



Harvey Mackay: Workplace bullying is no bull

SEPTEMBER, 4 2011

HARVEY MACKAY

THE ASPEN TIMES

ASPEN, CO, COLORADO

The playground isn't the only place where you'll run into bullies. Internet bullying has led to suicides. Office bullying is on the rise, and it's a deal-killer no matter what business you're in.

If you think people outgrow bullying behavior just because they get older, think again. Bullies come in all ages, shapes and sizes - and on all rungs of the corporate ladder.

Remarkably, bullying in the workplace is among the leading reasons for employees to seek other employment. Even more remarkably, most don't list bullying as the reason they quit.

Instead, they suffer in silence and take their talents elsewhere.

And "suffer" they do. Scholars at The Project for Wellness and Work-Life at Arizona State University found "workplace bullying is linked to a host of physical, psychological, organizational, and social costs." Their research indicated that stress is the most predominant health effect associated with bullying in the workplace: "Stress has significant negative effects that are correlated to poor mental health and poor physical health, resulting in an increase in the use of 'sick days' or time off from work."

Can any company afford that?

In a CareerBuilder survey of over 5,600 full-time employees, 27 percent of workers said they have felt bullied in the workplace. Most of them didn't confront the offender nor report the abusive behavior. What form did the bullying take? Workers gave these examples:

- Comments were dismissed or not acknowledged: 43 percent.
- Falsely accused of a mistake: 40 percent.
- Needlessly harsh criticism: 38 percent.
- Forced into doing work that wasn't really part of the job: 38 percent.
- Held to different standards and policies from those of other workers: 37 percent.
- Made the focus of gossip: 27 percent.
- Boss yelled at me in front of co-workers: 24 percent.

- Belittling comments during meetings: 23 percent.
- Others taking credit for work: 21 percent.

Does any of this sound familiar?

Management is responsible for keeping the workplace free of sexual, racial or other forms of harassment and inappropriate behavior. If an issue is reported, reasonable action should

follow. Unfortunately, sometimes the manager is the bully. If that manager has a manager, the victim needs to go to that level. They might be doing the company a huge favor by exposing the reason why so many good people in that department are heading for the hills.

The victims of bullying have to take responsibility - it's not safe to assume anyone else is aware of the bullying if they don't report the problem. Bullies are notoriously sneaky. They pick and choose their targets carefully. But that doesn't mean you're helpless to do anything if you're a victim.

Take charge by following these guidelines:

- Recognize bullying when it occurs. Mild teasing or isolated comments, even if they're inappropriate, don't necessarily constitute harassment under the law. Stand up for your rights by all means, but remember that harassment is more than just behavior that's unwelcome. Technically, it's behavior that discriminates against gender, race, national origin, or some other legally protected characteristic.
- Study your policy. Most organizations have written policies that don't just prohibit harassment but spell out the steps to take if an employee feels uncomfortable. Check out the procedures for reporting unwelcome incidents to be sure you don't miss any options.
- Speak up to the harasser. Your first step should be to tell the person that his or her behavior, comments or requests aren't welcome. In some cases the matter may end there. But don't hesitate to inform management if you can't comfortably confront the other person on your own.
- Document the behavior. Most important of all: Take notes describing each incident to keep details fresh in your memory. This will add credibility to your claim. And keep a record of your conversations with management concerning the problem.
- Inform management. Follow the procedure for reporting harassment to the proper person. Your own manager is usually the person to start the process with, but if your manager is the one harassing you, you'll have to go up the ladder to reach the right authority. Document your efforts to report the behavior — dates, times, what was said, and so forth.

Mackay's Moral: If you're being bullied, take the bull by the horns before there's a stampede.

Harvey Mackay is a Minneapolis businessman and author. He also spends about six weeks a year in Aspen.

<http://www.aspentimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20110904/COLUMN/110909954&template=printart>