

## BULLYING

### **What is bullying?**

Bullying is persistent unwelcome behavior, mostly using unwarranted or invalid criticism, nit-picking, fault-finding, also exclusion, isolation, being singled out and treated differently, being shouted at, humiliated, excessive monitoring, having verbal and written warnings imposed, and much more. In the workplace, bullying usually focuses on distorted or fabricated allegations of underperformance.

### **Why do people bully?**

The purpose of bullying is to hide inadequacy. Bullying has nothing to do with managing etc; good managers manage, bad managers bully. Management is managing; bullying is not managing. Therefore, anyone who chooses to bully is admitting their inadequacy, and the extent to which a person bullies is a measure of their inadequacy. Bullies project their inadequacy on to others:

- a) to avoid facing up to their inadequacy and doing something about it;
- b) to avoid accepting responsibility for their behavior and the effect it has on others,
- c) to reduce their fear of being seen for what they are, namely a weak, inadequate and often incompetent individuals,
- d) to divert attention away from their inadequacy - in an insecure or badly-managed workplace, this is how inadequate, incompetent and aggressive employees keep their jobs.

Bullying is an inefficient way of working, resulting in disenchantment, demoralization, demotivation, disaffection, and alienation. Bullies run dysfunctional and inefficient organizations; staff turnover and sickness absence are high whilst morale, productivity and profitability are low. Prosperity is illusory and such organizations are a bad long-term investment.

Bullying is present behind all forms of harassment, discrimination, prejudice, abuse, persecution, conflict and violence. When the bullying has a focus (e.g. race or gender) it is expressed as racial prejudice or harassment, or sexual discrimination and harassment, and so on. When the bullying lacks a focus, it comes out as pure bullying; this is an opportunity to understand the behaviors which underlie almost all reprehensible behavior.

## **Bullying...**

is a form of abuse, and bullies - and unenlightened employers - often go to great lengths to keep their targets quiet, using threats of disciplinary action, dismissal, and gagging clauses. What bullies fear most is exposure of their inadequacy and being called publicly to account for their behavior and its consequences. This makes sense when you remember that the purpose of bullying is to hide inadequacy, and people who bully to hide their inadequacy are often incompetent.

A bully is a person who

- has never learnt to accept responsibility for their behavior
- wants to enjoy the benefits of living in the adult world, but who is unable and unwilling to accept the responsibilities that are a prerequisite for being part of it
- abdicates and denies responsibility for their behavior and its consequences (abdication and denial are common features of bullying)
- does not want to know of any other way of behaving

Bullying is obsessive and compulsive; the serial bully *has to have* someone to bully and appears to be unable to survive without a current target.

Despite the facade that such people put up, bullies have low self-confidence and low self-esteem, and thus feel insecure. Low self-esteem is a factor highlighted by all studies of bullying. Because such people are inadequate and unable to fulfill the duties and obligations of their position (but have no hesitation in accepting salary), they fear being revealed. This fear of exposure often borders on paranoia.

Bullies are seething with resentment, bitterness, hatred and anger, and often have wide-ranging prejudices as a vehicle for dumping their anger onto others. Bullies are driven by jealousy and envy. Rejection (which cannot be assuaged) is another powerful motivator of bullying.

## How to spot a bully in your workplace?

If you have a serial bully on the staff they will reveal themselves by their department showing excessive rates of

- staff turnover
- sickness absence
- stress breakdowns
- deaths in service
- ill-health retirements
- early retirements
- uses of disciplinary procedures
- grievances initiated
- suspensions
- dismissals
- uses of private security firms to snoop on employees
- litigation including employment tribunals or legal action against employees

## Types of bullying

**Corporate bullying** is where the employer abuses employees with impunity knowing that the law is weak and jobs are scarce, eg:

- coercing employees to work 60/70/80 weeks on a regular basis then making life hell for (or dismissing) anyone who objects
- dismissing anyone who looks like having a stress breakdown as it's cheaper than risk facing a personal injury claim for stress breakdown
- introduces "absence management" to deny employees annual or sick leave to which they are genuinely entitled
- regularly snoops and spies on employees, e.g. by listening in to telephone conversations, using the mystery shopper, contacting customers behind employees backs and asking leading questions, conducting covert video surveillance (perhaps by fellow employees), sending personnel officers or private investigators to an employee's home to interrogate the employees whilst on sick leave, threatening employees with interrogation the moment they return from sick leave, etc.

