

Corporate Advice



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How do I tell what's bullying and what's harassment? Is there really a difference? A manager asks me in frustration.

'Every time I ask a particular employee to do something, they accuse me of harassing them,' another moans. Does this sound like you or any of your managers? Does it remind you of some of your staff?

If you have answered yes to either of these questions, you may be dealing with workplace bullying or harassment in your own team or organisation.

Managing Performance

Staff competence needs to be assessed on a regular basis. Regular performance appraisals and reviews are part of doing business.

How else will your people know where they need to improve their performance if their level of competence and skills are not assessed regularly? At times, employees may hear feedback they don't like from their manager - about their lack of performance, areas for improvement or skill gaps.

This is NOT bullying. If the feedback is about how they perform and areas they need to address so they can be more competent in their job, this is not bullying.

It is performance management. It is legitimate and considered a necessary part of running a successful team or business.

Examples include:

- Deciding not to select or promote an employee for a promotion based on competence
 - Allocating work and setting reasonable goals and time-lines
 - Warning employees about unsatisfactory performance
 - Disciplining staff in a constructive, respectful manner (not humiliating or threatening)
- Naturally, feedback should be done sensitively and with dignity and respect for the person being assessed.

Levels of Bullying

Most bullying occurs top-down. In other words, people in higher positions bully others further down the line.

But there are other equally harmful types of workplace bullying and harassment:

- **Side by side bullying** - peers bully each other (people at the same organisational level)
- **Down up** - individuals or teams bully their leader or people in more senior positions

Workplace Bullying and Harassment is Serious Stuff!

Workplace bullying and harassment can have dire consequences for the individual and the workplace.

Comprehensive research over two decades indicates that ramifications of workplace bullying often

LEADERSHIP

Is it Bullying, Harassment or Performance Management?

Impact on Victim

The evidence is unrefuted. The impact of bullying and harassment has far reaching consequences that can affect the individual and their wider circle such as family, friends and colleagues.

- ✓ Death of the person being bullied (suicide)
- ✓ Effect on the person's health - mental, psychological and physical
- ✓ Depression and anxiety
- ✓ Lowered productivity
- ✓ Decreased staff morale
- ✓ Ongoing absenteeism

Impact on Organisation

Simply, workplace bullying is bad for business. Because it is mostly repetitive and ongoing, the impact on organisational outcomes can include:

- ✓ Reduced competence on the job
- ✓ Lowered productivity
- ✓ Lessened efficiencies
- ✓ Reduced morale and employee engagement
- ✓ Damaged reputation
- ✓ Lower profitability
- ✓ Loss of human capital as it walks out the door

result in significant detrimental effects to the individual (and often those around them) and to the reputation and overall profitability of an organisation.

Dealing with Bullying and Harassment in the Workplace

Workplace bullying and harassment is a leadership issue. A role of leaders in any team or organisation is to 'set the tone' of the workplace.

This refers to how it 'feels' to work there. Teams or Organisations that have the 'feel' or culture of achievement and support don't have bullying or harassing behaviours in their midst.

When there is ongoing bullying and harassment in a team or Organisation there are generally two issues happening:

1. The leaders are too busy, or unskilled, to know how to deal with workplace bullying
2. The leaders are part of the culture of bullying and harassment.

Strategies

Introduce, and be committed to, a zero tolerance to bullying and harassment in the workplace

Train all your people on this policy, including executive staff

Bullies must have consequences for their behaviour

Make everybody responsible for ensuring the workplace is a safe and happy place to work

The CEO and all the Executives need to be committed to creating bully-free organisations

Design and implement a process to deal with bullying allegations swiftly



TEST: IS THERE BULLYING IN YOUR WORKPLACE?

ACTION	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	ALWAYS
Is there regular and ongoing conflict in your team?			
Do you regularly see reduced performance in your team?			
Is there change in the behaviour of any of your staff over the last few months?			
Do team members complain to you about behaviours of other team members as being aggressive and rude?			
Do you have a close working relationship with your team where they are encouraged to tell you about work related issues? (if not, perhaps your behavior could be the problem!)			
Is your team unhappy?			
Do you have a high staff turnover rate?			
Is your working environment more supportive or competitive?			

The more you ticked the Often or Always box, the more it indicates that you have an issue with bullying or harassment in your team or organisation.

The point is: What are you going to do about it?

Positive Ways to Learn from Workplace Bullying

- No job, no matter how much you enjoy it, is worth being the target of abusive and demeaning behaviour
- Over time, bullying attacks your soul and significantly impacts your health
- Because you may have felt the horrific impact of bullying on you, learn not to do it to others
- If you rise to a leadership role, create and maintain a culture of support and achievement within your team or organisation
- Don't stand by and watch others bully a person. If you do, you are as badly behaved as the bully yourself. Always stand up for the other guy.

The Victim

Stand up for yourself. Research indicates that people who are assertive and don't tolerate bullying behaviour tend not to be bullied. Learn to say no!

Get the help you need - from HR, an independent person, the law or family

If your health is being affected, get out! It's not worth it to stay.

If your peer is the bully, stand up to them. Tell them you don't appreciate their behaviour and that if it continues, you will take it higher. If it does not stop, take it higher! Or get out.

If your organisation has a bully-

ing culture that rewards bullying behaviour and it is rife throughout and people are running scared, leave! Now!

Conclusion

Workplace Bullying and Harassment are problems of epic proportions and need to be urgently and systematically addressed.

It is to ensure that when people come to work, they do so knowing they will be safe, content and able to perform their roles without intimidation or threat.

If workplace bullying and harassment is ongoing within an organisation, it is a leadership issue.

Key Definitions

- **Workplace Harassment:** Can be a single instance of offensive behaviour which usually involves race, age, sex or other criteria that come under anti-discrimination legislation
- **Workplace bullying:** The repetitive, prolonged abuse of power that is unreasonable and is accompanied by escalating behaviours aggressively directed at one or more workers and causes humiliation, offence, intimidation and distress.
- **Discrimination:** The unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of race, age, or sex.

SOURCE: NEWS.COM.AU

Types of Bullying

Many types of behaviour comprise bullying.

- **Verbal** - constant put downs, insults, personal insults
- **Physical** - pushing, standing over, threatening, hitting
- **Psychological** - This means emotional demeaning and social isolation, for example
- **Racial** - discrimination based on colour, culture or race
- **Sexual** - Assault, abuse
- **Spiritual** - control over another person's religious affiliations
- **Financial** - given no access to money or extreme control over money
- **Cyber** - this occurs when a person is being bullied through communication and various media such as social media, emails, phones, chatrooms, discussion groups, instant messaging, video clips, cameras and so forth.
- **Homophobic** - bullying or prejudice against homosexual people

SOURCE: BZAF.ORG.AU (ADAPTED)

Highly transformational and involved leaders who value the importance of healthy and happy workplace relations will ensure their teams communicate well and regularly, and are supportive and encouraging of each other, no matter what.

■ Caryn Walsh is an International Business Consultant, Executive Coach, Keynote Speaker. On July 1, 2015 Pure Magic International Training Solutions changed its name to Pure Magic International Business Solutions to more accurately reflect what services it offers.