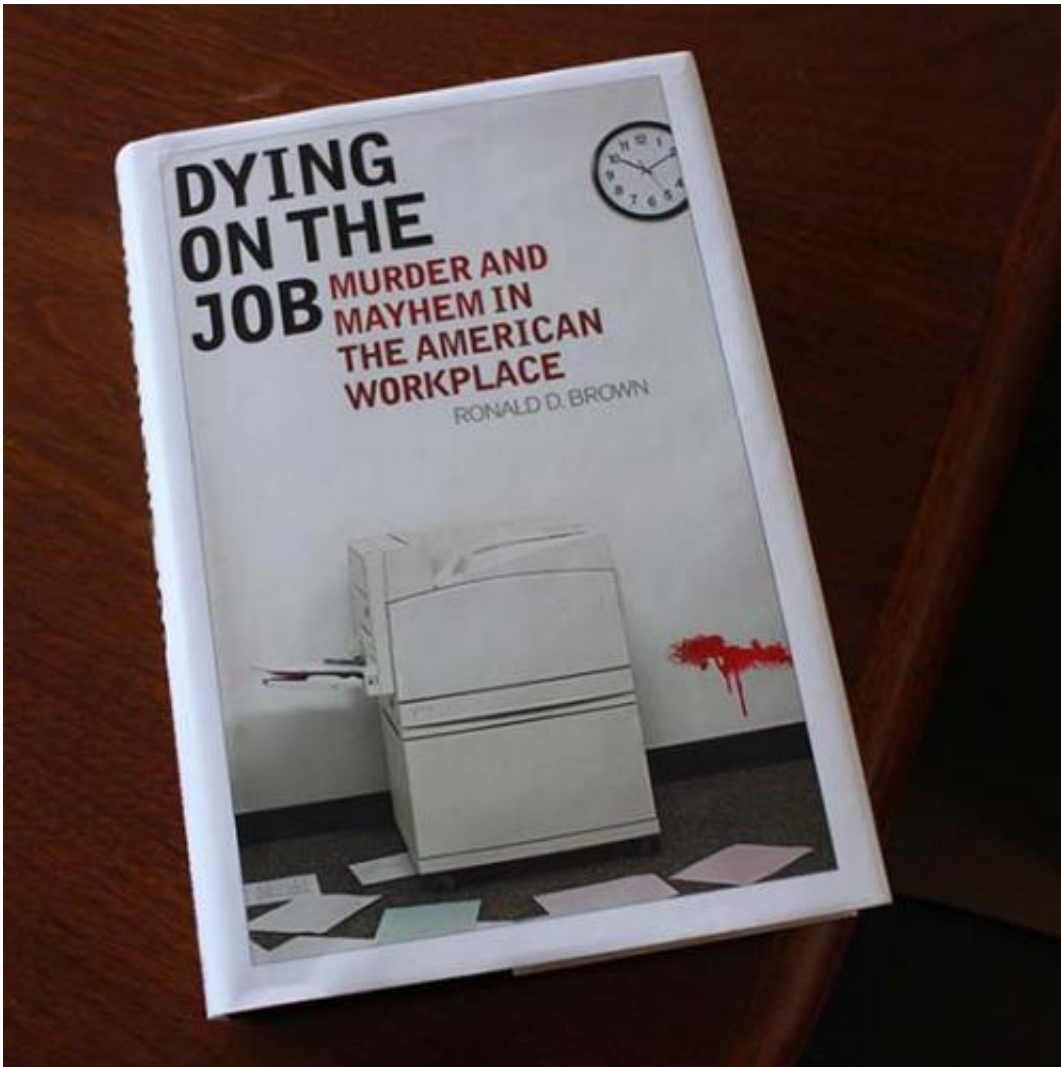


What drives individuals to kill their co-workers?

January 30 2015, by Jeff Tolvin



Ron Brown studied more than 350 workplace murders in preparing to write *Dying on the Job*, believed to be the first book to focus exclusively on workplace murder. Credit: Jeff Tolvin

Denied tenure and certain she would lose her job, Harvard-trained neurobiologist Amy Bishop shocked the nation when, in 2010, she killed three colleagues and wounded three others with a nine-millimeter semiautomatic handgun at a University of Alabama biology faculty meeting in Huntsville.

