

Establishing a Bully Proof Work Environment

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Abstract

While bullying is most often associated with grade-school children, workplace bullying is not new despite the scarce amount of publicity received on the subject. Bullying creates a workplace climate that is detrimental to employees and employers. Employees suffer a tremendous amount of emotional trauma and the employer loses valuable workers as an end result of the process. People who are bullied in the workplace often transfer to another job or may even feel forced to simply end up quitting. The employers lose out by continuous loss of manpower and productivity. Ultimately, the organization may be forced to spend additional monies on retraining and hiring new personnel; therefore, it would be very cost effective to produce a bully-free workplace environment. Employing institutions and organizations should attempt to make every effort to establish zero tolerance policies for bullying in the work place. This paper purposes to define workplace bullying and to examine how employees are negatively impacted. It will also offer solutions and applicable measures on how to create work spaces free of bullying behavior.

Keywords: *Workplace Bully; Bully Free Work Environment and Zero Tolerance*

Introduction

Bullying is not just some dirty little well-kept secret on the playgrounds of schools around America. Bullying also occurs in work environments where it can wreak havoc in the lives of victims and the organizations where they are employed. Workplace bullying presents itself in the form of harassment, threatening or negative behaviors demonstrated by employees toward their peer employees or towards subordinates of the organization. Additionally, it can be in the form of abusive power over another employee by the employer. There are a variety of ways in which bullying can take place. This may include: verbal bullying, nonverbal bullying, psychological bullying and physical bullying. Often, a great majority of people suffer in silence from work place bullying. It's not something most people feel comfortable speaking about, particularly adults. Adults often feel ashamed or embarrassed thinking that it will work itself out in a matter of time; if only I keep my mouth shut and just remain under the radar. Due to the complexities of workplace bullying and people not willing to bring it to the light, there is very little being done about workplace bullying and many people are suffering in silence. It is extremely important to create an atmosphere free of judgement where people can engage in healthy dialogue about the growing epidemic of workplace bullying. This would allow for organizations to establish policies and laws that support and enforce a culture where there is zero tolerance of bullying in the workplace.

The Workplace Bully Institute conducted a survey in 2010 reporting that one out of every three American workers has been bullied, equaling 35% of the work force totaling 53.5 million people. The other side of this equation is the devastating consequences it has on the

employees, as well as, the employer. It is a lose-lose versus a win-win situation no matter what side of the equation you are on. The employees are at risk of psychological trauma from the bullying and the employer loses out on good workers, loss of time, and money spent to replace workers.

Over the past several years, workplace bullying has started to receive a small amount of research attention among academicians. Nevertheless, it is not a new phenomenon, it is something that has been around for years. Workplace bullying is extremely harmful to the employees and each year it costs organizations billions of dollars [1,2]. Unfortunately, organizational leaders have failed to take under consideration the detriment to organizations or they simply do not care about the impact workplace bullying has on the productivity of the overall company [3]. As a result, bullies continue to reign terror throughout organizations. Targets, on the other hand, worry about being bullied, lose organizational trust, and therefore leave the organization in hopes of finding a more secure and conducive work environment.

Even though workplace bullying should be of serious concern for organizations, it often goes unreported. Targets are made to feel humiliated and ashamed about being bullied [4]. Many targets would rather suffer in silence or quit their jobs than speak out concerning their issue(s). Often times, the stress level is so unbearable and leads to heart attacks or other stress-related ailments [1,5]. Even in some extreme cases, bullying has resulted in either the bully or the target committing homicide or suicide [6-8]. Workers who witness firsthand the overwhelming feeling of stress experienced by the targets being bullied have also reported suffering. Lutegen- Sanvik [9] reports that bullying is not an isolated problem for the bullied but it is a systemic problem. The majority of the research which has been conducted on bullying in the workplace has been outside of the United States. Bullying is an epidemic in the United States even though it is grossly underreported and studied. The United States is a global market which interacts with other countries on a constant basis. So, there is much work needed in the area of understanding and addressing bullying in the workplace. In order for the United States to maintain its competitiveness, growing economy, and marketable employers, it is incumbent upon the United States to deal head on with alleviating and establishing bully- free work environments. Having a better understanding of workplace bullying would better equip organizational leaders to create a wholesome, healthy work environment conducive for both the employer and employees.

