

# Viewing North Korean Aggression from the South

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After many desperate years in unemployment, and fruitless applications, you are finally offered a position for which you always felt deserving. It's not perfect, it's not what you had dreamed of – in fact it is only about half – but it is more than you had before. And you view it as a step towards something better, something more complete.

Your new job is a split position. So at the same time, another employee is hired, and you both move into a shared cubical in the office. You look across at your new co-worker, you think he is both underqualified and that his job title is superfluous – you think that you could, and should, handle both jobs alone. He looks back at you, and thinks the same thing.

Naturally there are some early growing pains between the two of you – and even some moments when you will admit you didn't behave too well. But through it all, your neighbour has a conviction that you just cannot match. He is so dedicated to making you uncomfortable and ultimately taking over your job, that he is willing to risk his own job in order to try and get both.

Beyond the animosity, and to your shock, he also starts to out-compete you. The quality of his work towers over you, and you just can't match his output. He talks out loud about how you will soon have no purpose with the company, that you will soon be fired, and that he will take over your job by default. Other people in the office begin to talk in the same way. You are genuinely worried.

So you re-assess. You accept that you need to change, that you need a new philosophy for your work. And you also make peace with the fact that there is no sense competing with the belligerence of your neighbour. He is just willing to be reckless in a way that you are not.

You settle into things, and soon you are hitting your stride. Your work starts to improve, and your co-workers begin to look at you with a new found respect. Frustrated that you are still around and now thriving, your neighbour's aggravation builds.

It creeps up as a slow burn, but soon it becomes apparent that your neighbour, for all his success, has been operating by highly unsustainable business practices. Soon the rug is pulled out from under him, and the quality of his work hits a wall. Now feeling exposed and vulnerable, your neighbour becomes outwardly aggressive, occasionally violent, and constantly seeking to sabotage your work (generally way off the mark, but occasionally successful).

You speak to board members, to the management; they write him reprimanding letters, they sympathise with you, and even make public announcements about his bad behaviour and your admirable restraint. But they always fall short of firing him. So, worried about your safety, you seek the support of powerful friends in the office.

But something more permanent is needed. Locked into daily fights with a man that has less to lose than yourself is not a long-term solution – it takes too much emotional energy, it distracts too much from your work, and as you both trade blows it plays into his hands; with people occasionally thinking you are just as much of the problem as he is.

So you draw a line. You resign yourself to accepting a level of daily aggression, you make a commitment not to respond. But so that your restraint here is not seen as a coalescing weakness, you make it very clear that any escalation beyond this will draw an equal and opposite response from yourself (though you don't always live up to this).

Sitting there, quietly working away, while your neighbour berates you each day, is quite the spectacle. New employees, and visitors to the office walk past shocked... they whisper to each other, "*why doesn't he do something?*" But you see their hypocrisy. They would never actually *want* to help you out if things went too far – they want peace and quiet just as much as you, and they offer no better solutions to your problem.

As the months and years creep by, you become increasingly desensitized to the noise. He still screams, and provokes, and seeks a reaction, but you have learned to drown him out. Sure he is unpleasant, and occasionally a threat, but what else is there to do other than ignore him?

This becomes such a normal part of your daily life – and having seen it for so many years – when people hear the threats your neighbour makes, and witness his erratic behaviour, it is now often *You* that acts as mediator, and downplays the problem. A strange contradiction forms: people looking in from a distance, are more interested, and more concerned, by your neighbour and his antics, than you are.