

Bullying: 6 things every manager needs to know

by Karen Gately

If you have experienced or witnessed bullying in the workplace you are probably already aware of the devastating impact verbal and psychological abuse can have. All too often I meet people whose health, wellbeing, engagement or job performance have been impacted by the behavior of bullies. Just as common is for me to meet people who are able to share stories of family and friends being subjected to extraordinarily unfair and inappropriate treatment at work.

Driving bullying from our workplaces will happen when we all make it a priority. While employers in Australia have a legal obligation to provide a healthy and safe work environment, creating a bully free workplace takes everyone doing their part. Leaders play an especially important role however in setting the standard and holding people accountable to acceptable standards of conduct.

Six things every manager needs to know about dealing with bullying include:

1. *A respectful culture is the key to prevention.*

- ✓ Demonstrate and inspire respect, kindness and sensitivity.
- ✓ Expect every member of your team to act with compassion and give reasonable consideration to how other people feel.
- ✓ Reward and recognize people who demonstrate sincere regard for their colleagues and the desire to support everyone to succeed.

2. *Culture starts from the top.*

- ✓ Lead by example by behaving respectfully and demonstrating that bullying is never tolerated.
- ✓ Set a high standard against which you hold yourself and other people accountable.
- ✓ Exhibit the behaviors you want from others through the decisions you make and actions you take.

3. *Action is necessary.*

- ✓ Meeting your obligation to provide a healthy and safe work environment requires that you take proactive steps to protect not only your team's physical safety but also their psychological wellbeing.
- ✓ Investigate complaints of bullying thoroughly and impartially.
- ✓ Apply appropriate outcomes

4. *Consequences are essential.*

- ✓ Regardless of any position of power or influence no one should be allowed to bully other people.
- ✓ It takes discipline and a consistent approach to applying a zero tolerance policy to drive bullying from an organisations culture.
- ✓ If an investigation concludes that a member of your team is guilty of bullying, apply appropriate consequence through disciplinary action.

5. *Acting early matters.*

- ✓ It can be tempting to sit back and hope the issue will take care of itself however unless the bully leaves your business that is unlikely to happen.
- ✓ Take steps to address the issue as soon as you become aware of it; at times you'll be able to nip brewing issues in the bud.
- ✓ Be responsive and quick to investigate complaints. Avoid the tendency some managers have to dismiss those they perceive as coming from overly sensitive people.

6. *Tough love can work.*

- ✓ Honesty delivered with respect is critical to building awareness and influencing the behaviour of a bully.
- ✓ Expect bullies to demonstrate greater regard for others and the ability to regulate their conduct in order to stay with your business.
- ✓ Ensure they clearly understand what behaviours are required of them and the consequences of conduct that is misaligned.
- ✓ Balance this firm approach with compassion and sensitivity.
- ✓ Express confidence in their ability to change and the support that they will be provided with.

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