

**WRESTLING
RHINOS:**

**CONQUERING
CONFLICT**

in the
WILDS OF WORK



Rhoberta Shaler, PhD

"Fasten your seatbelts! Here's a book that will put you on the fast-track of the Truth Train. It's not about waking up to smell the roses. It's waking up before you lose the rose bushes. Not just another intriguing book title, 'Wrestling Rhinos' will help you overcome both cultural and personal denials, contradictions, and avoidance in order to master those difficult to handle situations. I will recommend it to all of our readers—women leaders who have had to work harder than most to learn these principles. This book will make it much easier for all of us in the future!"

Pat Lynch, Founder and Editor in Chief
WomensRadio and WomensCalendar
www.womensradio.com, www.womenscalendar.org

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"Rhobertha has done a masterful job of identifying the core issues that impact productivity, and applying a framework for positive change. Her creativity knows no bounds, and can have an immediate impact on your success!"

Mark LeBlanc, Author, *Growing Your Business!*

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"If I had to select one skill to better position oneself for success, it would be the ability to communicate effectively. I believe there is no other skill set that can better enhance your success—personally or professionally. Dr. Shaler is a master of the art of effective communication—even in difficult conversations. 'Wrestling Rhinos: Conquering Conflict in the Wilds of Work' could very well become one of the most valuable books in your library—one you will want to return to often."

Michael Angier, President, Success Networks International
www.successnet.org

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"An instant classic! Dr. Shaler has delivered the only book that actually demonstrates how improving your people skills can lead to increased profits. Her sharp style and savvy examples clearly communicate how to turn this chronic problem into a powerful opportunity. Finally, a conflict management approach that's not as painful as the problem it attempts to solve! It may be a jungle out there, but with this fun-to-read guide you'll go from sticky situation to successful safari in no time. 'Wrestling Rhinos' is THE competitive edge for the 21st century. This year's must-read business title!"

Sterling Valentine, Marketing Expert
TurbochargeYourMarketing.com



"Many people work 40 hours a week or more, and conflicts can make it a very stressful experience. In 'Wrestling Rhinos: Conquering Conflict in the Wilds of Work', Dr. Rhobera Shaler truly shares how people skills sharpen your competitive edge and how you can interact assertively with colleagues, clients, and bosses. She also reveals ideas on how to deal with anger, communication, competition, conflict, negotiation, and common sense. Transforming your outlook at the office will not only lessen conflicts in the workplace, it will also lead to a happier homelife.

Written in Dr. Shaler's sincere, honest and appealing style, 'Wrestling Rhinos', is certainly an inspirational book and highly recommended for those that deal with these issues."

Roy Van Broekhuizen, CEO, OnlineTradingGuru.com



"This is the first book I've ever seen that speaks to the good ol' boys club and blows the whistle on them. It is revealing, honest and forthright and will help anyone—women, particularly—create and navigate a path through the glass ceiling or any other perceived obstacle on the way to the top. Dr. Rhobera Shaler offers practical insights and clear strategies to cut to the chase and cut through any dung heaps on the way. I strongly advise every business person to read this book."

Bill Lawson, Former CEO & Golf Pro
Realtor, Diamond Valley Realty Temecula, CA



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RHOBERTA SHALER, PHD



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For information, contact:
Rhobera Shaler, PhD
Optimize Life Now™, San Diego CA
Email: info@OptimizeInstitute.com
Website: www.OptimizeInstitute.com

WHY RHINOS?

Rhinoceros are often portrayed as aggressive and unintelligent but this is not true. They simply cannot see. That's the case with 'rhino people' as well. They simply do not see. They do not see another way to behave, to interact, to solve problems, to make the pain go away. So, they lash out in one way or another.

Rhinos at work . . . and at home . . . have many ways to make their point. (No pun intended.) They may be overbearing, aggressive or generally grumpy. Each behavior is aimed at increasing their sense of control. They want acknowledgment for their opinion, or their dominances. They may simply be unresponsive, ignoring your presence . . . until they feel threatened. Then they surprise you with a ferociousness that seems completely out of proportion to your proximity.