Definition of Workplace Bullying

There have been several definitions given for workplace bullying. Due to the ambiguity surrounding what actually constitutes workplace bullying, it has left many workers wondering what exactly is workplace bullying and am I really being bullied in the workplace? As a result, work place bullying has often gone unnoticed and unreported. However, this leads to an escalation of workplace bullying and it becomes the norm in the work environment. Having a clear understanding of what exactly workplace bullying is can place employees in a better position to put a name on what exactly is happening to them in their work environment. This would allow them to be better able to file complaint(s) and take what necessary actions that are warranted in order to allow organizations to create bully free work environments. A bully- free work environment is not only productive for the employers but also the employees as well. Workplace bullying has been described in many instances as a form of psychological violence. Glendinning [10] compared workplace bullying to cancer and stated that if it is not properly taken care of, then both the employee and employer will suffer greatly. Cancer has no known cure, but work place bullying, with the proper management, can be eradicated.

Currently, there is no real agreed upon definition for workplace bullying. However, there have been several recorded definitions by various authors, such as the following:

- Bullying is said to be a systematic campaign of interpersonal destructions which can jeopardize your health, career, and the job you so deeply admired.

- Bullying can be a non-physical, non-homicidal form of violence. It can also be violent and abusive resulting in emotional harm. Therefore, you may be the first person to assess you are being bullied.
- Keashly [11], referred to bullying as interpersonal behaviors which are both unwelcoming and unsolicited.
- Dr. Heinz Leymann [12], a Swedish pioneer, defined workplace bullying as “Psychological terror involving hostile and unethical communication directed in a systematic way by one or a few individuals mainly toward one individual” (p.165).
- Zarf and Gross [13] defined workplace bullying as repeated exposure to persistent, oppressive, offensive, abusive, intimidating, malicious, or insulting behavior by supervisor/manager or co-worker.
- Lewis and Oxford [14] described bullying as result of discrimination of power and is comprised of individuals who are not capable of defending themselves. The incident becomes intensified when the victim’s manager lacks the adequate managerial skill set or perhaps when the victims are deprived of their colleagues or manager support.
- Namie [7], Wornham [15]; Einarsen [6]. defines workplace bullying as “harassing, offending, socially excluding someone, or negatively affecting someone’s work (p.15). The behavior, interaction, or process must occur repeatedly over a period of at least six months and put the target in an inferior position [6,11].
- Pamela Lutgen-Sandvik- states workplace bullying is “persistent verbal and nonverbal aggression at work that includes personal attacks, social ostracism, and a multitude of other painful messages and hostile interactions”.
- Catherine Mattice and Karen Garman defines workplace bullying as “systematic aggressive communication, manipulation of work, and act aimed at humiliating or degrading one or more individual that create an unhealthy and unprofessional power imbalance between bully and target(s) resulting in psychological consequences for targets and co-workers and cost enormous monetary damage to an organization’s bottom line”.
- Bullying is psychological violence or abuse that is persistently and continuously repeated over time. If carried out with malice and the target perceives it to have a negative impact on his or her performance and wellbeing [7,11,15-17].
- Gary and Ruth Namie defined workplace bullying as “repeated, health-harming or verbal abuse, or conduct which is threatening, humiliating, intimidating, or sabotaging that interferes with work of some combination of the three”.

Work place bullying is repeated, health-harming mistreatment of one or more persons (the targets) by one or more perpetrators; abusive conduct that takes one or more of the following forms:

- Verbal abuse, or
- Threatening, intimidating, or humiliating behavior (including nonverbal), or
- Work interference – sabotage – which prevents work from getting done, or some combination of one or more
- This is the definition that was used in the 2014 Work Place Bully Institute U. S. Workplace Bully Survey.

