

# Supervisor/HR Newsletter

Helpful Resources from your Employee Assistance Program

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Page 1

## Let's All Play Nice!



Bullies may graduate from high school—but they don't always shake their manipulative, power-seeking ways in tandem. In fact, a 2014 study conducted by the Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI) revealed that nearly 30% of workers had experienced some form of bullying on the job.

Moreover, 72% of those surveyed felt that their workplace either rationalized or encouraged a culture of bullying, or denied its existence altogether.

When your workplace has any presence of bullies, it's impossible to give your team the safe environment that encourages them to have the confidence, motivation and ability to be truly productive and happy in their jobs.

Here are a few simple ways to prevent and manage workplace bullying, for the sake of your staff, and your own ability to be an influential manager.

- **Know what it looks like.** The easiest way to manage workplace bullying is to create an environment that discourages it from beginning altogether. But the actions that constitute bullying in a professional environment are broad, and at times, slightly subjective.

According to the WBI, bullying in a professional environment includes repeated mistreatment, whether by a supervisor, a co-worker or even a person on the lower levels of the organizational chart.

Though the more obvious bullying is physical or overtly verbal abuse, including yelling, using profanity, making racial remarks and name-calling, it includes behavior "designed" to make it hard for another person to succeed in the workplace. This may include outright sabotage of a person's efforts, but can also be subtle.

For example, refusal to give a co-worker the attention or support they need to complete a task could be considered bullying. Likewise, workplace "cliques" that make a worker feel excluded or intimidated could also qualify as bullying.



## Let's All Play Nice! continued...

- **Look out for the targets.** Though anyone can be bullied, there are some types of co-workers who tend to be targeted more frequently than others—and it may not be the ones you expect. Experts at the WBI explain that workers who are particularly skilled in their jobs, favorites of management, well-liked in the company, ethical, honest and not particularly aggressive—even if confronted—are common targets.
- **Be a persistent observer of interactions.** When the WBI surveyed more than 600 respondents who had been bullied, their top three reasons for why it occurred all included the fact that bullies aren't punished—by management or the law. But bullies are only as powerful as the sense of fear, coercion and intimidation they cultivate. The more present an observer you are throughout the workday to such behavior in the making, the better you can gauge the tone of your employee's relationships with one another.
- **Make a point to consistently observe as a proverbial "fly on the wall."** Check in the employee break room periodically and take stock of who seems to have a positive relationship. Note who doesn't seem to interact with the group, and whether there seems to be animosity among any workers. Employees who are feeling bullied may not feel comfortable reporting the behavior, but you can gain a sense for the nature of the interactions through observation.
- **Encourage a zero tolerance environment.** When the WBI surveyed bullied victims for how their employers handled the issue, those who did nothing and hoped the behavior would pass were successful in their approach just 3% of the time. But bullied victims who reported the behavior to management or human resources had the same success rate.

Clearly, management's attitude toward workplace bullying is imperative in preventing and dealing with such incidents. Let every member of your team know that bullying in any form is something you take seriously—and that it's a behavior the entire group needs to work together to police and proactively prevent. Encourage employees to stand up for the safe and trust-based culture that will allow them all to thrive and be successful.

If employees overhear a person who is speaking inappropriately to another co-worker, let them know they have the responsibility to speak up. Make it clear that they're not "tattling," but rather, maintaining the departmental culture that will allow them all to succeed professionally.



# How to Build Trust with Your Team

Managers who take the time to build trusting relationships with their employees receive many benefits in the areas of staff retention, engagement and productivity. For example, the Great Place to Work Institute reports that there is 50-65% less turnover when there is a high trust environment. In addition, if the staff trusts their leader(s), they will be less resistant to change, and feel more comfortable taking initiative and sharing their ideas because they won't fear making mistakes, losing credit, etc.

