

The Successful SUPERVISOR

2010

February

Tips from  LifeSolutions

With increasing frequency, LifeSolutions receives calls from supervisors, HR, and employees requesting support to resolve situations that can best be described as some variation of workplace bullying or intimidation. This is the sixth and final newsletter in a 6-part series in which The Successful Supervisor provides suggestions for recognizing and managing bullying behaviors in the workplace. The focus this month will be on “Steps for Supporting the Victim, the Bystander . . . and the Bully.”

*Material is adapted from Namie, G. and Namie, Ruth. *The Bully at Work*, Naperville, IL, Sourcebooks, Inc., 2000, 2003. Material is also adapted from Sutton, Robert, *The No Asshole Rule – Building a Civilized Workplace and Surviving One That Isn't*. NY, Boston: Warner Business, 2007, and from SHARP, Department of Labor and Industry, Olympia, WA. We are interested in your feedback to *The Successful Supervisor*. E-mail your questions and comments to the EAP at ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com.
Debra Messer, MA, CEAP, LifeSolutions*

Last month we described the three key activities needed to create a culture of civility in the workplace. In this issue, we will focus on the third activity, **Direct Intervention**. How can a manager support an employee who reports being bullied, a coworker who has witnessed bullying and doesn't know how to handle it, and, yes, even the bully? The following steps offer a framework for handling these situations. Keep in mind that this framework must be firmly anchored in the manager's solid understanding of the dynamics of workplace bullying and a commitment to zero tolerance for bullying.

Supporting the Victim

- ◆ **The first step is to recognize and validate the employee's experience.** Listen carefully and patiently without judging. This is *not* the time to try to be evenhanded. Any suggestion that you are taking the side of the alleged bully will leave the employee feeling unheard and invalidated.
- ◆ **Tell the employee you are sorry that he or she is feeling bullied** and that you want to understand and help. Let the employee know that you are glad he or she came to you, that the employee did the right thing and does not need to fear retaliation.
- ◆ **Reassure the employee** that she or he did not invite this abuse or cause it to happen.
- ◆ **Educate the employee** about bullying.
- ◆ **Develop a plan of action** to resolve the problem. The plan may include: recommending that the employee document all bullying encounters, identifying the next steps to take, helping the employee to reframe what is happening, taking steps to protect the employee, and referral to EAP and/or HR.

Supporting the Bystander

All of the steps listed above can also be used to respond to a bystander who may come to you to share concerns. Keep in mind that bystanders are often as deeply affected by bullying as the victim. They may also carry the extra burden of feeling guilty or responsible for “allowing” this to happen to a coworker.

- ◆ **As with the victim, thank the employee for coming forward.** Assure the employee that this is the right thing to do and that you do not view it as gossiping or tale-bearing. Assure the employee that you will limit his or her involvement as much as possible and that the employee does not have to worry about retaliation.
- ◆ **Explore options** the employee may have for supporting the bullied coworker, such as speaking up appropriately when witnessing bullying or validating the victim's experience and letting the victim know the employee feels badly about it. Employees who have been bullied often say that coworker support and empathy greatly reduce the impact of the bullying.

Supporting/Addressing the Bully

Who are bullies and why do they do what they do?

Only a very small percentage of bullies are what we might label as instinctual bullies or just plain mean people. The vast majority of bullies are ordinary people who rely on bullying and intimidation as a management strategy or as a way to handle interpersonal relationships *because they don't know any other way to do it*. They are often unaware of the toxic nature of their behavior. Take an employee who has limited social skills or emotional intelligence (self-awareness, empathy, assertiveness). Put that employee in a work setting where there is high stress, competitiveness, pressure to produce, job insecurity, overwhelming responsibility, lack of manager training, or a culture in which aggressiveness and strong-arming are viewed as strong management, and you have a recipe for bullying.

- ◆ **Remember that the “bully” is human.** Be slow to label. Focus instead on addressing the unacceptable behaviors. It's the behaviors that are unacceptable, not the person.
- ◆ **Be specific.** Clarify *exactly* what behaviors are unacceptable and must be changed. Make it clear that bullying will not be tolerated.
- ◆ **Solicit the employee's input.** Listen for ways you can help this employee change his or her behavior. Is there a need for training, coaching, or clarification of roles or expectations?
- ◆ **Educate the employee.** Remember, the employee may not be aware of how hurtful this behavior is.
- ◆ **Bottom line.** Make it clear that performance evaluation is based not only on job competency but on how well the employee treats others in the workplace. Redefine competency to include interpersonal behavior...an employee *cannot* be viewed as competent if she/he mistreats others.

Tune in next month when Intimate Partner Violence will be explored. In the meantime, call LifeSolutions or your HR consultant with any questions.

Online Leadership Support



As leaders, what we do and say can have significant impact on those around us. *LifeSolutions* offers a series of self-guided online courses specifically developed to equip managers and supervisors with the appropriate tools to help make a positive impact in the workplace.

In keeping with the theme of this month's The Successful Supervisor, we offer the following Skill Builder courses:

Conflict Intervention

Defuse a potential morale-draining work environment through successful conflict intervention.

In this course you will learn:

- ◆ How to assess the climate of a conflict
- ◆ Methods to help set the stage for a positive outcome
- ◆ Techniques to broker a resolution and follow-up advice

Managing Disagreement

As an effective leader, we can set the stage for individuals to handle their differences over workplace issues and decisions.

In this course you will learn:

- ◆ The principles and styles
- ◆ How to apply the four-phase process
- ◆ Ways to refine your skills

Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace

Emotional intelligence is a set of skills that enables leaders to understand, anticipate, and deal with our automatic reactions in the workplace.

In this course you will learn:

- ◆ Intelligent thinking about emotions
- ◆ The keys to behaving wisely
- ◆ Techniques for fostering emotional intelligence in others

Follow the steps below to learn more and to get started:

- ◆ Access www.lifesolutionsforyou.com.
- ◆ Click on *WorkLife* login at the top right.
- ◆ Enter your company code. If you do not know your code, call 1.800.647.3327.
- ◆ Locate *Working Smarter* on left-side menu.
- ◆ Click on *Effective Manager*.
- ◆ Click on *Skill Builder*.
- ◆ Click on title that interests you and review the highlights of each course.
- ◆ You will be able to click on link at bottom (within the Skill Builder highlight) to get started.

If you have questions, please call **1.800.647.3327**