Ronald D. Brown, who has practiced both criminal and labor and employment law, was more intrigued than most with the circumstances and details surrounding those killings. He had been studying [workplace](#) murders – acutely aware of the paucity of literature on the subject – and Bishop motivated him into writing mode.

The result: *Dying on the Job* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013), said to be the first book to focus exclusively on workplace murder, based on Brown's study of more than 350 workplace murders. In it, he analyzes what drives individuals to take such horrific action, the warning signs and preventive security measures companies should take.

"Writing a book was on my bucket list," says the 1973 Rutgers graduate and Henry Rutgers Scholar. "The fact that Amy Bishop killed three colleagues execution style as if she were a drug-dealing street gangster got my juices flowing. It was one of those rare dramatic cases with issues of [criminal law](#) and employment law juxtaposed."

Each year, according to Brown, approximately 800 employees are killed in brutal homicides in the American workplace, nearly 75 percent of them committed by single men in their 40s. What made Bishop so compelling for Brown is that the Ivy League mother of four, who pleaded guilty to one count of capital murder and three counts of attempted murder in 2012 and is imprisoned for life without parole, did not fit the profile of most workplace murderers, only 14 percent of whom are women.

More than 56 percent of workplace killers are blue-collar workers. A majority of those murders were committed in either a factory or warehouse, only 8 percent at universities, colleges or schools.

Brown found that the employee most likely to snap was commonly labeled "loser" or "jerk" and considered among a company's most pathetic, ineffective and socially stunted employees. More than 25 percent of the murderers confessed that they acted in response to being teased and taunted on the job.

Often, dramatic changes in the lives of workplace murderers precede the killings—among them, job loss, loss of a spouse or long-time partner, news confirming an incurable disease or dependency on alcohol and prescription drugs. In many cases, warning signs, such as employees carrying guns in their cars or signing up for target practice lessons, are missed.

A workplace murder not only can destroy employee morale and productivity but also devastate a company, leaving it vulnerable to lawsuits and bankruptcy.

"After a workplace murder, even large companies can fold, slowly go under and never bounce back," Brown explains. "Most survive, but it's never the same."

Believing a better understanding of workplace homicide is needed, Brown cites companies' use of ineffective pre-employment screenings and lack of security measures to detect weapons carried into the workplace among factors contributing to workplace killings.

"A gun-free workplace, along with zero tolerance for violence, insulates an employer from possible legal liability if a workplace shooting does occur," writes Brown, who recommends a series of measures to greatly

diminish the possibility of workplace murders.

A father of two who attended Newark's Arts High School, Brown honed his researching and writing skills during more than 30 years practicing law, including as an assistant U.S. Attorney. U.S. Supreme Court Associate Justice Samuel Alito and Attorney General Eric Holder were among his classmates in his U.S. Attorneys training seminar.

In private practice, Brown, who graduated from Rutgers School of Law, earned verdicts in two high-profile cases that significantly enhanced his reputation and standing as a versatile attorney. He argued before the U.S. Supreme Court for his clients' right to build and operate a lucrative cable television franchise in Jersey City. In a closely watched case, he won a controversial dismissal of all charges against two Muslim men from Boston who were indicted on charges including an Essex County homicide.

When Brown left his practice, he joined the Department of the Army research facility at the Picatinny Arsenal in Morris County, where he developed an affinity for labor and employment law. Soon after, the Beacon, New York, resident completed an LLM in labor and employment law at Columbia University's School of Law in 2004. Currently, he is a labor law specialist for the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Washington, spending his down time crafting his next books.

While researching *Dying on the Job*, Brown became fascinated about women who commit workplace murders, providing the impetus for *Women and Murder on the Job*, to be published later this year.

"Nobody's ever compared men and women murderers in the workplace," says Brown, who is also finalizing a novel. "Men can take six weeks to decide to shoot the [boss](#). Women decide in an hour. And there's still a

great disparity in how the criminal justice system treats men and women and shameful disparities in who actually ends up on death row."

Provided by Rutgers University

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