

WORKPLACE BULLYING

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Understand workplace bullying

Bullying in the workplace can be defined as 'all those repeated unreasonable and inappropriate actions and practices that are directed to one or more workers, which are unwanted by the victim, which may be done deliberately or unconsciously, but do cause humiliation, offence and distress, and that may interfere with job performance, and/or cause an unpleasant working environment.' (Based on Stale Einarson and Paul McCarthy)

Types of Bullying Behaviours:

According to the late Tim Field there are over 75 different types of bullying behaviours. These range from social bantering to teasing, verbal abuse, blame, humiliation, personal and professional denigration, overt threats, harassment (eg racial, sexual) manipulation of job specifications, unrealistic workload, micro - management, aggressive e-mails or notes, professional and personal exclusion or isolation, sabotage of career and financial status, whistleblower attack, blackmail, overt aggression / violence, criminal assault and murder.

Causes:

Bullying is caused by many different reasons.



The tribal laws:

- Every group or tribe requires a leader to survive. Some leaders have charisma, charm, political networking skills or professional competence. They may be respectable and trustworthy but not be trained in leadership skills.
- Some leaders give the impression of being a good leader but boss people around instead of guiding them.
- Mean, aggressive, psychopathic or incompetent managers can be empowered by their organization, because it reflects badly on their employer to denigrate and dismiss them.
- Managers are expected to achieve goals. In some organizations, it doesn't matter if they bully as long as it gets done or they are expected to bully to achieve.
- Anyone who wants to belong to a group must follow the leader. If a leader expects everyone to be respectful and treat others with dignity, that becomes the name of the game.
- If a leader lacks assertive leadership skills, feels threatened, has poor social skills then they may bully to remain in control or enable others to bully. This sets the pattern for everyone else.

- Ultimately bullying is enabled by our social institutions, eg families, schools and workplaces. The fish rots from the head down!
- Although no one wants to be bullied they fear, reject and despise people who broadcast their vulnerabilities. Like the animal world, a tribe is threatened by its vulnerable members who remind them of their own fears and could even handicap their survival needs.
- Many psychological studies, eg Stanley Milgram, Philip Zimbardo and Robert Sapolsky have demonstrated that most people follow the general trend. Few people have the guts to stand up and say 'this is not fair, you cannot treat another human being like this'.
- Many organizations behave as though they don't care about their employees' wellbeing, safety or even productivity. They can't confront change without bullying and bully instead of dealing with conflict. Their respect for human capital and level of social and financial accountability is low. Their management skills are limited, job descriptions are inaccurate, nepotism, favouritism is high and staff training is restricted. Some use bullying to cover up incompetence, fraud, malpractice or criminal behaviours.

Damage to the organization

- About one in six people are bullied at work; in schools the figure is far higher.
- Any organization can lose millions due to lost productivity, reduced motivation, brain drain, time wasted defending and protecting oneself, workcover claims, bystander fear, frustration and apathy, negative public relations, expensive mistakes, covering up fraud and unethical behaviours.
- The economy as a whole also suffers. Excluding general community costs such as medical costs, unemployment benefits, family breakdown and sickness, the loss to organizations has been calculated at between \$AUD 17 and 36 billion for Australia, which has a relatively small population (Workplace Bullying Project Team, Griffith's University, (2001)!

Action - This is not rocket science.

- Validate targets' concerns
- Provide a safe workplace
- Treat bully with respect
- Use a collaborative approach not an adversarial one
- Employ laws of natural justice



Understanding the target

There are many reasons why you can be targeted. Here are some:

- Wrong place/wrong time.

- Previous target leaves.
- Different to others eg only female, different cultural background.
- Bully is a new manager.
- Conscientious, agreeable, a quiet achiever (threaten bully).
- Inflammate bully game by showing your distress eg 'walking away' or 'doing nothing'.
- Whistleblow: organizational difficulties, mismanagement, malpractice, fraud.
- Inappropriate social skills, which antagonise others who bully as payback.
- Padlocked to the job and can't leave.
- Paralysed due to earlier traumas.
- Socially unassertive or avoid conflict.
- Support a colleague who is being bullied - you're next.
- You become an active trade union official.

Injuries

Targets of workplace bullying can be affected in many different ways:

- Physical - health issues, weight gain, cancer, heart attacks, stress-induced illness, suicide attempts and some are successful.
- Intellectual- concentration affected, reduced motivation, memory difficulties, hard to learn new material
- Emotional- panic attacks, anger, depression, anxiety disorders, posttraumatic stress disorder,
- Financial-loss of income/career, loss of second job, loss of promotion, less superannuation, forced retirement,
- Social- social difficulties, social isolation,
- Family and sex life- separation, divorce, lowered sex drive,

Understand the bully

There are a variety of bullies. The aggressive bully who screams, threatens and blames is easily noticed, whereas the passive aggressive bully, who divides and conquers, is camouflaged and difficult to identify.