Work Place Bullying

- Is driven by perpetrators’ need to control the targeted individual(s)
- Is initiated by the bully who choose their targets, timing, location, and methods
- Is a set of acts of commission (doing things to others) or omission (withholding resources from)

- Requires consequences for the targeted individual
- Escalates to involve others who side with the bully, either voluntarily, or through coercion
- Undermines legitimate business interests when bully's personal agendas take precedence over work itself
- Is similar to domestic violence at work where the abuser is on the payroll
- Bullying is the mistreatment, if severe enough to compromise a targeted worker's health, jeopardize her or his job and career and strain relationships with friends and family. It is a laser-focused, systematic campaign of interpersonal destruction. It has nothing to do with work itself. It is driven by the bully's personal agenda and actually prevents work from being accomplished. The bully easily and swiftly recruits others to gang up on the target, which increases the sense of isolation (Workplace Bully Institute definition used in several surveys).

Dr. Heinz Leymann [18] was reported as being the first researcher to explore the topic of "mobbing" (also known as workplace bullying). Mobbing is a hostile or ethical behavior directed toward people who are not in the position to defend themselves [18]. Bullying in the workplace was compared to mobbing by Leymann [18]. Mobbing is said to be when a group of animals attack a single or larger animal. Leymann's [18] research further stated that people who suffered from bullying in the workplace were at a higher risk of becoming depressed, suffer from anxiety, and illustrate symptoms very similar to PTSD. Leymann [18] also went on to state that this activity must take place over a duration of six months, having at least one interaction per week.

Lutgen-Sandvik's [9] describes the (EEA) Model Employment Abuse. He stated that workplace bullying is when a "repetitive, targeted and destructive form of communication directed by more powerful members at work at those less powerful" (p. 472). Leymann's [12] build of this model breaks down bully into four separate phases:

Phase 1: The precipitating incidents which puts the target on the bully's radar. The precipitating events may be a job-related change that increases internal and external pressures, such as downsizing or changing jobs. When the problem is not addressed, the bullying spirals into the second phase.

Phase 2: The bully attacks the target with repeated criticism, manipulations, isolation, or threats. This could be in the form of progressive discipline embedded in constructive feedback or complaints about the target's performance.

Phase 3: The target reports the abuse to upper management. During this phase, the target is often "revictimized" (p.477) and labeled as a troubled maker. Even though the target makes every attempt to rectify the situation, the bullying then become more often and volatile. It results in the target either quitting or getting fired.

Phase 4: The targets blame the organization for their failure to protect them [19].

Bullies, on the other hand, engage in persistently aggressive and/or unreasonable behaviors against a person. The person is usually singled out and this goes beyond the point of being rude or annoying. Several definitions of bullying often use words such as: systematic, hostile, threatening, abusive, humiliating, intimidating, and sabotage. In short, bullies are intentionally trying to harm the person, resulting in the person becoming impaired.

Bullying in the workplace varies depending on the occupation.

- **Academia:** The decentralization of the institutional policies regarding bullying often can be seen in the recruitment and upward mobility career processes. The reporting is highly discouraged.

- **Blue-Collar Jobs:** Blue collar jobs consist of mechanic shops, factory workers, machine shops, and oil rigs. The fear of intimidation and retribution results in a decrease in reports. This is also an industry heavily dominated by males where disclosure is frowned upon. A combination of manipulation and coercion to gain favor among higher ranking administrators is often used.
- **Information Technology:** Bullying in this culture often results in high levels of sickness, low morale, inadequate productivity, and a high staff turnover rate. Deadline-driven project work and stressed out managers take its toll on IT workers.
- **Medicine:** Bullying in the medical profession is very common amongst student or trainee doctors.
- **Nursing:** Reports of bullying have been very prevalent among the nursing profession, although the reasons are not very clear. It is thought to stem from relational aggression of bullying, such as gossiping and intimidations. Relational aggression has been studied amongst girls and adult women.
- **Teaching:** School teachers are targets for bullying. More often than we like to think, they have been reported as the originator of bullying within the school-work environment.
- **Legal Profession:** Bullying, in the legal profession, is believed to be more common than most other professions. It is believed to be because this occupation is adversarial and hierarchical in nature. Women trainees, ethnic minority lawyers and lesbian, gay and bisexual lawyers are reported as being the most impacted.
- **Military:** Bullying exist in the military in varying degrees, often in the form of hazing or abuse by higher ranking members of the military hierarchy.