- deems any employee suffering from stress as weak and inadequate whilst aggressively ignoring and denying the *cause* of stress (bad management and bullying)
- "encourages" employees (with promises of promotion and/or threats of disciplinary action) to fabricate complaints about their colleagues
- employees are "encouraged" to give up full-time permanent positions in favor of short-term contracts; anyone who resists has their life made hell

**Institutional bullying** is similar to corporate bullying and arises when bullying becomes entrenched and accepted as part of the culture. People are moved, long-existing contracts are replaced with new short-term contracts on less favorable terms with the accompanying threat of "agree to this or else", workloads are increased, work schedules are changed, roles are changed, career progression paths are blocked or terminated, etc - and all of this is without consultation.

**Client bullying** is where employees are bullied by those they serve, e.g. teachers are bullied (and often assaulted) by pupils and their parents, nurses are bullied by patients and their relatives, social workers are bullied by their clients, and shop/bank/building society staff are bullied by customers. Often the client is claiming their perceived right (e.g. to better service) in an abusive, derogatory and sometimes physically violent manner. Client bullying can also be employees bullying their clients.

**Serial bullying** is where the source of all dysfunction can be traced to one individual, who picks on one employee after another and destroys them. This is the most common type of bullying; most of article is devoted to describing and defining the serial bully, who exhibits the behavioral characteristics of a socialized psychopath. Most people know at least one person in their life with the profile of the serial bully; most people do not recognize this person as a socialized psychopath, or sociopath. Estimates are that one person in thirty is either a physically-violent psychopath who commits criminal acts, or an antisocial whose behavior is antisocial, or a sociopath who commits mostly non-arrest able offences.

**Gang bullying** is a serial bully with colleagues. Gangs can occur anywhere, but flourish in corporate bullying climates. If the bully is an extrovert, they are likely to be leading from the front; they may also be a shouter and screamer, and thus easily identifiable (and recordable on tape and video-able). If the bully is an introvert, that person will be in the background initiating the mayhem but probably not taking an active part, and may thus be harder to identify. A common tactic of this type of bully is to tell everybody a different story - usually about what others are alleged to have said about that person - and encourage each person to think they are the only one with the correct story. Introvert bullies are the most dangerous bullies.

Half the people in the gang are happy for the opportunity to behave badly; they gain gratification from the feeling of power and control, and enjoy the patronage, protection and reward from the serial bully. The other half of the gang are coerced into joining in, usually through fear of being the next target if they don't. If anything backfires, one of these coerces will be the scapegoat and sacrificial lamb on whom enraged targets will be encouraged to vent their anger. The serial bully watches from a safe distance. Serial bullies gain a great deal of gratification from encouraging and watching others engage in conflict, especially those who might otherwise pool negative information about them.

Gang bullying or group bullying is often called mobbing and usually involves scapegoating and victimization.

**Cyber bullying** is the misuse of email systems or Internet forums etc for sending aggressive flame mails. Serial bullies have few communication skills (and often none), thus the impersonal nature of email makes it an ideal tool for causing conflict. It is sometimes called cyber stalking.

In environments where bullying is the norm, most people will eventually either become bullies or become targets. There are few bystanders, as most people will eventually be sucked in. It's about survival: you either adopt bullying tactics yourself and thus survive by not becoming a target, or you stand up against bullying and refuse to join in, in which case you are bullied, harassed, victimized and scapegoated until your health is so severely impaired that you have a stress breakdown (this is a psychiatric injury, *not* a mental illness, take ill-health retirement, leave, find yourself unexpectedly selected for redundancy, or are unfairly dismissed).

## **Hierarchical bullying, peer bullying, upward bullying**

The majority of cases of workplace bullying involve an individual being bullied by their manager, and these account for around 75% of cases. Around a quarter of cases involve bullying and harassment by peers (often with the collusion of a manager either by proactive involvement or by the manager refusing to take action). A small number of cases (around 1-2%) involve the bullying of a manager by a subordinate. Serial bullies like to tap into hierarchical power, but they also generate their own power by simply choosing to bully with impunity and justifying or denying their behavior with rationalization, manipulation, deception or lying.

