorney to Northern – worked on Lombard campus sale) had told this employee that she had asked Bill why I left Northern, and Bill told her that I left because my husband was divorcing me. I was livid. I went to my attorney and she advised that I had grounds to sue Bill for slander if this was proven (easily), and she was ready to send a cease-and-desist letter to Bill and copy the Board.

Given that Bill has been exhibiting this type of behavior for years during his tenure without being held accountable for this type of destructive behavior, I decided to let God handle it.

It is my hope that at some point Bill will be held accountable for how he has bullied and demeaned staff and faculty at Northern Seminary, how he has blatantly lied about people, and how he has attempted to destroy people’s lives.

The toxic culture at Northern Seminary has been created and continues because of President Bill Shiell. He needs to be held accountable.