Different Forms of Bullying

- **Serial bullying:** The source of this dysfunction can be traced to one individual, who picks on one employee after another and destroys them then moves on. Probably the most common type of bullying.
- **Secondary bullying:** The pressure of having to deal with a serial bully causes the general behaviors of others to decline and sink to the lowest level.
- **Pair bullying:** This take place among two people; one active and verbal and the other often watching and listening.
- **Gang bullying or group bullying:** is a serial bully with colleagues. Gangs can occur anywhere, but flourish in corporate bullying climates. It often called mobbing and usually involves scapegoating and victimization.

Impact of Work Place Bullying

The continuous increase in workplace bullying has resulted in countless research findings suggesting workplace bullying does in fact have a traumatic effect on those being bullied. Namie [7] reported in a self-described poll that targets reported 76 % severe anxiety, 71% disrupted sleep, 71% loss of concentration, 47% PTSD, 39% clinical depression and 32% panic attacks.

Kivimäki, *et al.* [20] examined 5,342 hospital employees, 601 participants were men, and 4,832 were women between the ages 18 - 63. They observed the exposure to workplace bullying, risk factors on cardiovascular disease, and depression among the employees. It was reported that there was a strong correlation between workplace bullying and stress and mental health problems. The bullied victims were reported to be at a greater risk of cardiovascular disease. The result also suggested this might have been a result of the subjects being a little overweight. Keashly and Neuman [21] contend that targets of workplace bullying suffer from chronic stress with targets reporting high levels of "anxiety, depression, burnout, frustration, and helplessness" (p.339). In addition, anger, frustration, fear, and resentment plagues workplace bullying [21]. Increased stress can lead to insomnia, clinical depression, eating disorders, heart disease, and stomach ailments [1,2,5,21]. Moreover, even employees who are not direct targets of bullying behaviors suffer negative side effects. Employees who witness their co-workers being abused may be afraid that they will be the next target of the bully. As a result, non-targeted co-workers also experience some degree of stress, lower levels of job satisfaction, and higher turnover rates than individuals working in bully free environments [22]. In some cases, there are witnesses who choose not to get involved, which leads to them feeling guilty. There are instances where the witnesses try to help the target by finding ways to retaliate against the bully [23].

In a study, 165 professional staffs who have experienced stress in the workplace were surveyed. The finding revealed that within a two-year period, 40 % of the staff reported being a victim of bullying and 68% stated that they had observed bullying in the workplace. Noticeably, 44 % of the victims of bullying had suffered from PTSD after the attack.

Regardless of its source, workplace bullying reveals serious negative side-effects on employees such as

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Digestive upsets
- High blood pressure
- Insomnia
- Trouble with relationships due to stress over work
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Shock
- Anger
- Feelings of frustration and/or helplessness
- Increase sense of vulnerability
- Physical Symptoms such as:
 1. Inability to sleep
 2. Loss of appetite
- Psychopathic Symptoms such as:
 1. Stomach pains
 2. Headaches
- Panic or anxiety, especially about going to work
- Family tension and stress
- Inability to concentrate
- Low morale and productivity
- Absenteeism and low productivity
- Increased turnover
- Increased costs for employee assistance programs (EAPs), recruitment, etc.
- Increased risk for accidents/incidents
- Decreased motivation
- Decreased morale
- Poor customer service

Bullying Can Affect Your Brain and Body

Bullying has a negative impact on your overall mental health due to prolonged exposure to overwhelming levels of stress [24].

Stress is a biological human response to stressors and stress is not something that is imagined; it is real. Some degree of stress in life is warranted because it moves the person to action. However, prolonged, uncontrolled stress can lead to negative consequences. Distress, not eustress, is the most harmful. Distress triggers the human body to automatically release glucocorticoid cortisol; this hormone fluid affects both the brain and body. Thus, a prolonged exposure of brain tissue to glucocorticoids leads to atrophy of the area responsible for memory, emotional regulation, and an ability to sustain positive social relationships.

