*Life*Solutions

The Successful Supervisor

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Bullying in the workplace

With increasing frequency, *Life*Solutions 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. We are revisiting part one from the six-part series on bullying from 2009. It is always a good idea to refresh our awareness of what constitutes workplace bullying. The material is adapted from Namie, G., Namie, R. The Bully at Work: What You Can Do to Stop the Hurt and Reclaim Your Dignity on the Job. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, Inc. 2000 and 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*. Email your questions and comments to EAP at ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com.

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Whether referred to as disrespect, rudeness, lack of team spirit, poor communication, bad manners, or a "lack of interpersonal skills," bullying still comes down to unacceptable behavior in the workplace. This behavior causes distress for the targeted employee, co-workers who witness it, and clients or patients affected by it. Bullying impacts the overall morale of the organization.

Bullying or intimidation can be:

- Blatant, but often is subtle
- Public or done quietly behind a closed door
- Illegal (harassment based on discrimination), but usually is not
- Very damaging, yet hard to define and manage

"What exactly is bullying? What does it look like?"

According to Drs. Gary and Ruth Namie, founders of the Workplace Bullying and Trauma Institute and co-authors of *The Bully at Work*, workplace bullying can be defined as "the repeated, malicious, health-endangering mistreatment of one employee (the target) by one or more employees (the bullies). This mistreatment is psychological violence, a mix of verbal and strategic assaults to prevent the target from performing well at work ... a combination of deliberate humiliation and the withholding of resources ...." Bullying and intimidation can look like any of the following:

- Sarcasm, insults, or put-downs
- Gossip, spreading rumors, poisoning the well
- Ignoring, ostracizing, excluding

- Glaring, staring down, eye rolling, refusing to look at a person
- Condescending looks, sighs, etc., in response to a person
- Talking or gesturing behind someone's back
- Refusing to help or work with someone
- Yelling or screaming at a person
- Constant criticism, faultfinding, blaming, or attacking
- Withholding support, resources, or information
- Unreasonable job demands, giving someone all the "dirty jobs"
- Threats of job loss

You may wonder, "Wait … if I roll my eyes at a co-worker *one time* am I guilty of bullying? If a supervisor is busy and ignores an employee *once* is he guilty of intimidating that employee? How can you tell the difference between an isolated incidence of thoughtlessness and a genuine pattern of bullying?"

Bullying:

- Is **repetitive** over time
- **Escalates** or worsens if unchecked
- Involves a **power disparity** (either formal or perceived)
- Is **intentional** (goal is to embarrass or put down the target)

Bullying is more than the occasional rude remark or thoughtless gesture. It is more than "bad manners." It is a **pattern of behavior** that serves to put down, embarrass, or disempower another person.

If you are interested in learning more about bullying in the workplace, or if you have specific questions or concerns related to this topic, contact *Life*Solutions at **1-800-647-3327** and ask to speak with an EAP Account Manager. You may also contact your HR consultant.

Next month's issue will focus on Civility in the Workplace.

For more information or for questions or concerns of an immediate nature, contact your HR consultant or *Life*Solutions at **1-800-647-3327**.

The information in this flier is not meant as a substitute for your organization's policies.

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