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Workplace Bullying

Summary

Bullying at work is surprisingly a common occurrence. In fact, recent survey data shows that 21 percent of employees have witnessed some form of workplace bullying and 20 percent have experienced it firsthand at one time or another. Workplace bullying can have devastating effects on both employees and organizations. Those bullied risk depression, difficulty sleeping, reduced self-esteem, increased sick days and more. And the organizations that tolerate it chance their reputation, increased turnover, workplace inefficiency ... even litigation.

This Blue Paper® will define workplace bullying—reviewing both what it is and what it isn't. It will offer a more in depth look at the problems it causes for both employees and employers by overviewing statistics on who bullies and why, and examining why bullying behavior is tolerated. And finally, it will offer suggestions employees can use to address workplace bullies and employers can take to foster a healthy workplace.

Workplace bullying: The high cost of bad behavior

Anthony is excited to start his dream job, one he's exceptionally qualified for. But things sour quickly. Another team member consistently withholds information he needs to do his job. While there appears to be a high level of camaraderie among the rest of the team, Anthony is isolated professionally and socially. With his performance clearly suffering, he begins to experience panic attacks every Monday morning. Eventually Anthony learns that he was hired over the friend of one of the difficult team members—someone who is well liked by the rest of group. Is Anthony on a team of bullies?

Kylie is 15 minutes late for work nearly every day. Her boss berates her with a string of profanities every time. She receives a negative performance review, but continues to come in late. A month after the review, Kylie is fired. Is Kylie's boss a bully?

Tuan returns from lunch to find his chair missing. He sees that a colleague is using it. He asks for it back, but the colleague tells him to go find another chair. Is Tuan's colleague a bully?

Allie earned good performance reviews for five years and is respected by her colleagues. When a new supervisor begins to make jokes about her religion,



she asks him to stop. The supervisor laughs it off, and the jokes continue. She begins to document the behavior and reports it to human resources. At her next performance review, her supervisor tells her that she's not a team player and she needs to develop a sense of humor. She doesn't receive a raise. Is Allie's supervisor a bully?

The first scenario is a typical example of workplace bullying—Anthony's team members are continually setting him up to fail and harming his health. The second may or may not constitute workplace bullying—the review and the firing are most likely justified, but the problem of coming in late could have been addressed without resorting to verbal abuse. The third scenario—a “borrowed” chair—probably isn't workplace bullying if the incident happened only once. The fourth scenario may seem like workplace bullying, but it actually meets the legal definition of harassment in the U.S. While all of these scenarios reflect bad workplace behavior, the fourth is the only one for which an employer could be legally liable.

This Blue Paper® will define workplace bullying—reviewing both what it is and what it isn't. We'll outline the problems it causes for both employees and employers, looking at statistics on who bullies and why, and examining why bullying behavior is tolerated. Finally, we'll suggest steps that employees can take to address workplace bullies and employers can take to foster a healthy workplace.

What is workplace bullying?

The word “bully” has been in the English lexicon for hundreds of years, but awareness of the existence of workplace bullying is rather recent. Psychologist Heinz Leymann pioneered the use of the term “mobbing” in relation to the workplace in the 1980s, beginning with his research on nurses who attempted or committed suicide because of workplace events. (Previously, “mobbing” in the behavioral sense had only been applied to animals and children.)¹ Mobbing by definition involves a group targeting an individual. The concept of workplace bullying is believed to have been developed by British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) broadcaster Andrea Adams as part of a radio program that led to the 1992 publication of her book “Bullying at Work: How to Confront and Overcome It.”²

While there isn't a single definition of workplace bullying, most experts emphasize that it involves behavior that is repeated and persistent, is intended

¹ “Workplace Bullying: Dare We Call It Terror?” Workplace Bullying Institute. Workplace Bullying Institute, 28 Oct. 2014. Web. 23 Mar. 2015. <<http://www.workplacebullying.org/2014/10/28/terror/>>.