Stress-related diseases and health complications formed from prolonged exposure to the stressors of bullying are

- Cardiovascular problems: Hypertension (60%) to Strokes, Heart Attacks
- Adverse Neurological Changes: Neurotransmitter Disruption, Hippocampus and Amygdala Atrophy
- Gastrointestinal: IBD, colitis
- Immunological Impairment: More frequent infections of greater severity
- Auto-immune disorders
- Fibromyalgia (21%), Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (33%)
- Diabetes (10%)
- Skin Disorder (17%)

Some physical indications of the above stress might include

- Nausea
- Tremors of the Lips, Hands, Etc.
- Feeling Uncoordinated
- Chills
- Profuse Sweating
- Diarrhea
- Rapid Breathing
- Elevated Blood Pressure
- Chest Pain
- Uncontrollable Crying
- Headaches

Each of these symptoms can start off very minute and may seem unrelated, but the presence of such indicators should be seen as a warning and are not to be taken lightly.

The source of the above statistics is from the Work Bully Institute 2012 Impact on Employee Health Survey

Bullying is often referred to as psychological harassment or violence. What makes it psychological is bullying's impact on the person's mental health and sense of well-being. This sort of bullying is so personalized and focused in nature it destabilizes and disassembles the target identity, ego strength, and makes it difficult to rebound from the negative assaults. The longer the exposure to the bullying, the more severe the psychological impact. Thus, the longer the exposure to stressors like bullying, the more severe the psychological impact. When stress goes unchecked, it compromises both the target's physical and mental health.

Psychological – Emotional Injuries

- 80% Debilitating Anxiety
- 52% Panic Attack
- 49% Clinical Depression: new to person or exacerbated condition previously controlled
- 30% Post-traumatic Stress (PTSD) from deliberate human-inflicted abuse

- Shame (desired result of humiliating tactics by the bully) – sense of deserving a bad fate
- Guilt (for having “allowed” the bully to control you)
- Overwhelming sense of Injustice (Equity – the unfairness of targeting you who works so hard: Procedural- inadequacy of the employer’s response to your complaint)

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is defined as war wound. It is possible for anyone to suffer from PTSD whose coping mechanisms have been overwhelmingly compromised. PTSD can occur as result of childhood abuse, domestic violence, and or bullying in the workplace. When a person’s workplace has become a war zone, he or she is most likely to suffer from PTSD. PTSD results from the environment becoming traumatized and there is very little predictability or control within the milieu. The person often feels intensely overwhelmed and feel like they have a very little, if any, sense of security.

Workers who are bullied often report suffering from depression. For those persons who were previously suffering from depression, if it is not adequately managed, then the bullying simply exacerbates the condition. Bullying can also be the cause of on the job injuries. The person no longer feels safe and is threatened by the bullying, resulting in unnecessary and unwarranted injuries.

Bullying, Economic Crises, and Suicide

In these times of job insecurity, many people suffer at the hands of bullies. The majority of people, if not all, cannot afford to lose their job. The loss of a job can also mean the loss of health insurance. Without health insurance, workers are not able to seek the mental health treatment necessary to address any health symptom triggered by the stress. Workplace bullying takes a toll not only on the person who is experiencing the bullying but also the individual’s family. This impact is expressed by the individual’s family members having to listen and support the person during these trying times. This often results in marriage and family problems spilling over into relationships with the children. Should the person lose their job, then this might send the family into a financial crisis. This is often followed by an increase in domestic violence, substance abuse, and a negative impact the overall family lifestyle. Like a domino effect, this stress can impact a successful job search and the ability to find employment in a reasonable amount of time. By definition, workplace bullying occurs at work. It has been known to destroy a person’s self-confidence and destabilize the economic livelihood of an individual. This can be debilitating economically sending a person into an economic downward spiral causing them to eventually lose their job. The lack of self-confidence combined with income loss can lead to tremendous personal and financial pain.

Bullies can block job transfers and make the victim exceptionally miserable that they quit, get fired from their job, or become impaired by their health. They cease to come to work, have to take extended leave of absences, and they are forced to quit or resign from their job.

Types of economic harm includes

- Lost opportunity to be left alone to do what they once loved– “loved job”
- 13 % forced to transfer from loved job, often punitive transfer
- 24% constructively discharged without reasonable cause
- 40% targets quit to reverse decline in health and sanity

Reported in both 2007 and 2010 Scientific United States Workplace Bullying Surveys [25]

Impact of Workplace Bullying on Family

Displacement is bound to occur where the person who is being bullied at work takes it out on those that are around. Prime example of this would be, a person being kicked at work “goes home and kicks the dog”. This is when a person displaces his or her anger on other peo-

ple or objects which are not the cause of their anger. Some examples include: a bullied worker yells at a driver on the way home from work, or perhaps the person stops to get a bite to eat, and he or she takes their frustration out on the waitress, cashier, or the cook. The target is usually filled with shame and embarrassment about being bullied at work. Often times, bullied workers being abused by the supervisor brings that sort of behavior home where it is improperly mishandled. As the old saying goes “violence at work begets violence at home”.