### **What is bullying?**

People who are bullied find that they are:

- constantly criticized and subjected to destructive criticism, explanations and proof of achievement are ridiculed, overruled, dismissed or ignored
- forever subject to nit-picking and trivial fault-finding (the triviality is the giveaway)
- undermined, especially in front of others; false concerns are raised, or doubts are expressed over a person's performance or standard of work - however, the doubts lack substantive and quantifiable evidence, for they are only the bully's unreliable opinion and are for *control*, not performance enhancement
- overruled, ignored, sidelined, marginalized, ostracized
- isolated and excluded from what's happening (this makes people more vulnerable and easier to control and subjugate)
- singled out and treated differently (for example everyone else can have long lunch breaks but if they are one minute late it's a disciplinary offence)
- belittled, degraded, demeaned, ridiculed, patronized, subject to disparaging remarks
- regularly the target of offensive language, personal remarks, or inappropriate bad language
- threatened, shouted at and humiliated, especially in front of others
- taunted and teased where the intention is to embarrass and humiliate

- set unrealistic goals and deadlines which are unachievable or which are changed without notice or reason or whenever they get near achieving them
- denied information or knowledge necessary for undertaking work and achieving objectives
- starved of resources, sometimes whilst others often receive more than they need
- denied support by their manager and thus find themselves working in a management vacuum
- either overloaded with work (this keeps people busy and makes it harder to achieve targets) or have all their work taken away (which is sometimes replaced with inappropriate menial jobs, e.g. photocopying, filing, making coffee)
- have their responsibility increased but their authority removed
- have their work plagiarized, stolen and copied - the bully then presents their target's work (e.g. to senior management) as their own
- are given the silent treatment: the bully refuses to communicate and avoids eye contact (always an indicator of an abusive relationship); often instructions are received only via email, memos, or a succession of post-it notes
- subject to excessive monitoring, supervision, micro-management, recording, snooping etc
- the subject of written complaints by other members of staff (most of whom have been coerced into fabricating allegations - the complaints are trivial, often bizarre [*"He looked at me in a funny way"*] and often bear striking similarity to each other, suggesting a common origin)
- forced to work long hours, often without remuneration and under threat of dismissal
- find requests for leave have unacceptable and unnecessary conditions attached, sometimes overturning previous approval. especially if the person has taken action to address bullying in the meantime
- denied annual leave, sickness leave, or - especially - compassionate leave
- when on leave, are harassed by calls at home or on holiday, often at unsocial hours
- receive unpleasant or threatening calls or are harassed with intimidating memos, notes or emails with no verbal communication,

- immediately prior to weekends and holidays (4pm Friday or Christmas Eve - often these are hand-delivered)
- do not have a clear job description, or have one that is exceedingly long or vague; the bully often deliberately makes the person's role unclear
  - are invited to "informal" meetings which turn out to be disciplinary hearings
  - are denied representation at meetings, often under threat of further disciplinary action; sometimes the bully abuses their position of power to exclude any representative who is competent to deal with bullying
  - encouraged to feel guilty, and to believe they're always the one at fault
  - subjected to unwarranted and unjustified verbal or written warnings
  - facing unjustified disciplinary action on trivial or specious or false charges
  - facing dismissal on fabricated charges or flimsy excuses, often using a trivial incident from months or years previously
  - coerced into reluctant resignation, enforced redundancy, early or ill-health retirement
  - denial of the right to earn your livelihood including preventing you getting another job, usually with a bad or misleading reference

A favorite tactic of bullies which helps them evade detection is to undertake a "reorganization" at regular intervals. This has several advantages:

- anyone whose face doesn't fit can be organized out through downsizing (redundancy) or transfer
- ditto anyone who challenges the reorganization
- ditto, their job can be "re-graded" or "redefined" to the person's disadvantage
- each reorganization is a smokescreen for the bully's dysfunctional behavior - everyone is so busy coping with the reorganization (chaos) that the bully's behavior goes unnoticed
- the bully can always claim to be reorganizing in the name of "efficiency" and therefore be perceived by those above as a strong manager

However, there is never any cost-benefit justification to the reorganization - no figures before and no figures after to prove that it has brought benefits.