² “About Us.” The Andrea Adams Consultancy. The Andrea Adams Consultancy, n.d. Web. 23 Mar. 2015. <<http://www.andreadamsconsultancy.com/about>>.



to humiliate a target or undermine the target's ability to work, creates a health or safety risk, and often involves an abuse of power. The perpetrator may be either an individual or a group. Victims are generally referred to as targets. The Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI) uses this definition:

Workplace bullying is repeated, health-harming mistreatment of one or more persons (the targets) by one or more perpetrators. It is abusive conduct that is:

- threatening, humiliating, or intimidating, or
- work interference—sabotage—which prevents work from getting done, or
- verbal abuse.³

The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS) offers these as examples of workplace bullying, emphasizing that this is not a checklist or comprehensive inventory of all forms of bullying:

- Spreading malicious rumors, gossip or innuendo that is not true.
- 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 either too much work—creating unreasonable pressure on one person—or not enough work—creating a feeling of uselessness.
- Yelling or using profanity.
- Criticizing a person persistently or constantly.
- Belittling a person's opinions.
- Issuing unwarranted or undeserved punishment.
- Blocking applications for training, leave or promotion.
- Tampering with a person's personal belongings or work equipment.⁴

To further identify workplace bullying, it helps to understand what it's not. Most experts on workplace bullying emphasize that it does not include inadvertent



³ "The WBI Definition of Workplace Bullying." Workplace Bullying Institute. Workplace Bullying Institute, n.d. Web. 16 Mar. 2015. <<http://www.workplacebullying.org/individuals/problem/definition/>>.

⁴ "OSH Answers Fact Sheets." Government of Canada, Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety. N.p., 28 May 2014. Web. 11 Mar. 2015. <<http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/bullying.html>>.

social faux pas or behavior that is merely petty or annoying. It also doesn't include isolated incidents, unless exceptionally severe. The Washington State Department of Labor and Industries distinguishes bullying from aggression this way: "Whereas aggression may involve a single act, bullying involves repeated attacks against the target, creating an ongoing pattern of behavior. 'Tough' or 'demanding' bosses are not necessarily bullies as long as they are respectful and fair and their primary motivation is to obtain the best performance by setting high yet reasonable expectations for working safely."⁵

Similarly, the CCOHS maintains that bullying does not include expressing differences of opinion; offering constructive feedback, guidance, or advice about work-related behavior; or reasonable action taken by an employer or supervisor relating to the management and direction of workers or the place of employment (for example, managing a worker's performance, taking reasonable disciplinary actions or assigning work).⁶

Bullying is not the same as harassment, at least in the United States, because the term "harassment" carries a very specific legal definition: Harassment is a form of employment discrimination that violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (ADEA), or the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). For conduct to meet the legal definition of harassment, it has to involve actions based on race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy), age (40 or older), disability or genetic information. According to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), harassment becomes unlawful when enduring the offensive conduct becomes a condition of continued employment, or the conduct is severe or pervasive enough to create a work environment that a reasonable person would consider intimidating, hostile or abusive.⁷

Bullying is also distinguished in U.S. law from retaliation, which happens when a person makes a complaint of illegal discrimination and is then the subject of an adverse employment action or subjected to harassment because he or she made the complaint.⁸

U.S. employers can be found liable for harassment and retaliation. But believe it or not, bullying is generally legal. As of March 14, 2015, 31 U.S. state and



⁵ Washington State Department Of Labor & Industries. SHARP Bullying Report Update (2011): n. pag. Recognize and Prevent Workplace Bullying. Washington State Department of Labor & Industries, Mar. 2013. Web. 16 Mar. 2015. <<http://www.lni.wa.gov/safety/research/Workplacebullying/Default.asp>>.

⁶ "OSH Answers Fact Sheets." Government of Canada, Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety. N.p., 28 May 2014. Web. 11 Mar. 2015. <<http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/bullying.html>>.

⁷ "Harassment." Harassment. U.S. Equal Opportunity Employment Commission, n.d. Web. 15 Mar. 2015. <<http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/harassment.cfm>>.

⁸ "Retaliation." Retaliation. U.S. Equal Opportunity Employment Commission, n.d. Web. 16 Mar. 2015. <<http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/retaliation.cfm>>.

territorial legislatures had introduced bills against workplace bullying, but none passed the legislation.⁹ Four Canadian provinces—Quebec, Saskatchewan, Ontario and Manitoba—have laws against workplace bullying behavior, and federal employees of Canada also have protections. Australia and a number of European Union (EU) member states have enacted anti-bullying laws as well.¹⁰

How big of a problem is workplace bullying?