An emotionally abused worker at work often withdraws when he or she arrives home. It takes all their energy to survive their work environment so that when they get home they are emotionally drained. The stress at work depletes their appetite. Once they arrive home they have no desire share a meal with their family. The victim tends to find refuge in going to sleep. Unfortunately, sleep does not provide them the safe heaven they need. Rarely, are they able to enjoy a good night’s rest sleep. The person more than likely becomes a non-participant in family activities during the week and even more so on the weekend. The wounded worker tends to impact everyone else’s schedule around them. The rest of the family members all attempt to console and accommodate the person, resulting in the other family members building up resentment. The wounded worker who does not seek professional counseling becomes trapped in a vicious cycle and family problems starts to escalate. The anxiety of work spills over into their family life creating a sense of despondency. The spouse and other family members begin to express feelings of how the wounded worker is taking a toll on the family. The longer the family members are exposed to this sort of behavior the more likely the family is to become a place of toxic stew. So, seeking professional counseling is highly recommended. One should avoid at all costs making their partner or children emotional dumping grounds for discussing work- place bullying.

Impact of Workplace Bullying on Coworkers

Co-workers are expected to rescue the person who is being bullied. Oftentimes the co-workers are discouraged to assist, take breaks, go to lunch with, or be seen with the person who is being bullied. Victims are usually ostracized by the rest of their work family. People at work are notorious for sharing openly what they would do a situation if it was happening to them; so, they often blame the target for his or her condition. This in turn, further pushes the victim into isolation and many are left alone having to fend for themselves. Remarkably, many co-workers do empathize with the bullied worker, but out of their own fears and thinking I could be next, or not wanting the bullying to target them; therefore, they do not get involved. It is like the bystander theory where people clearly see a person in need, but passes by the person because they are thinking perhaps someone else might come along and help. Many co-workers simply do not get involved due to FEAR that they might be the next person on the chopping block. So, they stay clear of the bully and offer very little, if any, assistance to the person being bullied.

People who are bullied have been known to contemplate suicide. The victims experienced this as a form of violence and they do not see a way out of their situation. Therefore, the only thing they felt they could do was to take their life. Work Bully Institute reported in [26] that 29% of the bullied who were targeted considered suicide and 16% of them had a plan. Should you know of anyone contemplating or speaking about suicide, please have them to contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

Leymann and Guttafsson [27] conducted a study on 64 people who reported they had been bullied. They were referred by the psychology clinic. Of those reported, 92% were found to be suffering from PTSD [27]. In another qualitative survey, 10 women working for the government self-reported themselves as victims of bullying. The findings illustrated that their main source of stress was their workplace. Bullying hurt the victims by irreparable damage both physically and psychologically. Interestingly, bullying varies by based on the gender of the person. Women are much more likely to bully in the workplace than men are. The consequences of them being bullied are more obvious [28].

The negative effects of workplace bullying can be extremely costly for both the organization and the target. A study carried out by the National Institute of Occupational Health and Safety (NIOSH) discovered that stressful working conditions resulted in a higher level of

employee's absenteeism, turnover, lower motivation, and work morale [5,13,29,30]. Additionally, a study conducted by Christine Pearson of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill supported those same findings. Her research suggested that there were 10% cut backs on the number of hours they worked and 12% quit [23]. Even though the target reported that they had been bullied to avoid humiliation of their allegations, many suffered in silence and lived in fear of personal humiliation, social rejections, and economic loss. Claims that are reported by bullies are either discounted or labeled as personality conflicts by a manager who is ill-equipped to handle the problem.