In the real rhinoceros world, it is clear. When neighboring rhinos meet, one must show signs of subordination or violence is likely. If one rhino does not show those signs, say, by turning back its ears, the stage is set for a contest that can quickly turn violent. You've met workplace rhinos who behave exactly the same way, haven't you? You may have been totally unaware that you had compromised their turf. Their hyper-vigilance for intruders is remarkable and their response, unpredictable. And, then, they charge when your back is turned!



Both males and females are aggressive and possessive. They will both fight for their land due to their extreme territoriality. Before their famed 'bull charge', they lower their heads, scream and paw the earth at a distance to demonstrate their courage... and, no doubt, to summon it as well. If the intruder does not retreat, the defender will charge, hopefully sending the alien to the other side of the savannah with its tail between its legs, licking its wounds and knowing its place.

When rhinos collide, they seem to test each other's bravery with force, loud snorts, and thunderous pawing of the ground designed to cause the other to retreat. Failure of one to back down produces the stand-off. Each lowers its head and readies its horns. They charge, attempting to pierce the sides of their antagonist and draw blood. Rhinos will lock horns and try to push each other backwards. You've likely experienced this phenomena. In this instance, the rhino with the greater strength and positioning will be victorious. Fortunately, even with their great strength and extreme ferociousness, they do not battle to the death. The loser simply retreats, usually with plans of revenge at a later time. Sound familiar?

Recently, I was working with a coaching client who told the story of a co-worker. My client was recently promoted to the executive suite where there were eight people already in positions of power. She met her 'rhino' on her first day upstairs.

When introduced, he stood a little too close, crushed her hand a little too long and forgot to tell his eyes that his lips were smiling. She knew immediately that they failed to share a definition of 'team'. His non-verbal horn-locking with the desire to push her backwards was clear. He wanted her to know who he thought was the king of the beasts in that jungle.



Wisely, she smiled, looked into his eyes, extracted her hand and said,

“I’m looking forward to working with you. Being asked to join this executive team is an exciting opportunity and I’m sure we’ll find many ways to work well together. Let’s sit down soon and learn more about each other.”

No threatening behavior from her. She could ‘see’. The ‘rhino’ had nothing to react against and he turned and went back to his grass. Had she challenged the ‘rhino’, the posturing might have continued. Had she questioned the rhino’s mixed message, she might have set herself up as his own personal target. She did nothing but stand firm and express openness. A great beginning!

Would you have stood your ground when you were standing on someone else’s dung heap?

Rhinos don’t see well. They can see only a very short distance in front of themselves. Therefore, they simply cannot see the big picture. Imagine their distress when someone wants to paint it for them and fill in their blanks. They must say ‘no’, because it does not exist for them. In fact, it represents something scary and beyond their control. What to do? Charge!!!! Get it out of the way. Reduce the risk. Stop the threat. Charge!!!!

In the wild, a rhinoceros defends its turf vigorously against rivals. With highly developed senses of smell and hearing, the office rhino operates on limited input. And, on assumption and deduction. Dangerous! You may know the phrase from Abraham Maslow,

“When all you have is a hammer, you tend to see everything as a nail.”

Rhino’s have this problem. They lack skills and insight, too. They hammer away at anything that looks like a threat.



The rhinoceros is a solitary animal. Well, is this a 'horse or cart' story? Did they become solitary because they chased away all folks, friendly or otherwise? Or, were they naturally solitary . . . preferring to stay that way by chasing away all who would come close? Who knows?

Rhinos have been around since the Miocene era millions of years ago. They have their stories. The truth is that work is not the place to uncover childhood issues, nor, is it to be expected that folks will make allowances for those unresolved issues, either. Office rhinos make their own 'beds'. If they happen to own the savannah you are working on, beware. There may be little you can do. It's their turf. If, however, they are simply behaving as though they own the turf, your skills can have a great impact.

Rhinos are never seen in large groups. They only become somewhat tolerant of others at the watering hole. There they are simply too thirsty to pay attention to others and there is a degree of respect for privacy. Of course, rhinos also become friendlier during mating season. We'll leave the topic of harassment for another time!

Now, about that watering hole. Every rhino stakes out a territory that includes a watering hole and a mud wallow. Interesting, isn't it, how they like to control the resources? It gives them a sense of power, even if it is over office supplies. They keep an eye on where folks gather and some like to dominate the landscape. Others prefer to watch from afar.

