Workplace Bullying: What is it? How can we help?

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You can kill a person only once, but when you humiliate him, you kill him many times over.

The Talmud
When I say that evil has to do with killing, I do not mean to restrict myself to corporal murder. Evil is also that which kills the spirit.

M. Scott Peck

People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing

Human Evil
Workplace bullying is linked to various physical, psychological, personal, professional, and economic costs for the target. This negatively affects bystanders as well as the organization and includes economic and social costs for the workplace.
27% of Americans have suffered abusive conduct at work

21% have witnessed it

72% are aware that workplace bullying happens
Statistics

- 69% male bullies
  - 57% female targets
  - 43% male targets
- 31% female bullies
  - 68% female targets
  - 32% male targets
Statistics

- 77% of cases involved a single perpetrator
- 23% of cases involved multiple perpetrators (mobbing)
Statistics

- Perpetrators’ position
  - 56% held a higher position (boss, top-down)
  - 33% of abuse from peers (lateral or horizontal, same level)
  - 11% of abuse from subordinates (bottom-up)
% bullied within ethnic groups (n=1,000)

Hispanic – 56.9%

African American – 54.1%

Asian – 52.8%

White – 44.3%
Statistics

- In 61% of cases, bullying stopped when target loses job.
- Once a person is targeted, person has a 6 out of 10 chance of losing livelihood.
Statistics

- 93% support specific anti-bullying legislation – The Healthy Workplace Bill
- Workplace Bullying Institute
  U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey
  February, 2014

workplacebullying.org
Definition of Workplace Bullying

- A **systematic, consistent sequence of abusive and intimidating behaviors** by an individual, or a group of individuals, directed at another individual (or target) in such a way that the target is stigmatized and/or victimized.
Defining Characteristics

- Prolonged exposure to repeated negative and/or abusive behaviors to which the target feels unable to cope

- Repeated exposure may cause severe physical, psychological, personal, and/or professional effects on the target
Behaviors of Workplace Bullying are designed to
demean
humiliate
control the target

may
include verbal and non-verbal aggression
manifest in an overt or covert manner
Behaviors

- include, but are not limited to,
  - yelling
  - cursing
  - temper tantrums
  - refusal to delegate work
  - spreading rumors about the target
  - unsubstantiated criticism
  - glaring
  - ridicule
Behaviors

- isolation
- attacks on the target’s self-esteem
- the arbitrary removal of responsibilities
- unrealistic work demands
- threats of job loss
- public humiliation
- in some instances physical aggression
- withholding of support, resources, and information
International Movement

1980’s: Founder Dr. Heinz Leymann, clinical research & books, Sweden

1990’s: In U.K, Andrea Adam’s book coins term “Workplace Bullying”

1993: First law, Victimization At Work, Sweden

1994: Conference & book, Beyond Bullying, Australia

1997: Book, Hyenas at Work, South Africa
History & Context

**U.S. and Canadian Movement**

- **2000**: First U.S. Conferences on Workplace Bullying, Namies write 1st edition *The Bully at Work*
- **2003**: First U.S. legislation introduced
- **2004**: Multiple U.S. state law initiatives begun
Institute-Led Legal Reform

- California Assembly Bill AB 1582
  *(First anti-bullying law proposed in America)*

  - To protect all employees from health-impairing abusive work environments

  - To compel employers to prevent and correct unlawful misconduct according to the Institute, definitions introduced in 2003
Illinois – 15th state to introduce Healthy Workplace Bill

- Senator Ira Silverstein (D-8) introduced SB 2943, a bill to prohibit workplace bullying, on February 4, 2014. The bill requires an employer to establish a workplace bullying policy and file it with the Department of Labor. It subjects businesses in violation to pay a fine.

SB 2943 was referred to the Labor and Commerce Committee.
Is Workplace Bullying more Prevalent Today?