Workplace surveys have shown that bullying is quite common—four times more common than either sexual harassment or racial discrimination on the job.¹¹ According to the 2014 Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI) U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey, conducted by Zogby Analytics:

- 7 percent of respondents were either currently experiencing bullying at work or had experienced it in the past year.
- 20 percent had experienced it in the past, although not in the last year.
- 21 percent had witnessed workplace bullying happening to others.
- 23 percent reported not personally experiencing or witnessing workplace bullying but being aware of its existence.
- 28 percent reported being unaware of workplace bullying.¹²



A 2014 study by CareerBuilderSM revealed a similar picture: 28 percent of workers in that study reported that they felt bullied at some point in their career, with 19 percent leaving their job because of it.¹³ “One of the most surprising takeaways from the study was that bullying impacts workers of all backgrounds regardless of race, education, income and level of authority within an organization,” said Rosemary Haefner, vice president of human resources at CareerBuilder. “Many of the workers who have experienced this don’t confront the bully or elect not to report the incidents, which can prolong a negative work experience that leads some to leave their jobs.”¹⁴

Bullying is costly to employees and employers. For employees, bullying may cause the target to experience physical problems (musculoskeletal, sleep, digestion) and mental problems (reduced self-esteem, self-blame, depression, post-traumatic

⁹ “I Want To Help!” 27 States, 2 Territories since 2003 Have Introduced the HWB. Workplace Bullying Institute, n.d. Web. 16 Mar. 2015. <<http://www.healthyworkplacebill.org/states.php>>.

¹⁰ “The International Movement.” Healthy Workplace Bill. Workplace Bullying Institute, n.d. Web. 16 Mar. 2015. <<http://www.healthyworkplacebill.org/international.php>>.

¹¹ “Being Bullied? Start Here.” Workplace Bullying Institute. Workplace Bullying Institute, n.d. Web. 16 Mar. 2015. <<http://www.workplacebullying.org/individuals/problem/being-bullied/>>.

¹² Namie, Gary. “2014 WBI Workplace Bullying Survey.” 2014 WBI U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey (2014): n. pag. Workplace Bullying Institute. Workplace Bullying Institute. Web. 16 Mar. 2015. <www.workplacebullying.org>.

¹³ “Office Bullying Plagues Workers Across Races, Job Levels and Educational Attainment, According to CareerBuilder’s New Study.” CareerBuilder. CareerBuilder®, 18 Sept. 2014. Web. 16 Mar. 2015. <http://www.careerbuilder.com/share/aboutus/pressreleasesdetail.aspx?sd=9%2F18%2F2014&siteid=cbpr&sc_cmp1=cb_pr842_2_&id=pr842&ed=12%2F31%2F2014>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

stress disorder). It can lead to professional crises (work withdrawal and sick days) as well as family tension and financial stress due to taking unpaid days off or ultimately losing or voluntarily leaving a job.¹⁵

For employers, workplace bullying costs time, money and reputation (see Figure 1). Here are some of the most common problems that workplace bullying causes businesses:

Turnover: The WBI survey showed that once a person is targeted by a bully, the target has a 6 in 10 chance of either leaving the job voluntarily, being forced to quit or being fired. (Perpetrators lose their job only 15 percent of the time, and another 11 percent are punished but keep their job.)¹⁶ Companies are then faced with the costs related to hiring and training a new employee—and in most cases, the bully is still on the scene to repeat the behavior!¹⁷

Absenteeism, presenteeism and other forms of workplace inefficiency: Bullying causes a target to expend time and effort coping with the problem rather than working productively. As delineated above, one form of bullying happens when the target is intentionally undermined or set up to fail. The Workplace Bullying Institute also reports that bullying behavior has an effect on bystanders—creating a climate of fear, guilt and disillusionment among coworkers.¹⁸

Reputation: A company that tolerates bullying can quickly gain a negative reputation within its industry. Websites such as glassdoor.com encourage workers to anonymously rate their current and former employers, listing pros and cons and offering advice to management—making it harder to recruit top talent when those reviews are negative. Retail and service businesses that allow bullying to happen in front of customers, such as a restaurant where wait staff are verbally abused in front of diners, will drive away clientele.

