

## Fair Is Fair

**Why a theme issue about work?** Because we are finally crawling out of the Great Recession and have enough distance to look back and ask ourselves: What just happened, and how has it changed our lives? When the economy tanked and companies downsized, many people who held onto their jobs felt lucky to have survived. Some were even promoted. Then, slowly, the cost of survival dawned on them: double or triple the workload. Employers, shaken up by the market upheaval, weren't prepared to reward

staffers for their overtime with raises or bonuses, at least not in the short term. Of course, the short term is starting to feel like the long term, and workloads aren't getting any lighter. This, it seems, is the new normal.

In 2009, at the height of the Great Recession, the executive editor of the *New York Times*, Bill Keller, addressed his staff about how the paper was going to cope with a sharp decline in ad revenue. "The idea that you can do more with less is, in my view, one of the four great lies," he said. "What you can do with less, is less." He's right, of course, though many companies had to learn that lesson the hard way. And the way some companies behaved wasn't all that becoming. (Case in point: during the recession, the Ontario Human Rights Legal Support Centre reported an increase in complaints from women who were being let go while they were on maternity leave or soon after they told their bosses they were pregnant.)

In Canada, we believe in the ideal of fairness in the workplace. We have elaborate laws to protect workers physically, to insulate them from the prejudices of their bosses, and to guarantee a base minimum wage. Compared to most other workers on the planet, we're lucky, but the system isn't perfect, and sometimes it flat out fails.

Corporate managers, it seems, could improve in the fairness department. In a recent survey of 800 Canadian human resources professionals, the vast majority considered badly behaved managers to be a "big" or even "huge" problem. Apparently, 70 per cent of managers show favouritism, 62 per cent treat their employees with disrespect and 57 per cent use bullying or intimidation to get results. Putting aside the possibility that HR people are just super-judgmental perfectionists, the results are alarming, and also disap-

pointing; hasn't any good come from the widespread proliferation of expensive MBA programs? Just what, exactly, are managers learning?

According to the HR survey, lower-level managers are supposedly the worst. And in a way, that's not a surprise. They had the hardest time during the recession: their bosses were pushing them to improve the bottom line. To achieve corporate goals, they had to pressure their employees to work harder and be more productive. And it appears they thought a little bullying or intimidation would do the trick.

Fairness comes up often in this issue, our first dedicated to exploring the modern workplace. Maryam Sanati considers the fairness of the 100-hour workweek in her piece about burnout on Bay Street (page 28). Fairness is also a theme in "The Housekeepers Revolt," by Nicholas Hune-Brown, about staff at the Royal York hotel demanding more job stability (page 36). And Jesse Brown, in his eye-opening story about bosses who spy on their employees, asks the question: What should an employer do when he or she discovers an employee spending time on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube during business hours? The answer (page 50) will surprise you.