

Tackling the trolls

AMANDA HAMILTON is Chief Executive of the National Association of Licenced Paralegals (NALP), a non-profit membership body and the only paralegal body that is recognised as an awarding organisation by Ofqual (the regulator of qualifications in England).

Through its Centres around the country, accredited and recognised professional paralegal qualifications are offered for those looking for a career as a paralegal professional.

Amanda Hamilton writes for The Herald:

ONLINE DISINHIBITION EFFECT is a term used to describe people behaving online in a way that they would not if they were interacting with someone in person.

The effect can see people being unusually open about their lives and/or feelings or it can see them engage in extraordinary kindness – their ability to empathise seems to receive a boost.

However, the online disinhibition effect can manifest in less benign ways – it can bring out the worst in people.

Trolling is not a new issue.

A 2017 study by the University of Buckingham showed that 43% of UK adolescents experienced some kind of cyber-bullying in the space of a year.

The pandemic, with the long lockdown periods it brought where many of us spent even more time with our laptops, tablets and phones has seen an increase in unpleasant online activity, in various shades, shapes and severities.

The sad fact is that it is so easy to do.

It can be a totally unprovoked attack, but it can emotionally affect the recipient or destroy a career or business.

Trolling is like bullying.

The troller is confident enough to do it knowing that there will be a few sheep-like individuals who will join in and back them up. So, in the same way as confronting a bully head-on, you do the same thing online to try to defuse the situation.

Suggestions such as:

- You are entitled, of course, to your opinion, but I would invite you to meet me, or have a face-to-face Zoom with me to discuss this in person



Jon Coles

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- I am afraid you are wrong in your assumptions for the following reasons...
- Let me put you right on a few inaccuracies in your comments...

Of course, what you don't want to do is to get embroiled in a whole batch of further comments and so you need to think very carefully about how to approach the response and make it as 'closed' as possible: do not leave it open for further comment.

And think hard before you reply to the reply (if the troll does reply)

I had a close friend who was an extremely balanced person and non-aggressive.

She was asked to do something for an acquaintance free of charge that would enhance that person's business. It involved a performance in front of a large audience which my friend had never done before.

She felt aggrieved since the acquaintance was an experienced performer and teacher and never offered any support on the night.

After the event and a glass too many of red wine,

my friend posted something on the Facebook Group page that she later regretted.

It was not aggressive, but it was perceived by the acquaintance to be an insult and degrading in the eyes of her fellow group members. However, the acquaintance promptly sent a private message to my friend saying that it would be better to discuss this face to face.

It worked, and within a few minutes of their meeting and after a chat, my friend apologised to her and posted a retraction and apology on the Group page.

She has never posted anything derogatory since.

She learned her lesson and realised how easy it is these days to say something you later regret, but only when it is too late to prevent the posting.

If you attempt to diffuse the situation without success, you may have to turn to legal methods.

A 'Cease and Desist' letter could be sent (if you know the troller's postal or email address). This informs the person to cease what they are doing under threat of legal action. If that fails to work, a claim for compensation based on harassment could be made through the courts.

One final tip: people often

refer to 'defamation'. This is a legal term that describes someone making a false verbal (slander) or written (libel) statement about an individual or business which damages their reputation, resulting in financial loss.

However, the burden lies with the person making such an allegation of loss that financial loss has been suffered as a direct result of such defamation.

If that can be proved, then it may be worth taking legal action.

But beware!
It is a costly process and there is no funding to assist you.

All of the above actions, of course, may be negated by the fact that the reviewer or 'troller' may be anonymous, but if you are aware of who they are, then mediation could be considered in order to settle any issues without recourse to litigation through the courts.

If you need legal advice or assistance, you can always approach a paralegal who will offer you access to justice at a more reasonable cost than a solicitor.

To find a qualified paralegal visit the National Paralegal Register: <https://www.nationalparalegals.co.uk/national-paralegal-register/>

MIKE EDWARDS

"SODDEN" is a word as wretched and depressing in reality as it sounds when it falls leaden from the lips.

The wife's keenness on walking in all weathers has given me a new appreciation of just how miserable a word it is.

After fifteen minutes walking through the most recent downpour we braved at her behest, I felt uncomfortably damp in places where dampness does not belong.

A steady trickle of water wound its way down my kagoule and into the gap between the back of my trousers and my fundament.

Meanwhile, at the front end of things, the rain pummelled through the thin raincoat while simultaneously producing the sort of wick effect via my woolly jumper, which leaves you both dripping in sweat and soaked through to the skin.

Those are not circumstances from which much comfort can be drawn.

All it needed was a large bird-dropping landing on top of my raincoat to put the metaphorical cherry upon which I mentally chewed as we trudged along.

Onward I squelched, beginning to wonder how long it took to develop trench foot.

The stump of a felled tree stood ahead of me, and I sat down to allow the water to cascade off my hood onto the ground between my soaking feet.

I had not quite got to the stage of contemplating the end; however, it occurred to me that this was perhaps my final opportunity to make my piece with

Jehovah before I became delirious with fever and sank into unconsciousness never to awake.

There weren't any hills around unto which I could lift up my eyes for strength.

Even if there had, I would not have been able to see them through the pelting torrent.

As I communed with whatever woodland deities exist, there came a sudden crash followed by a string of violent and violently bilingual expletives.

A forlorn voice came from the track ahead, calling my name.

I struggled to my feet and hauled my sopping carcass towards the noise.

About ten yards on, I found the wife sitting up and covered in an amount of mud and vegetation that made me think of the words 'Swamp Thing'.

She was unable to get up unaided and, once up, could barely hobble.

Gingerly, I helped her back to the car park.

We stopped now and again when her pain was too great and my breath too short to continue.

After forty minutes' solid drudgery, in which the hammering intensity of the rain mercifully drowned out the wife's howls of agony, we reached our car. I helped her inside and headed off to A&E.

A mere seventeen hours later, we were home: damp, miserable, and on the hunt for scabby cats to eat.

I don't know whether there are gods of the forest. But today, in the warmth of our own home and with the wife's foot elevated and her under strict instructions to rest for six weeks, I am prepared to believe in them.