Litigation: Even though workplace bullying is generally legal under current U.S. law, individuals may still threaten to sue or initiate a legal case that could result in attorney fees and possible settlements, even if the victim would lose in court. Bullying may also expose employers to workers' compensation and disability claims.

15 Washington State Department Of Labor & Industries. SHARP Bullying Report Update (2011): n. pag. Recognize and Prevent Workplace Bullying. Washington State Department of Labor & Industries, Mar. 2013. Web. 16 Mar. 2015. <<http://www.lni.wa.gov/safety/research/Workplacebullying/Default.asp>>.

16 Namie, Gary. "2014 WBI Workplace Bullying Survey." 2014 WBI U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey (2014): n. pag. Workplace Bullying Institute. Workplace Bullying Institute. Web. 16 Mar. 2015. <www.workplacebullying.org>.

17 Namie, Gary. "2014 WBI Workplace Bullying Survey." 2014 WBI U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey (2014): n. pag. Workplace Bullying Institute. Workplace Bullying Institute. Web. 16 Mar. 2015. <www.workplacebullying.org>.

18 "Impact of Workplace Bullying on Coworkers." Workplace Bullying Institute. Workplace Bullying Institute, n.d. Web. 16 Mar. 2015. <<http://www.workplacebullying.org/individuals/impact/coworkers/>>.



Catherine Mattice, president of Civility Partners LLC, a workplace consulting, training and coaching firm, offers this example of the damage to a company when a workplace bully is tolerated: “Despite the crying, begging and pleading of employees to the company president that he address bullying behaviors in one particular individual—who was causing major turnover, bottleneaking of information and upsetting employees and even customers—the president would not lift a finger. The answer was always, ‘That’s just how he is,’ ‘Just let Nick be Nick,’ or ‘Why can’t you be the bigger person and just let it go?’ The company president never spoke to Nick, the manager who mistreated everyone else in the office. By failing to respond to a workplace bullying situation, the company president condoned bullying behavior and created a reputation for being tolerant of bullying. Many employees left the organization as a result of the challenging workplace relationships. Other employees chose a different route and became abusive themselves because they’d learned it was okay, and perhaps even expected, to behave like a jerk. Hey, if this guy did it and got away with it, why shouldn’t they?”¹⁹

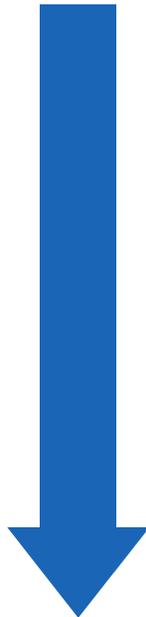
Figure 1: When a culture of bullying is tolerated in a workplace, the factors that contribute to productivity and profit decline, and negative workplace characteristics increase.²⁰

What thrives in a culture of workplace bullying?



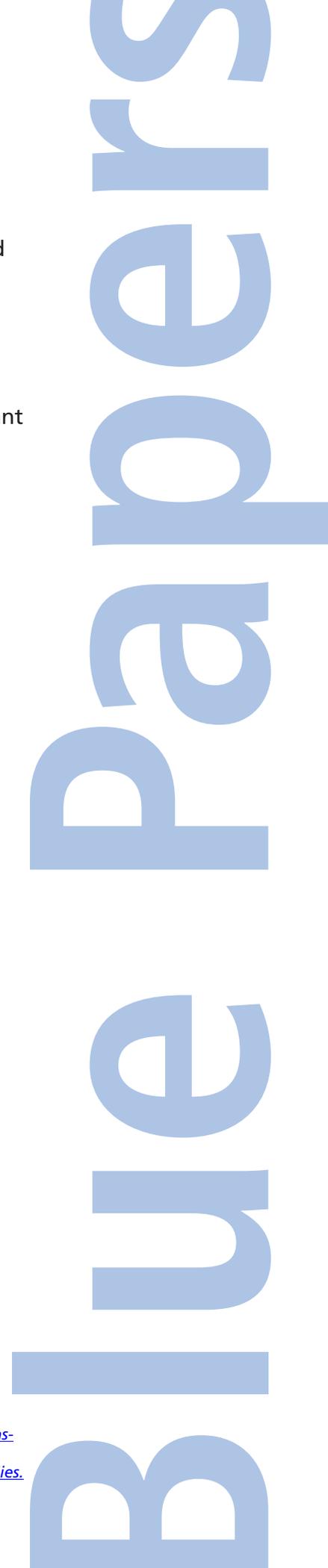
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Discouragement
- Physical Health
- Absenteeism
- Presenteeism
- Turnover
- Vengeful Activities
- Customer Complaints
- Wasted Time
- Office Politics
- Workers Comp Claims
- Health Insurance
- Litigation

What disappears in a culture of workplace bullying?



