I punched my boss in the face

The title of today’s article is “I Punched My Boss in the Face”…

Why do you think the author punched his boss?

What were the likely results?

Do you ever fantasize about punching your boss?

I punched my boss in the face

I punched my boss in the face. He told me he was going to lower my pay. I called him some colorful words and walked out. He followed me into the street and offered to fight me.

I found out later that he didn’t expect me to actually fight him; he was just talking sh*t. But I grabbed him by the hair with one hand and blasted him in the mouth with the other. He called a truce after his left eye swelled shut.

By then I’d had enough. I told him “Nice working with you!” and walked away. But he called me back. He had experienced a mysterious change of heart and he would let me stay on for the original pay rate.

I should have been suspicious of this guy to begin with when he spent half my interview trashing all his other employees for being lazy and incompetent. This guy was clearly a jerk, but the job paid well. Most of all, being unemployed sucks. So I took the job.

But things quickly went downhill. My co-workers all hated the boss. He was verbally abusive and constantly blamed us for problems caused by his mismanagement. Before long I was being told that I had lied about my experience and my pay would have to go down. The rest is history.

At first the feeling was euphoric. After years of taking sh*t from a*hole bosses, I had fought back. But even before my knuckles healed up I began to think otherwise.

The late 20th Century saw one defeat after another for organized labor in the United States. Ronald Reagan’s firing of striking air-traffic controllers in 1981 was only the most public example of a vigorous campaign of union-busting that continues to the present day. The result has been a devaluing of labor in many skilled occupations, the loss of benefits and full-time positions in many sectors, and a diminished standard of living for the American working class. And it’s tough to reverse this trend, as anti-union legislation makes it difficult to organize and the unions we already have are constantly under attack.

Most workers are now profoundly alone. They’re deprived of job security, isolated from their co-workers, and stretched so thin by juggling multiple jobs and taking care of loved ones that there’s no time for anything else, even if they decide that organizing is worth the risk of being fired. A friend of mine got a job at Wal-Mart and the first thing they told him was that unions were necessary 100 years ago, but nowadays the manager’s door is open to grievances and that’s how problems should be resolved.
Isn’t that exactly what I did?

So no matter how amazing it felt when I punched my boss in the face, I just embodied the profound impotence of the 21st Century worker. Instead of cooperating with my co-workers to form a union capable of fighting for our common interests, getting higher pay, slowing down work, and going on strike if we don’t get what we want, I stood as one.

The fact that I got what I wanted is irrelevant; This won’t work 99.99 percent of the time, never mind the million reasons why workers would be unable or unwilling to blast their boss like they were Mark Wahlberg on the Red Line.

I’m not a Christian; I don’t renounce violence for moral reasons; I don’t have an ethical objection to what I did. But punching your boss is no alternative to fighting back for real, and that can only be done together.

**Vocabulary activity 1: New words**

Write down any difficult or new words from this passage. Then, working with a partner, try to come up with a definition using context clues:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The words on the left can be found italicized in the text. Match them to their definitions on the right.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Blast ______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Talking shit ______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Trash ______</td>
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<tr>
<td>4) Take shit ______</td>
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<tr>
<td>5) Sucks ______</td>
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**Vocabulary activity 2: Slang**

The words on the left can be found italicized in the text. Match them to their definitions on the right.
Vocabulary activity 3: Idioms, expressions, & phrasal verbs

The words on the left can be found in bold in the text. Match them to their definitions on the right.

1) Walk out ______
2) Stay on ______
3) To go downhill ______
4) Fight back ______
5) Heal up ______
6) Stretched thin ______
7) Colorful words ______
8) Change of heart ______

a) expletives, curses
b) to recover from an injury
c) to continue in a job or role
d) to change one’s opinion
e) when a situation becomes worse
f) to leave in disgust
g) to resist injustice
h) having little time and many responsibilities

Textual analysis: Answer each question with at least 2-3 sentences.

1) How would you describe the author’s personality?

2) What type of magazine do you think this article appeared in? Why do you think that?

3) What is the author’s opinion of individual resistance in the workplace?

4) Do you agree with the author that the use of violence can, at times, be morally justified?

5) How do you think the author feels about the “American dream”?

6) What is the author’s understanding of the history of organized labor in the US during the last half century? Is it a similar situation in your home country?

7) Do you agree with the author’s conclusions about how workers can fight back? Why or why not?

8) Do you think “I Punched my Boss in the Face” is an effective title for this article? If not, suggest an alternative.
## ANSWER KEY

### Activity 2: Slang

The words on the left can be found _italicized_ in the text. Match them to their definitions on the right.

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<td>a) to be bad/shitty/annoying</td>
<td></td>
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<td>2) Talking shit <em><strong>e</strong></em></td>
<td>b) To punch</td>
<td></td>
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<td>3) Trash <em><strong>d</strong></em></td>
<td>c) to withstand (put up with) a negative situation</td>
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<td>4) Take shit <em><strong>c</strong></em></td>
<td>d) to speak badly about another person</td>
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<tr>
<td>5) Sucks <em><strong>a</strong></em></td>
<td>e) Speaking aggressively, negatively, or untruthfully</td>
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### Activity 3: Idioms, expressions, & phrasal verbs

The words on the left can be found in **bold** in the text. Match them to their definitions on the right.

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## NOTES

Lesson should take up to two hours based on levels of student discussion.

You may also want to consider having students switch answers after the writing activity so they can give each other feedback.

This article originally appeared in Vice magazine: