

Developing New Attitudes Bullying In The Workplace

by Richard Pimentel

Many employers believe that bullies are simply supervisors who use gruff “in your face” tactics to increase production. This is not true. The bully targets a specific employee and by using a never-ending series of small – sometimes even trivial incidents and abuses –orchestrates that employee’s failure. Many employers also believe that bullies target the weak and incompetent, and that they may actually serve a positive, almost Darwinian purpose to the organization. The truth is a bully is more likely to target a competent employee who has the traits that the bully lacks, such as, the ability to get along with others, be well liked, respected and work well in a team; than to target a marginal employee. These targets can be subordinates, peers and even the bully’s supervisor.

Bullying in the workplace happens four times more frequently than illegal discriminatory harassment, yet less than ten percent of companies have a policy to address it. It impacts on the careers, the productivity and the health of its victims, as well as, the viability of the company.

It is a rare workplace that has never had a bully and an even rarer organization that has not felt frustrated when confronted with bullies and their effect on staff. Once one of your employees is in a bully’s crosshairs there is better than 70% chance that employee will quit, stop being productive or give up his/her job to escape the bullying.

While the exact number of employees who are targets of bullying who choose to be absent because of the stress or file some kind of workers compensation claim as their escape route is not documented, there is no doubt that a negative and hostile employer atmosphere drives up the duration and cost of claims and productivity, both physical injuries as well as stress claims.

While there is no doubt that all stress claims are not from bullying, there is also no doubt that the experiences reported by verified victims of bullying are the same as those reported by a significant number of employees filling stress claims. A stress claim resulting from bullying in the workplace can be one of the most difficult and expensive workers' compensation claims that an organization has to deal with.

The more employers understand about bullying in the workplace, the how and why of what bullies do, the better they will be able to separate those employees with general stress claims and those who are being systematically driven out of the workplace by bullies. Employer’s, who say that bullying is a personnel issue, ignore the health and liability aspects of this behavior. In the cases where bullying affects the health of the employee, bullying is more than a personnel issue—it is a safety issue.

**“Just because you are paranoid doesn’t mean
they are not out to get you.”**

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