- Quality of Work
- Productivity
- Self-Esteem
- Job Satisfaction
- Company Loyalty
- Customer Satisfaction
- Number of Customers
- Company Reputation
- Internal Relationships
- Communication
- Decision Making Abilities
- Innovation & Learning
- Employee Engagement
- Ability to Meet Goals
- Bottom Line

¹⁹ Mattice, Catherine. “The Top Three Myths Of Workplace Bullying.” Web log post. No Workplace Bullies. Civility Partners, 24 Jan. 2014. Web. 16 Mar. 2015. <<http://www.noworkplacebullies.com/the-top-three-myths-of-workplace-bullying/>>.
²⁰ “Employers.” No Workplace Bullies. Civility Partners, n.d. Web. 16 Mar. 2015. <<http://www.noworkplacebullies.com/employers/>>.



Given the potential costs of workplace bullying, why would any company tolerate it? Consultant David Maxfield, founder of VitalSmarts™, has studied corporate culture since the 1980s. He theorizes that as workplaces have become less labor intensive, workplace abuses have evolved from physical violence to verbal threats and intimidation.²¹ So while abuses in the workplace have always existed, they changed with the times. Maxfield identifies several factors that promote workplace bullying:

- **Certain industries tend to foster workplace bullying more than others.** Maxfield points to the tech industry's penchant for sarcasm and irony, which in practice can function as cruel joking. Bullying flourishes in the health care industry due to "intimidating physicians," rigid hierarchies and promotions that come from educational attainment rather than skill, he says.²²
- **Bullies sometimes don't realize they are doing it.** Maxfield described one organization that was losing its senior scientists. The division manager admitted that he would lose his temper 2 percent of the time, but didn't see that as a problem given that he was even-keeled 98 percent of the time. But his coworkers explained that they were walking on eggshells 98 percent of the time to keep the manager's temper at bay!²³
- **Victims remain silent.** Victims often worry that if they raise the issue, they'll become even more of a target. This allows the bullying to continue and even escalate. "Silence is not golden," Maxfield says. "Silence is permission."²⁴

The presence of bullying may be a symptom of a larger problem within a company: an unhealthy corporate culture. "Organizations that focus on respect, civility, collaboration, innovation and positive internal relationships generally would not allow bullying people to behave that way," says Mattice of Civility Partners. "Organizations that have a highly competitive environment and leaders who do not step in when someone is being disrespectful probably have bullying. Organizations that focus only on what is being done wrong and how to fix it, and think about the bottom line more than their most valuable asset—employees—foster a workplace where bullying is just a normal way of life."²⁵

²¹ Shavin, Naomi. "What Workplace Bullying Looks Like In 2014 -- And How To Intervene." *Forbes*. *Forbes Magazine*, 25 June 2014. Web. 16 Mar. 2015. <<http://www.forbes.com/sites/naomishavin/2014/06/25/what-work-place-bullying-looks-like-in-2014-and-how-to-intervene/>>.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Mattice, Catherine. "Does Your Organization Foster a Culture of Workplace Bullying." *No Workplace Bullies*. Civility Partners LLC, n.d. Web. 16 Mar. 2015. <http://www.noworkplacebullies.com/assets/docs/Culture_Assessment.3144735.pdf>.



The Washington State Department of Labor and Industries lists several factors related to general workplace culture that can increase the likelihood of workplace bullying behavior:

- Significant organizational change (major internal restructuring, technological change and so on).
- Workplace relationships (for example, inadequate information flow between organizational levels and lack of employee participation in decisions).
- Work systems (lack of policies about behavior, high rate and intensity of work, staff shortages, interpersonal conflict, organizational constraints, role ambiguity and role conflict.)²⁶

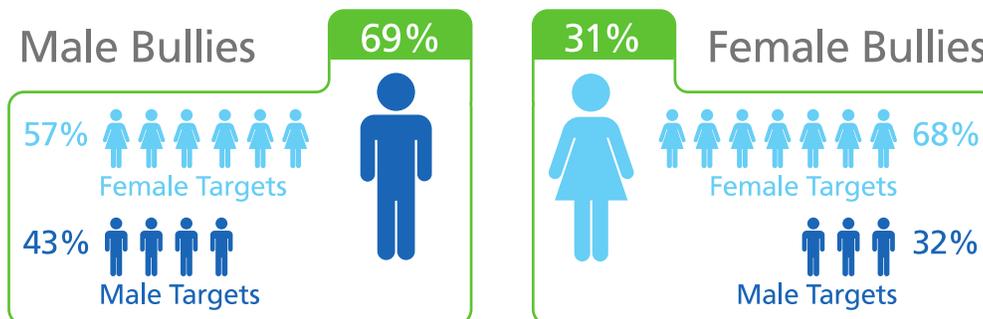
Simply put, businesses under stress and ones that are poorly managed are more likely to create the conditions that foster bullying.

Who is a bully ... and why do they act that way?

Anyone can be a workplace bully—a boss, a person who is higher up but not a direct supervisor, a coworker or group of coworkers, a contract employee, a labor representative—even a subordinate! And virtually anyone can be a target. But studies have found some patterns. Perpetrators are more likely to be male, perpetrators are more likely to be bosses, and female perpetrators tend to choose female targets.²⁷

The 2014 WBI Survey found that that 69 percent of bullies are men and 31 percent are women. Targets are women 60 percent of the time and men 40 percent of the time.²⁸ The report also broke down perpetrator-victim pairs along gender lines (see Figures 2 and 3).²⁹

Figure 2: The 2014 WBI U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey found that male and female bullies are both more likely to choose female targets.³⁰



²⁶ Washington State Department Of Labor & Industries. SHARP Bullying Report Update (2011): n. pag. Recognize and Prevent Workplace Bullying. Washington State Department of Labor & Industries, Mar. 2013. Web. 16 Mar. 2015. <<http://www.lni.wa.gov/safety/research/Workplacebullying/Default.asp>>.

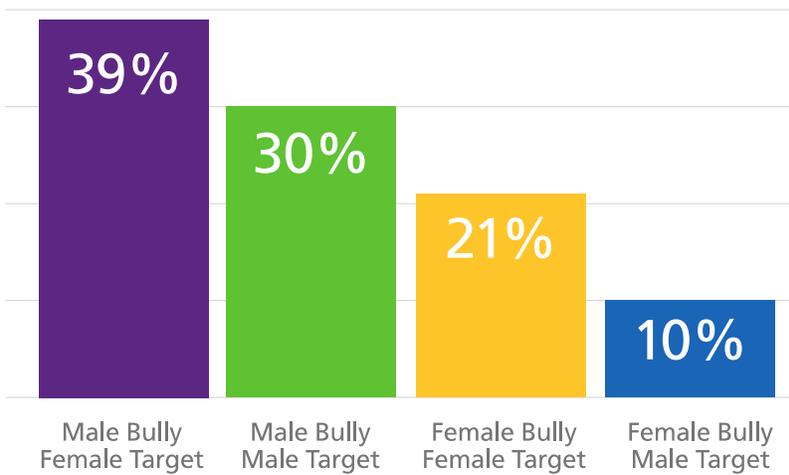
²⁷ Namie, Gary. "2014 WBI Workplace Bullying Survey." 2014 WBI U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey (2014): n. pag. Workplace Bullying Institute. Workplace Bullying Institute. Web. 16 Mar. 2015. <www.workplacebullying.org>.

²⁸ Namie, Gary. "2014 WBI Workplace Bullying Survey." 2014 WBI U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey (2014): n. pag. Workplace Bullying Institute. Workplace Bullying Institute. Web. 16 Mar. 2015. <www.workplacebullying.org>.

²⁹ 2014 WBI U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey (n.d.): n. pag. Workplace Bullying Institute. Web. 23 Mar. 2015. <<http://workplacebullying.org/multi/pdf/WBI-2014-US-Survey.pdf>>.

³⁰ Ibid.