Below are several steps that managers can take to build trust with their teams:

- **Demonstrate Competence** – First, continue to develop your own skillset. Employees need to see that their leaders are skilled and capable. In addition, model a good work ethic - be willing to roll up your sleeves and do the work alongside your employees.
- **Be Dependable** - Follow through on your commitments - consistently do what you say you're going to do. Also, be highly responsive to your employee's needs, requests, etc., and always show loyalty to your staff members - especially during crisis or when they make a mistake. Employees need to know that you "have their backs".
- **Care About Your People** - Get to know your staff as individuals - their needs, their interests, and their strengths. That shows that you care. In addition, be available for employees to share their worries and frustrations with you. Finally, always try to do what's in their their best interest – employees will go above & beyond for managers who demonstrate that they care about them.
- **Be an Open & Transparent Communicator** - Have an open door policy and proactively share whatever information you can with the team (financial results, board meeting notes, future plans, etc.). Be truthful – even if you have to be the bearer of bad news. If you won't tell people the hard stuff, they won't trust you.
- **Collaborate Instead of Direct** - Practice good coaching skills – collaborate with employees and get their input instead of just telling them what to do. Don't be overly directive in your management style (i.e., when making an assignment share the "what" but not the "how"). People won't trust you if they feel that you don't trust them to get the job done.

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# Ask Your EAP!

The following are answers to common questions supervisors have regarding employee issues and making EAP referrals. As always, if you have specific questions about referring an employee or managing a workgroup issue, feel free to make a confidential call to the EAP for a management consultation.



**Q. When an organizational crisis happens, what can supervisors do to take charge and influence a large group of employees to remain calm and in control? I've had this experience a couple of times, and frankly I've felt caught off guard and not sure where to start or how to take charge.**

A. When an organizational crisis (large cutbacks, merger, or great loss) suddenly occurs, supervisors must demonstrate leadership. Confusion can reign, rumors can fly, and your work unit could appear on the edge of dysfunction. The need to demonstrate leadership can be scary. Insecurity can lead a manager to defer to someone else—for example, an assistant supervisor, “right-hand man,” or an employee with some perceived leadership ability. Avoid this temptation. Instead, grab the reins. Gather

employees in a room and use a circle-type seating arrangement. Keep your cool, because during a crisis, employees take cues on how to respond from those in charge. Clarify the problem, update the status, and communicate a goal, objective, or response to the crisis. Next, discuss with each person, using direct eye contact, what he or she is going to do or what role he or she will play in the solution or in achieving the goal. Open a discussion about how the EAP might help, and gauge support for its role.

**Q. I have a few employees who are 15 to 20 years older than their new manager. I imagine some are trying to adjust to the reality of a boss who is young enough to be their child. I'm the department head. Should I coach them now or expect them to “deal with it”?**

A. Being supervised by a younger employee can raise difficult feelings, but behavior is everything in the workplace, so monitor it. Many older workers, “bothered” by an age difference at first, readily cope in healthy ways and see the upside. Can your employees cooperate and demonstrate mutual respect? If so, view the age difference as a nonissue. For many older workers, a younger supervisor can be an exciting opportunity to learn about different ways of doing things, perhaps better, and more about technology, experiencing the wonders of more efficiency. Some older workers may see a young supervisor as a representation of what they did not accomplish, but most will adapt successfully and this awareness may never turn to conflict. If conflict occurs, address it. If it does not subside, then involve the EAP. Problems you may see could include parenting-like behaviors on the part of the older worker, insubordination, disrespectful tone, arguing, or other forms of disrespect, even bullying.

**Q. What is the best way for me to increase my level of cultural sensitivity in the workplace, and what is the best argument for doing so?**

A. The best argument for increasing one's level of cultural sensitivity is to improve engagement of workers and their job satisfaction. The Gallup polling organization has maintained a rolling seven-day average of this index since first reporting on it several years ago. It stood at only 31% recently for workers in general, but if you add discrimination and lack of cultural sensitivity to the mix of reasons normally cited, this problem is compounded. Improving cultural sensitivity is a professional responsibility, although larger organizations with training and education budgets can go about the task with more ease. To enhance your cultural competence (also referred to as cultural intelligence or “CQ,”) consider books such as David Livermore's *The Cultural Intelligence Difference*.

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