Finally, when a bullying-target relationship exists in a team, the team is perceived to be of lower status than the team in which bullying does not occur [31]. This toxic work environment not only impacts individuals, but it also has a negative effect on group performance due to low levels of trust, fear, and poor communication [21]. These stress-related illnesses result in both lower productivity and higher absenteeism, and these two factors cost United States organizations billions of dollars a year. The American Institute of Stress reported that one million workers miss work every day due to a stress-related illness [32]. Absenteeism, turnover, accident, medical costs, workers' compensation awards, and reduced productivity contribute to an estimated annual \$300 billion in added costs and lost profit [32]. Additionally, targets are less committed to the organizations for which they work. As a result, individuals are not the only ones suffering; organizational profits are negatively impacted. In return, these factors hinder the United States' ability to compete in the global market [1,2].

Bullying Tactics

While bullying is a form of aggression, the actions can be both obvious and subtle. It is important to note that the following is not a checklist, nor does it mention all forms of bullying. This list is included to show some of the ways bullying may occur in a workplace. Also remember bullying is usually considered to be a pattern of behavior where one or more incidents are taking place.

Example include

- Spreading malicious rumors, gossip, or innuendo
- Excluding or isolating someone socially
- Intimidating a person
- Undermining or deliberately impeding a person's work
- Physically abusing or threatening abuse
- Removing areas of responsibilities without cause
- Constantly changing work guidelines
- Establishing impossible deadlines that will set up the individual to fail
- Withholding necessary information or purposefully giving the wrong information
- Making jokes that are 'obviously offensive' by spoken word or email
- Intruding on a person's privacy by pestering, spying, or stalking
- Assigning unreasonable duties or workload which are unfavorable to one person (in a way that creates unnecessary pressure)
- Underwork – creating a feeling of uselessness
- Yelling or using profanity
- Criticizing a person persistently or constantly
- Belittling a person's opinion
- Unwarranted (or undeserved) punishment
- Blocking applications for training, leave or promotion
- Tampering with a person's personal belongings or work equipment

If you are not sure an action or statement could be considered bullying, you can use the “reasonable person” test. Would most people consider the action unacceptable?

Research conducted by The Workplace Bullying Institute, have identified the following as the 25 most common workplace bullying tactics

1. 71% falsely accused someone of “errors” not actually made
2. 68% stared, glared, was nonverbally intimidating, and was clearly showing hostility
3. 64% unjustly discounted the person’s thought or feelings (“oh, that’s silly”) in meeting
4. 64% used the silent treatment to “ice out” and separate from others
5. 61% exhibited presumably uncontrollable mood swings in front of the group
6. 61% made-up rules on the fly that even she/he did not follow
7. 58% disregarded satisfactory or exemplary quality of completed work despite evidence discrediting
8. 57% harshly and constantly criticized having a different standard for the target
9. 56% started, or failed to stop, destructive rumors or gossip about the person
10. 55% encouraged people to turn against the person being tormented
11. 54% singled out and isolated one person from other co-workers, either socially or physically
12. 53% publicly displayed gross, undignified, but not illegal behavior
13. 53% yelled, screamed, threw tantrums in front of others to humiliate a person
14. 47% stole credit for work done by others (plagiarism)
15. 46% abused the evaluation process by lying about the person’s performance
16. 46% declared target “insubordinate” for failing to follow arbitrary commands
17. 45% used confidential information about a person to humiliate privately or publicly
18. 45% retaliated against the person after the complaint was failed
19. 44% made verbal put-downs/insults based on gender, race, accent, age or language, disability
20. 44% assigned undesirable work as punishment
21. 44% created unrealistic demands (workload, deadlines, and duties) for person singled out
22. 43% launched a baseless campaign to oust the person; effort not stopped by the employer.
23. 43% encouraged the person to quit or transfer rather than to face more mistreatment
24. 41% sabotaged the person’s contribution to team goal and reward
25. 40% Ensured failure of person’s project by not performing required tasks, such as sign-taking calls, working with collaborators

Ten tips for dealing with bullies at work

1. **Don’t get emotional.** Bullies like when people get emotional because this allows them to take control of the situation. Stay calm, cool, and rational in order to diffuse the situation.
2. **Don’t blame yourself.** Keep in mind that this is not about you; it’s about you being bullied. This is a mind game to get inside your head and make you feel your work performance is inadequate. Keep your confidence, don’t think there is no way out, or that you are incompetent.

