

## ?Accused? doesn?t mean guilty

By Brian Lockhart

It's been a wild ride in the celebrity world and now on the political scene as person after person is being publicly accused of harassment in various forms.

From inappropriate comments to full-on assault this current trend of outing people for bad behaviour has been making news across the country.

Calling someone out for harassing or intimidating a person isn't a bad thing, but this behaviour is certainly not a new phenomenon in the workplace.

A lot of businesses, especially large ones with a lot of employees, have someone like this ? a person who uses their superior position to intimidate or just exhibit anti-social behaviour just because they can.

A lot of women would be surprised to learn that their ?kind and loving husband' is an absolute horror to work for and uses bullying tactics or speaks to employees in a manner that would get them punched in the mouth real quick if they weren't in the workplace.

It happens all the time. I've worked for a few of these types over the years and there's still a couple out there that probably wouldn't want to run into me or a few of my fellow associates in a public place now that we no longer work under their supervision.

Despite all of all the complaints that have been publicly splashed across the media, this is still going on. It's not so easy to speak out when your harasser is the one signing your paycheque.

However, with all the accusations coming out, we as a society, must remember that being accused of something doesn't make you guilty of anything.

Unfortunately, punishment without due process is becoming the norm in many of these cases.

Ontario Progressive Conservative leader Patrick Brown, in the course of mere hours, went from being the leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition to a ghost that no one can even seem to find. He had one of the biggest and fastest political meltdowns this country has ever seen ? maybe THE biggest.

Even now, nothing has been proven but his party, associates, and allies, abandoned him faster than a pack of rats jumping out of a garbage fire. No one wanted to be caught up and associated with him to avoid being labeled as guilty of something by association.

Accusations are a dangerous thing when used improperly. There were quite a few people left dangling at the end of a rope during the Salem Witch trials based solely on accusations. Of course that's an extreme example, but tell that to the departed.

An MP from Saskatchewan has become one of the latest politicians to be accused of harassment and now is under investigation by the powers that be in that political party.

Erin Weir, the New Democratic MP for Regina-Lewvan, claims he has not harassed anyone and vows to fight to clear his name.

The difference in this case is the complaint comes from another MP, who was not a victim, based on an e-mail from a third person, who was not a victim, who claims knowledge of an incident about a completely different person.

In other words, Weir's name is being publicly dragged through the mud based solely on hearsay delivered through an anonymous e-mail account.

If anyone should be investigated it should probably be the MP who has publicly attacked Weir without due process or any proof to back up her claims.

While Weir has claimed to have done nothing wrong, he also pointed out during a recent interview that the damage has already been done. ?Google his name,? he said, and the first thing that comes up are news stories detailing the harassment charges.

If the public gives in to this notion that accusations equal a guilty verdict, then all bets are off when it comes to the nasty world of politics and by extension a lot of other businesses, institutions, organizations, and any other group that includes two or more people.

In the current climate, destroying an opponent's reputation could be as easy as creating a false news story and leaking it to the press or paying a teenage girl to enter a bar and greet a person with a hug while making sure the interaction is caught on camera.

It's a dangerous situation when accused persons are automatically assumed guilty in the court of public opinion.

News sources must re-evaluate stories before releasing wild accusations rather than printing them at the drop of a hat just because someone submits a news release.

Without due process, lives can be ruined, based solely on hearsay and rumors.