- We have the ability to “label” the behavior and define it.
- We have the “language” to discuss it.
“Naming” Workplace Bullying

- Language used to discuss Workplace Bullying
  - Abuse
  - Emotional abuse
  - Target
  - Bully/Abuser
  - Bullying
Naming Workplace Bullying

- Language used
  - Mobbing
  - Systemic Bullying
  - Victim Blame
  - Incivility

Christine Pearson, *Workplace "Incivility" Study*
The Character & Traits of a Target…

- Strong sense of integrity & justice
- Tend to see things for how they could be
- Courageous
- Rational
The Character & Traits of a Target…

- Both men & women can be involuntary targets
- Women are more likely to experience bullying
- Power differentials & the retaliation that a bully can exercise, with virtual impunity, are two major reasons people don’t report bullying behavior
The Character & Traits of a Bully…

- Dominating
- Self-loathing
- Inability to confront their own feelings of inadequacy
- Exhibits bullying behavior regardless of his/her background, status, or position
The Character and Traits of a Bully…

- Projection
- Lack the ability to empathize with the plight of their targets
- Self-centered
- Poor to non-existent social skills
Impact of Workplace Bullying on the Target

- Health damage
  - Psychological injury, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
  - Stress-related physical health complications
- Loss of social support
- Income reduction or loss
Impact of Workplace Bullying within the Organization

- Employers’ Economic Issues
  - Interferes with workplace performance
  - High turn-over, loss of the brightest
  - Strains loyalty, fosters distrust, sabotage and resentment
Impact of Workplace Bullying within the Organization

- Employers’ Economic Issues
  - Higher workers comp and disability costs
  - Legal liability
  - Reputation as abusive employer
Preventing Workplace Bullying

- *If Targeted, What Can One Do?*
  - Name it
  - “Bully-Proof” Yourself
  - Break the Silence, Expose the Tyrant
Preventing Workplace Bullying

What Can Employers Do?

- Protect & support human resource employees
- Use unconnected outside consultants to handle complaints & investigations
- Require witnesses & targets to provide documentation
- Encourage & reward positive healthy behaviors
Preventing Workplace Bullying

What Can Employers Do?

- Make sure each department has safe and easy accessible places
- Give annual surveys (i.e. 360 degree evaluations)
- Examine the ways that you may be contributing to bullying in the workplace
- Commit to change, taking a stand is the first step
Preventing Workplace Bullying

What Can Employers Do?

- Look after the best interests of your workplace and your clients
- Declare your expectations for behavior
- Require that all employees attend anti-bullying training
- Make a commitment to do their part to create a safe & welcoming work environment for all
Preventing Workplace Bullying

**What Can Employers Do?**

- Have executives and other leaders publicly commit to a bully free/violence free workplace.
- Provide a progressive sequence of policy-driven consequences.
- Provide employees with safe fora for sharing workplace concerns.
- Train support personnel to deal with these issues.

- Judith Herman, Trauma & Recovery
Limited research on how counselors can assist targets of workplace bullying.

A counselor’s lack of knowledge is likely to deprive targets of appropriate identification and treatment.
Case Studies
Interventions utilized with targets

- Active listening and assessment of functioning
- Helping a target become less of a target
  - building self esteem
  - providing support and validation of the target’s experience
- Educating the target
- Coaching
- Creating an action plan
- Awareness of workplace resources
Recommended Readings

- Carnes, Patrick. *The Case for Traumatic Bonding: The Betrayal Bond*
- Carnes, Patrick. *The Betrayal Bond: Breaking Free from Exploitative Relationships*
- Einarsen, Stale. *Bullying and Harassment in the Workplace: Developments in Theory, Research, and Practice (2nd ed, 2011)*
Recommended Readings

- Farrell-Urbanski Liz. *Workplace Bullying's High Cost: $180M In Lost Time & Productivity*

- Herman, Judith. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*


- Pearson, Christine. *Workplace "Incivility” Study*
Recommended Readings

- Schaef & Wilson. *The Addictive Organization*
- Simon, George K. *In Sheep’s Clothing: Understanding and Dealing with Manipulative People*