## **Why me?**

### **1) How do bullies select their targets?**

The bully selects their target using the following criteria:

- bullies are predatory and opportunistic - you just happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time; this is always the main reason - investigation will reveal a string of predecessors, and you will have a string of successors
- being good at your job, often excelling
- being popular with people (colleagues, customers, clients, pupils, parents, patients, etc)
- more than anything else, the bully fears exposure of his/her inadequacy and incompetence; your presence, popularity and competence unknowingly and unwittingly fuel that fear
- being the expert and the person to whom others come for advice, either personal or professional (ie you get more attention than the bully)
- having a well-defined set of values which you are unwilling to compromise
- having a strong sense of integrity (bullies despise integrity, for they have none, and seem compelled to destroy anyone who has integrity)
- having at least one vulnerability that can be exploited
- being too old or too expensive (usually both)
- refusing to join an established clique
- showing independence of thought or deed
- refusing to become a corporate clone and drone

Jealousy (of relationships and perceived exclusion there from) and envy (of talents, abilities, circumstances or possessions) are strong motivators of bullying.

## **2) Events that trigger bullying**

Bullying starts after one of these events:

- the previous target leaves
- there's a reorganization
- a new manager is appointed
- your performance unwittingly highlights, draws attention to, exposes or invites unfavorable comparison with the bully's lack of performance (the harder you work to address the bully's claims of underperformance, the more insecure and unstable the bully becomes)
- you may have unwittingly become the focus of attention whereas before the bully was the centre of attention (this often occurs with female bullies) - most bullies are emotionally immature and thus crave attention
- obvious displays of affection, respect or trust from co-workers
- refusing to obey an order which violates rules, regulations, procedures, or is illegal
- standing up for a colleague who is being bullied - this ensures you will be next; sometimes the bully drops their current target and turns their attention to you immediately
- blowing the whistle on incompetence, malpractice, fraud, illegality, breaches of procedure, breaches of health & safety regulations etc
- undertaking trade union duties
- suffering illness or injury, whether work related or not
- challenging the status quo, especially unwittingly
- gaining recognition for your achievements, e.g, winning an award or being publicly recognized
- gaining promotion

## **3) Personal qualities that bullies find irresistible**

Targets of bullying usually have these qualities:

- popularity (this stimulates jealousy in the less-than-popular bully)
- competence (this stimulates envy in the less-than-competent bully)
- intelligence and intellect

- honesty and integrity (which bullies despise)
- you're trustworthy, trusting, conscientious, loyal and dependable
- a well-developed integrity which you're unwilling to compromise
- you're always willing to go that extra mile and expect others to do the same
- successful, tenacious, determined, courageous, having fortitude
- a sense of humor, including displays of quick-wittedness
- imaginative, creative, innovative
- idealistic, optimistic, always working for improvement and betterment of self, family, the employer, and the world
- ability to master new skills
- ability to think long term and to see the bigger picture
- sensitivity (this is a constellation of values to be cherished including empathy, concern for others, respect, tolerance etc)
- slow to anger
- helpful, always willing to share knowledge and experience
- giving and selfless
- difficulty saying no
- diligent, industrious
- tolerant
- strong sense of honor
- irrepressible, wanting to tackle and correct injustice wherever you see it
- an inability to value oneself whilst attributing greater importance and validity to other people's opinions of oneself (through tests, exams, appraisals, manager's feedback, etc)
- low propensity to violence (you prefer to resolve conflict through dialogue rather than through violence or legal action)
- a strong forgiving streak (which the bully exploits and manipulates to dissuade you from taking grievance and legal action)
- a desire to always think well of others
- being incorruptible, having high moral standards which you are unwilling to compromise
- being unwilling to lower standards
- a strong well-defined set of values which you are unwilling to compromise or abandon
- high expectations of those in authority and a dislike of incompetent people in positions of power who abuse power