Figure. 3: The 2014 WBI U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey found that the most common gender pair was a male bully and a female target.³¹



In other gender breakdowns, the WBI survey found that:

- Among people who reported that they were currently being bullied, 77 percent reported that the perpetrator was the same gender. So with few exceptions, this bullying would not meet a legal definition of sexual harassment.³²
- While targets lose their jobs more often than perpetrators, the situation in which a perpetrator is most likely to lose his or her job is when the perpetrator is female and the target is male.³³

While the gender breakdown may provide some context for workplace bullying, it doesn't answer "why?" Mattice of Civility Partners lists 11 specific reasons why a perpetrator might focus on a target:

- The bully is intolerant of the differences between him or herself and the target.
- The bully thinks the target makes too many mistakes or is an underperformer.
- The bully thinks he or she can get away with being aggressive because the target hasn't indicated otherwise.
- The target stands out with superior knowledge or as a top performer, so he or she is perceived as a threat to the bully.
- The target is likeable, but the bully doesn't like that.
- The target comes across as shy or unassertive, and the bully perceives that person as a target.
- The target is perceived to be a complainer.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

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- The target is a whistleblower.
- The target is dealing with past or present experiences, affecting the way the target communicates and the target's world-view.
- The target has rationalized the bully's behavior as acceptable and normal.
- The target is new to the job.³⁴

Solutions for employees

Confronting a workplace bully may seem risky, but remember the statistics—60 percent of targets end up losing their job one way or another. If you are already a target, then your job is already at risk, in addition to your physical and mental health and your relationships outside the workplace. Keep in mind that you are not the problem, and don't try to rationalize the bullying behavior. Here are steps you can take:

Build a network. Maxfield of VitalSmarts recommends taking a broad look at a company's culture. "It's really important that every employee understand who the opinion leaders around them are," he says. "Find out who the most respected people are, ask those people for a lay of the land, priorities, who do they respect, then meet them. Keep meeting those who lead others and who are opinion leaders."³⁵

Document. Just as you would build a legal case related to harassment or retaliation, keep a record of events, including dates, times, who was present, and what was said or done. If possible, collect a paper trail of supporting documents—emails, time sheets, financial documents—anything that contradicts a bully's story.

Address the bully directly. As Maxfield notes, some bullies are truly unaware of their behavior. Consider having a witness present during any interaction with the perpetrator.

Report. When presenting your case, focus on reasons that the bully is a problem for the employer. How are this person's actions costing the company time and money? How could productivity be increased if the behavior were to end? An overly emotional report that emphasizes your feelings over business needs may be discounted.



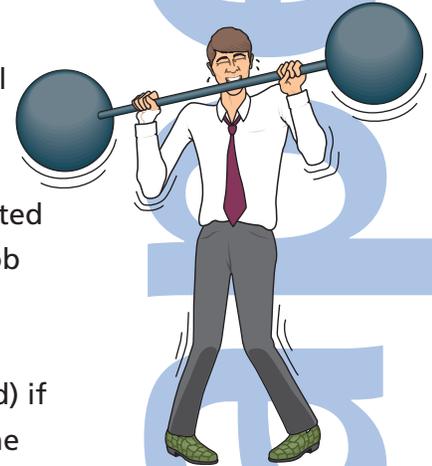
³⁴ Mattice, Catherine. "Targets." *No Workplace Bullies*. Civility Partners LLC, n.d. Web. 16 Mar. 2015. <<http://www.noworkplacebullies.com/targets/>>.

³⁵ Shavin, Naomi. "What Workplace Bullying Looks Like In 2014 -- And How To Intervene." *Forbes*. *Forbes Magazine*, 25 June 2014. Web. 16 Mar. 2015. <<http://www.forbes.com/sites/naomishavin/2014/06/25/what-work-place-bullying-looks-like-in-2014-and-how-to-intervene/>>.

Bystanders have a role, too. “Bullies often effectively coerce others to go along with their bad behavior,” writes Suzanne Lucas of CBS MoneyWatchSM. “Don’t acquiesce. Every time you see a coworker badmouthing someone, speak up. Every time you hear someone lying or attempting to spread malicious gossip, confront it. Defend the victims.”³⁶

Ultimately, some businesses won’t change. Bosses who are friends with the bully are unlikely to side with a target. Small, family-owned companies are likely to have entrenched dynamics. Some companies just have inept owners and managers. In those cases, targets must balance their long-term health and well being against their professional goals and the need for a paycheck.