3. **Do your best work.** Always do your best to avoid coming to work late, taking long lunch breaks, or turning work in late, etc. You do not want to justify what the bully is saying about you.
4. **Build a support network.** Avoid by all means necessary retreating to your office. Form a support system with your co-worker so the bully is not able to turn them against you also.
5. **Document everything:** Keep a journal of everything and e-mail what happened to you; who, what, when, where, and why. Keep this file on your personal computer; never leave this at work. This is in case your situation escalates and you have to file a report with the human resources office.
6. **Seek help.** Do not be afraid to seek professional help. It is okay to talk with a mentor, advocate, or friend. There might come a time when you will have to talk about your problem and get in touch with someone who specializes in this type of work. Be cautious when speaking with HR that you do not have the luxury to keep your conversation confidential. Also, it depends on how well the bully is liked with the organization.
7. **Get counseling.** By all means take care of yourself if the bullying is starting to cause you an immeasurable amount of stress which impacts physical and mental health. Do seek professional counseling.
8. **Stay healthy.** Maintain healthy work life harmony. To cope with the madness at work, be sure you are eating healthy, getting the proper rest, and have a good work program.
9. **Educate yourself.** Learn everything you can about bullying and what your organization policies and procedures are. The more you know the better able you are to deal with this situation.
10. **Don't expect to change the bully.** Remember you have no control of your bully's behavior. You are not in the business of trying to convert people. Change of behavior can be extremely long and difficult. It is the responsibility of organizations to create bully free environments. If all else fails, be prepared to leave your job or get ready for to fight your bully and or your employer.

Adopted from the blog Nov. 17, 2011 by Dr. Michelle Callahan.

Recommendations for bully proofing your work place

Effort is certainly warranted to eradicate bullying in the workplace and create bully free work place environments. It has been reported and clearly stated by several researchers the harmful traumatic impact bullying has on the employers. Additionally, the organization suffers at the hands of bullying. When workplace bullying is not given the proper attention, there will be continued increase in workers suffering from emotional and physical health issues. Organizations lose their ability to compete in a global economy due to absentee workers, low morale, and reduced productivity.

Namie's [7] developed a blue print for developing a zero-tolerance bullying in the workplace

- A zero-tolerance action plan for workplace bullying
- Putting workplace bullying in the same domain as health and safety of the organization. Creating a zero-tolerance enforcement process.
- Conducting a proper investigation and adjudication process when a workplace bullying incident takes place.
- Establishing progressive disciplinary action steps when a bullying incident takes place.
- Restorative disciplinary action steps when bullying take place.

- Having interventions in place to assist the (targets, bullies, and witnesses) such as professional counseling and employment behavior contracts.
- Provide delicate education and training on workplace bullying
- Structure education and training specifically addressing workplace bullying for entire staff and management.
- Deliver education and training that focuses specifically on policies and procedures around workplace bullying. For example, how to recognize the signs, symptoms, and procedures in filing a complaint.

Canadians have taken aggressive actions to handle workplace bullying with the passage of the Canada Labor Code [33], to protect their employees. Dr. Gary Namie along with Dr. David Yamanda have been very instrumental in establishing a Healthy Work Place Bill. Several states have initiated a grassroots campaign to eliminate workplace bullying. The next recommendation would be educating mental health professionals such as counselors, social workers, psychologists, and EAP professionals so they are better equipped to work with people who are subjected to workplace bullying.

Other Recommendations

- Implement an anti-bully policy
- Conduct yearly place climate survey
- Establish an effective and efficient reporting investigation system
- Take action to train all employers to ensure they are able to act in a responsible way when conducting themselves with other employers in a totally professional manner.
- Try to work out situations before they escalate
- Treat all complaints with seriousness, and deal with them immediately
- Train your supervisors and managers how to deal and address complaints in a timely manner
- Have a third party available if needed to resolve conflict
- Define what exactly is meant by work place bullying (or harassment, or violence)
- State clearly what the consequences or violations of workplace bullying are
- Outline the specific procedures for investigating a complaint
- Outline the process for confidentiality concerning a complaint

Overall, everybody working together to establish a bullying proof workplace would greatly impact the potential of having a heathier, livelier workplace environment.

Conflict of Interest

It does not constitute a conflict of interest for the authors.

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