

The Successful SUPERVISOR

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Tips from  LifeSolutions

With increasing frequency, LifeSolutions 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. This is the first in a six-part series in which The Successful Supervisor will provide suggestions for recognizing and managing these behaviors in the workplace. The focus this month is on understanding what bullying and intimidation are. 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. E-mail your questions and comments to the EAP at ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com.

Sample Calls:

- “My staff can’t get along ... there’s gossip and backbiting.”
- “My employees are disrespectful ... nothing I do seems to help.”
- “My supervisor has it in for me ... I can’t do anything right ... she ridicules me in front of other staff.”

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 them. It 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 work well ... 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, fault finding, 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.

“How common are bullying and intimidation? Hasn’t bad behavior always been around? Why focus on it now?” Tune in next month for answers to these questions. For more information on what to do, or if you have a question or concern of an immediate nature, please contact your HR Consultant or LifeSolutions at 1-800-647-3327.

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