The Workplace Bullying Institute maintains that if bullying behavior is discounted or supported by the employer, a target should value his or her health over a job and take control over an exit from the workplace: “Exposing the bully is more about your mental health than being an effective way to get the bully fired. Trauma is intensified if you leave the job (voluntarily or after being terminated) if you do not leave holding your head high and pointing accusatory fingers at the wrongdoers. In other words, since you are most likely to leave, once targeted, leave by telling everyone what happened to you and by whose hands. Targets who skulk away in silence, shrouded in personal shame, suffer the most. It can take a year or more to rebound to the point of being able to seek work. Those who leave proudly bounce back the fastest.”



Solutions for employers

As we’ve discussed, businesses pay a high cost when workplace bullying is allowed to thrive. It is the responsibility of an employer—and in a company’s best interest—to establish a healthy workplace culture before bullying begins and lay out a clear path for how bullying will be handled if the behavior is reported. The Workplace Bullying Institute maintains that an employer’s response to bullying is a litmus test of its ethicality: “If the bullied target is persecuted but no action is ever taken to stop the bully and the target is most likely disappeared, then witnessing coworkers see that their employer is not honest. Dishonest, unethical employers do not bother to provide safe workplaces. Coworkers start to fear for their own safety if such horrific treatment of the target was possible.”³⁷

³⁶ Lucas, Suzanne. “Bullying a Common Problem at Work.” CBSNews. CBS Interactive, 18 Sept. 2014. Web. 16 Mar. 2015. <<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/bullying-a-common-problem-at-work/>>.

³⁷ “Impact of Workplace Bullying on Coworkers.” Workplace Bullying Institute. Workplace Bullying Institute, n.d. Web. 16 Mar. 2015. <<http://www.workplacebullying.org/individuals/impact/coworkers/>>.

Here are steps you can take to help ensure that bullying behavior doesn't drive away employees and customers, leaving your company with a bad reputation and lower profits:

Take periodic climate surveys. Workplace climate surveys reveal all kinds of information about how a company functions. In addition to direct questions about whether employees have ever observed harassment or bullying behavior, a climate survey can indicate if a workplace culture has the potential to foster bullying. Do employees feel that company policies apply to everyone, or are certain individuals exempt? Do they feel that their time is spent productively? Is management approachable? Do they have the opportunity to do their best daily? Would they recommend that a friend apply for a job at this company?

Provide training. Because workplace bullying isn't generally illegal in the U.S., it lacks the very specific definitions of other bad workplace behaviors such as harassment and retaliation. Employees may be unaware of what actions constitute bullying and what they can do if they are a target or a witness.

Establish a written policy against bullying. An official policy will help all employees understand what behaviors constitute bullying and will encourage both targets and bystanders to speak up before a situation festers. A policy will also ensure that both perpetrators and targets know what to expect when a report is made. The Washington State Department of Labor & Industry has published this model policy for employers:

EXAMPLE WORKPLACE BULLYING POLICY

Adapted from The Commission of Occupational Safety and Health, Government of Western Australia

Company X considers workplace bullying unacceptable and will not tolerate it under any circumstances.

Workplace bullying is behavior that harms, intimidates, offends, degrades or humiliates an employee, possibly in front of other employees, clients or customers. Workplace bullying may cause the loss of trained and talented employees, reduce productivity and morale and create legal risks.

Company X believes all employees should be able to work in an environment free of bullying. Managers and supervisors must ensure employees are not bullied.

Company X has grievance and investigation procedures to deal with workplace bullying. Any reports of workplace bullying will be treated seriously and investigated promptly, confidentially and impartially.

Company X encourages all employees to report workplace bullying. Managers and supervisors must ensure employees who make complaints, or witnesses, are not victimized.

Disciplinary action will be taken against anyone who bullies a coworker. Discipline may involve a warning, transfer, counseling, demotion or dismissal, depending on the circumstances.

The contact person for bullying at this workplace is:

Name: _____

Phone number: _____

Preventing Bullying

Workplace bullies threaten entire organizations. While targets may take the brunt of the consequences, especially if their health suffers or they are fired, businesses lose, too, in the form of productivity and profit. Bully-free workplaces are attainable—and they are in everyone’s best interests.



Bully-Free Businesses

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