Two main types of bullies

Ken Rigby's research into school bullying reveals two types of bullies, the malicious and the non-malicious. The same appear at work.

A. The serial bully - psychopath, sociopath or anti-social personality disorder who uses bullying behaviours instinctively. (1% of the population are psychopaths / sociopaths (less women) and 3-5% have an anti-social personality disorder, refer to Tim Field, John Clarke and Robert Hare).

B. The remainder are ordinary people who bully under certain conditions, eg to achieve their goals, survive, impress their manager, avoid confrontation.

Research about bullies

There is limited research about the ordinary bully who does about 94% of bullying. Few bullies are accurately investigated from a historical (previous bullying or previous jobs) and systemic perspective, (who else is being bullied by them at work) checked against witness reports or videotaped. Few are referred for a psychiatric/psychological referral, (unlike their victims).

- Most employees who bully don't realise that their toxic behaviours are harmful and humiliating.
- They don't wish to hurt targets consciously
- Some experience real emotional distress when confronted.
- Most ordinary bullies don't realise that they achieve more by being respectful and fair than employing passive or aggressive power games.

Impact on bully

- May be extremely upset, hurt and defensive.
- May be wrongly blamed by a manipulative target.
- Hate being labelled a bully, ashamed to be exposed, and deny their behaviours
- Can lack prosocial skills and become more aggressive and disruptive.
- Dislike being blamed for doing something they have always done or did unconsciously because they were under pressure or following company role models.
- May blame others, manipulate and lie to cover up their lack of expertise or productivity.
- Some bullies make it to the top of the ladder, hurting people on their way up. But sometimes they are toppled. Then their bullying boomerangs back on them!
- Bullies' actions are becoming too expensive for some organizations to correct, they are less likely to be tolerated and protected.
- Families can reject a bully's aggression and payback eg an expensive divorce.
- Many can't release their anger in healthy, assertive ways, (possibly Type A's), and may be more prone to heart attacks.

Some facts On Workplace Bullying

- Education, welfare, nursing, police and government funded organizations have highest claims,
- 50+ % of NSW teacher's union (2004) BBC (2006), 97% Duncan and Riley(2006)
- 75 different bullying behaviours. (Tim Field)
- 1 in 30 employees is a serial bully.
- 75% of victims have symptoms of PTSD, 65% had symptoms five years later. (Einarsen, Mikkelson)
- Bullied employees waste 10% - 52% of work time: defending, networking, thinking, stressed and de-motivated. Canada Safety Council (2000)

- 25% of targets leave,
- 20% of witnesses leave, 35% provide no feedback.
- Some claims for workplace bullying have surpassed million pounds (UK)
- 5 members of the Workplace Bullying Support Group have cost over \$5 million dollars on workcover, privacy and other legal expenses,
- 39% of all managers experienced bullying in the past three years and 60% had no training on how to tackle bullying (2000, www.yourpeoplemanager.com)

Strategies for Organizations

'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you'

1. Establish and maintain codes of conduct- eg policies, prevention, procedures, programs,
2. Create a taskforce to constantly research and implement appropriate procedures to reduce bullying
3. Assess and regularly quantify the bullying
4. Maintain adequate records, eg performance, discipline, exit interviews,
5. Public relations and training in understanding workplace bullying to all levels,
6. Develop prevention strategies, eg leadership skills, social survival skills, office layout, focus groups, safe reporting facilities, empower mates,
7. Develop objective, complaint investigation processes, crisis management and dispute resolution procedures
8. Implement appropriate consequences where necessary, eg counselling, coaching, sanctions, retraining, demotion,
9. Rehabilitation and debriefing
10. Review and monitor regularly

Bullying survival skills - "Secrets of Relating" Bully Blocking 2007

- 1. Regulate your feelings to control your anger and fear**
Identify, quantify and release
- 2. Understand the reasons**
- 3. Rebuild your self esteem**
- 4. Use effective verbal/ nonverbal communication skills**

Body language

- eye talk
- face talk - neutral or involved
- body talk

Voice

Words

Gut words:

"I think", "I feel", "I would like"

Action talk:

- Ask questions
- Chitchat
- Show interest/follow through
- Show empathy / share feelings
- Disagree /confront/ negotiate
- Plan- let's do something together

5. Protect and empower yourself -construct a power pack

6. Build a support network

Conclusion

- Bullying is everywhere- school, home, on the road and at work.
- There will always be bullying.
- Nearly anyone can be a target or bully.
- Dealing with bullying is like dealing with weeds or cobwebs; it requires constant vigilance and action.
- It's up to each one of us, individually and in our tribes eg school, workplace to challenge it.
- Everyone needs to develop their social survival skills to block bullying behaviours wherever they are.

Further information:

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