- a tendency to self-deprecation, indecisiveness, deference and approval seeking
- low assertiveness
- a need to feel valued
- quick to apologize when accused, even if not guilty (this is a useful technique for defusing an aggressive customer or potential road rage incident)
- perfectionism
- higher-than-average levels of dependency, naivety and guilt
- a strong sense of fair play and a desire to always be reasonable
- high coping skills under stress, especially when the injury to health becomes apparent
- a tendency to internalize anger rather than express it

**The typical sequence of events is:**

- the target is selected using the criteria above, then bullied for months, perhaps years
- eventually, the target asserts their right not to be bullied, perhaps by filing a complaint with personnel
- personnel interview the bully, who uses their Jekyll and Hyde nature, compulsive lying, and charm to tell the opposite story (charm has a motive - deception)
- it's one word against another with no witnesses and no evidence, so personnel take the word of the senior employee - serial bullies excel at deception and evasion of accountability
- the personnel department are hoodwinked by the bully into getting rid of the target - serial bullies are adept at encouraging conflict between people who might otherwise pool negative information about them
- once the target is gone, there's a period of between 2-14 days, then a new target is selected and the process starts again (bullying is an obsessive compulsive behavior and serial bullies seem unable to survive without a target on to whom they can project their inadequacy and incompetence whilst blaming them for the bully's own failings)
- even if the employer realizes that they might have sided with the wrong person in the past, they are unlikely to admit that because to do so may incur liability

- if legal action is taken, employers go to increasingly greater lengths to keep targets quiet, usually by offering a small out-of-court settlement with a comprehensive gagging clause
- employers are often more frightened of the bully than the target and will go to enormous lengths to avoid having to deal with bully (promotion for the bully is the most common outcome)

### What's the difference between bullying and harassment?

Definitions of harassment and bullying vary and there is much overlap. The essential differences between harassment and workplace bullying are as follows:

Harassment	Workplace bullying
Has a strong physical component, e.g. contact and touch in all its forms, intrusion into personal space and possessions, damage to possessions including a person's work, etc	Almost exclusively psychological (e.g. criticism), may become physical later, especially with male bullies, but almost never with female bullies
Tends to focus on the individual because of what they are (e.g. female, black, disabled, etc)	Anyone will do, especially if they are competent, popular and vulnerable
Harassment is usually linked to sex, race, prejudice, discrimination, etc	Although bullies are deeply prejudiced, sex, race and gender play little part; it's usually discrimination on the basis of competence
Harassment may consist of a single incident or a few incidents or many incidents	Bullying is rarely a single incident and tends to be an accumulation of many small incidents, each of which, when taken in isolation and out of context, seems trivial
The person who is being harassed knows almost straight away they are being harassed	The person being bullied may not realize they are being bullied for weeks or months - until there's a moment of enlightenment

Everyone can recognize harassment, especially if there's an assault, indecent assault or sexual assault	Few people recognize bullying
Harassment often reveals itself through use of recognized offensive vocabulary, e.g. ("bitch", "coon", etc)	Workplace bullying tends to fixate on trivial criticisms and false allegations of underperformance; offensive words rarely appear, although swear words may be used when there are no witnesses
There's often an element of possession, e.g. as in stalking	Phase 1 of bullying is control and subjugation; when this fails, phase 2 is elimination of the target
The harassment almost always has a strong clear focus (e.g. sex, race, disability)	The focus is on competence (envy) and popularity (jealousy)
Often the harassment is for peer approval, bravado, macho image etc	Tends to be secret behind closed doors with no witnesses
Harassment takes place both in and out of work	The bullying takes place mostly at work
The harasser often perceives their target as easy, albeit sometimes a challenge	The target is seen as a threat who must first be controlled and subjugated, and if that doesn't work, eliminated
Harassment is often domination for superiority	Bullying is for control of threat (of exposure of the bully's own inadequacy)
The harasser often lacks self-discipline	The bully is driven by envy (of abilities) and jealousy (of relationships)
The harasser often has specific inadequacies (e.g. sexual)	The bully is inadequate in all areas of interpersonal and behavioral skills

(extract from UK National Workplace Bullying Advice Line)