

The Successful SUPERVISOR

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Tips from  LifeSolutions

With increasing frequency, LifeSolutions receives calls from supervisors, HR consultants, and employees requesting support to resolve situations that can best be described as some variation of workplace bullying or intimidation. This is the second in a six-part series in which The Successful Supervisor will provide suggestions for recognizing and managing these behaviors in the workplace. The focus this month is on examining the prevalence of bullying in the workplace and why it has become a “hot button” topic.

Material is adapted from *The Bully at Work: What You Can Do to Stop the Hurt and Reclaim Your Dignity on the Job*. Namie, G. and Namie, R. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, Inc. 2000, 2003. Material is also adapted from the U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey. June 6, 2009. <http://www.workplacebullying.org/docs/zogbyflyer.pdf>. We are interested in your feedback to *The Successful Supervisor*. E-mail your questions and comments to EAP ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com.

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How common is workplace bullying?

In 2007, The Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI) partnered with Zogby International to conduct a representative study of adult American workers. They interviewed 7,740 workers on the topic of workplace bullying. Key findings included:

- ◆ 37% of American workers (54 million) reported being the target of bullying and 12% reported witnessing bullying, for a total of 49% (71.5 million workers) impacted either directly or indirectly.
- ◆ 72% of bullies are bosses.
- ◆ More perpetrators are men (60%) than women (40%).
- ◆ The majority of *targets* are women (57%).
- ◆ Bullying is 4 times more prevalent than illegal forms of “harassment.”
- ◆ 40% of bullied employees never tell their employer.
- ◆ 62% of employers either ignore bullying or take action that makes the situation worse.
- ◆ 45% of those targeted reported stress-related health problems.
- ◆ Only 3% of bullied employees take legal action.

The bottom line is this: Bullying clearly has a major impact not only on the individual worker(s) targeted, but also on those who witness the abuse, and on the overall morale of the workplace.

Hasn't this kind of behavior always been present in the workplace? Why the sudden attention to bullying now?

Bullying has always been present wherever people have worked together. However, it has only been in recent years that bullying has been identified as a **critical issue or sentinel event** with formalized efforts made to study and address it. Historically, targeted employees have had little recourse legally or otherwise to protect themselves. They frequently ran the risk of jeopardizing their own employment if they brought these issues out.

Raess vs. Doescher, Indiana Supreme Court, April 2008

In 2007, Joseph Doescher, a perfusionist in an Indiana hospital, sued Dr. Daniel Raess, his supervising cardiologist, for assault and intentional infliction of emotional distress. The lawsuit alleged that Dr. Raess was a “workplace bully” and that his behavior toward his employee had created great emotional distress, resulting in Mr. Doescher’s inability to continue working in that setting. Following a judgment against Mr. Doescher in appeals court, the Indiana Supreme Court decided in favor of the plaintiff and awarded Mr. Doescher

“Workplace bullying, like other general terms used to characterize a person’s behavior, is an entirely appropriate consideration Workplace bullying should be considered a form of intentional infliction of emotional distress.” (Raess v. Doescher, No. 49S02-0710-CV-424, Indiana Supreme Court, April 8, 2008)

\$325,000. Dr. Raess’s attorneys had argued that workplace bullying did not fall under the mantle of inflicting intentional distress and should not be considered. The court stated:

This high-profile case helped to propel workplace bullying into the spotlight. Recognizing the need to respond, many companies have begun implementing strong anti-bullying policies. Creating and maintaining a respectful workplace has become a priority. Key in promoting this effort is the education and involvement of managers and supervisors. Knowledgeable and alert managers and supervisors can serve as strong change agents in this process.

How exactly does bullying affect the target, the witness, and the organization?

Tune in next month for the answer to this question. For more information on “what to do,” or if you have a question or concern of an immediate nature, please contact your HR consultant. Or call LifeSolutions at 1-800-647-3327.