Most rhinos are gentle and timid when left alone. They are just going about their business until something startles them. In the wild, rhinos startle easily... at about thirty feet. That's quite a large comfort zone! Once someone steps within it, even though the intruder cannot be seen, it is heard and smelled. Alert! Alert! There is something to fear. Hyper-vigilance ensues until the decision is



made to relax or charge. And, rhinos charge with great ferocity without much provocation. In fact, often without a reason at all!

At work, you've likely had the same experience. You are working with someone with whom you seem to have an easy, collaborative relationship on a day-to-day basis. No problem! Then, something scares him. A new animal walks on to the savannah, challenges the turf... or simply walks by on the way to the watering hole. Uncertain as to the purpose of the intruder, all the warning bells go off and the rhino is at the ready. Defenses are mustered. Offenses prepared. Nothing will sneak up on me and challenge my territory. Charge!

The unsuspecting gazelle with only water on her mind is cut down on the way to the water cooler. The benign wildebeest snorting home to his mate becomes foot fodder. He's skewered, thrust into the air and trampled before he knows he's stepped over the line.

The size of a rhino's home range can differ according to its sex, its age or the type of habitat. The more immature ones usually occupy larger areas than the adults. The only time they actually gather in groups is temporarily to wallow. Can't you just see a group of young executives gathered at their local watering hole, wallowing in the triumphs and thrusts of the day? Rhino behavior? Could be.

Now, before we start thinking of rhinos as 'them', it is important to note that every one of us is a potential rhino. We may not behave like rhinos as a rule, BUT, we definitely have the ability to be startled and charge at inopportune moments. We may be head-down, tail-up in our work and oblivious to our surroundings when an enthusiastic co-worker breaks our concentration or interrupts our flow. Rhino rage may erupt. A rhino rant spills from our lips . . . and we do not even recognize ourselves for a moment or two. It happens. Each person is someone else's idea of a rhino at some



time! Remember this as it helps with perspective when you can see and someone else cannot: *You've had your moments, too.* Back off and regain your vision. Ask a co-worker to give you a Rhino Report—the straight goods on how you're behaving—and agree to do the same for her. This way, Rhino Rampages, Rants and Rages can be stopped before the acceleration to “Full Speed Charge” is engaged.

Rhinos do not kill things on purpose. They simply want their fear to go away and for the world to leave them alone. If you were new to the jungle, could not see and had to rely on your senses of smell and hearing, would you be a little paranoid? Of course, you would. Your job is to create vision and safety for rhinos if you need or want to share their savannahs and watering holes. They may not own that property but they have a great need to control it. When you think you own something, you strive to hang on to it. If you want to own something, you keep it close and guarded.

Helen Keller said,

“The most pathetic person in the world is someone who has sight, but has no vision.”

Rhinos may not be pathetic but, the fear they experience is real. It renders them ineffective, yet offensive, a time and energy wasting condition that retards growth, progress and team synergy. The fact that they have size on their side makes their positioning fierce. Remember, though, that a rhino is surprisingly light on its feet and able to wheel and start off in another direction as easily as a polo pony. Knowing this, you might be able to see your way clearly to understand their blindness and realize their need for safety. Could you make a little extra room for them? Could you offer to point them in the right direction and turn their formidable strength towards a positive goal?

It is within your power when it is within your skill set.



Should we have to accommodate these beasts? Should every day be a “Rhino Wrestling” day? It makes life difficult and the workplace challenging, for sure. What are the alternatives? If you do not have the skills, insights and strategies for wrestling rhinos, you are going to have two choices: be miserable, anxious and stressed, or, be constantly looking for work until you own your own savannah.

Rhinos come in all sizes at all levels in the organization. One might surprise you in the mail room, the cafeteria, the staff lounge, the executive suite or the board room. They are everywhere. You need to be fully equipped to wrestle!

This book has three purposes:

- ⊕ **To help you understand the rhino within,**
- ⊕ **To teach you to become an intrepid intruder when nudges are necessary and,**
- ⊕ **To give you the attitudes and insights, skills and strategies to confidently wrestle rhinos for productivity, profit and peak performance!**

Don't let a little skirmish ruin your day.

Become a Resourceful Rhino Wrestler!

