



# Seeking Civility?

How managers and leaders can  
create a bully-free workplace



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## Introduction

Everywhere you turn it seems there is a story about bullying in schools and the resulting damage it caused the targets, the school culture and the school district. Every news station and newspaper out there seems to run regular articles about politicians who mistreat each other and harass their staff and interns. Turn on the television and you will find an array of “reality” TV shows that draw viewers with characters who yell and manipulate each other. Check out your favorite blogger’s latest article and you are likely to find comments from people who seem to have nothing better to do than be mean to the writer and other commentators. And as you head to bed and give your smart phone one last email check, you may find a nasty berating email from your co-worker or boss.

I became interested in workplace bullying due to my own experiences, working as the Director of Compliance & HR for a nonprofit organization. This person was my peer, also director level, and we both reported directly to the president. I noticed immediately after I started working there that Tom (whose name has been changed) was awfully insubordinate to the president. During staff meetings as the president was sharing information, for example, Tom would interrupt and say disdainfully, “No that’s not what we’re doing, geez” or “we talked about this, you’re giving the wrong information,” as if the president didn’t know what he was talking about. Over time the behaviors got worse and worse, targeting almost everyone in the office, including me.

Tom was an uber-excessive micromanager, even to people he didn’t manage and who were in other departments. He yelled frequently, and had a way of staring people down to make them crumble. He talked down to everyone. He made life difficult for clients and the people who referred us business, to the point where clients and referral sources were secretly coming to me for help in order to avoid him. He ordered and managed the distribution of office supplies, so even something as simple as getting a pad of Post-Its was a traumatic experience for all.

I was bullied; and not only did I personally deal with the repercussions of this behavior but as the HR manager I dealt with the organizational repercussions too. I frequently took employee grievances to the president in order to get his assistance in ending the bullying but his response was always, “that’s just how he is, people shouldn’t let him get to them.” Bullying is legal and wasn’t against our corporate policy so my hands were tied; I couldn’t help them. Dealing with bullying on my own, and the turnover, poor morale and bad customer service the bullying caused, eventually took a toll on me. As my performance suffered tremendously and I was on the brink of severe depression, after five years the president and I decided it would be best if we parted ways.

However, about three years into the job I had started graduate school. Early on in the program I had a class at San Diego State University called the “Dark Side of Communication” where we learned about negative human interactions (e.g., stalking, domestic violence, etc). Of course we had to write a paper on something dark, so I chose to write about my situation at work. It was during this time in 2004 that I came across the phrase

“workplace bullying” and saw that there was 25 years of academic research on the topic from around the world. As I read more and more articles I was mesmerized. Everything I was reading lined up with my situation; it was eerie. After that every ounce of research I did in graduate school was on workplace bullying. I even did my thesis paper on workplace bullying and dedicated it to “The Post-It Nazi” as we called Tom. I joke that I have a Master’s degree in workplace bullying, and have since made a career out of maintaining my expertise on the topic - publishing articles, appearing on the news, serving as a subject matter expert in legal cases, and providing training and consulting to a variety of businesses including the third-largest energy company in the world, the military, hospitals, universities, small businesses, government agencies and non-profits. I am co-author of the book, *BACK OFF! Your Kick-Ass Guide to Ending Bullying at Work*, with EG Sebastian, that Ken Blanchard called, “the most comprehensive and valuable handbook on the topic.”

This e-book is meant to provide guidance to any supervisor or manager, human resources professional, employee assistance professional, consultant, business owner, executive, CEO, or anyone else interested in ending bullying in their workplace. It is written from my own consulting experiences, and my goal is to help you understand what bullying is and the steps needed to effectively eradicate it.

## The prevalence of bullying and what it is

Weber Shandwick, a consulting firm known for its Civility Poll, found in 2011 that two-thirds of people believe we have a major incivility problem, and more than half of people expect incivility to become the norm. According to CareerBuilder, who conducted a survey of approximately 3,800 people in 2012, 35% of people feel bullied at work and half of them don’t report the bullying or stand up for themselves. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), found in their 2004 study that almost 25% of American businesses have some level of bullying happening in their workplace and that 11% of bullying incidents were committed against customers. Some academic researchers have even found that as many as 50 to 75% of people are bullied, depending on the industry.



Bullying is repeated negative acts that create psychological power imbalance and an inability of targets to engage in self-defense, and that result in psychological and physical harm to targets and witnesses, and monetary losses to the organization. While this is a nice (long) definition, let’s break it down.

**Repeated:** Bullying is not about having a bad day and mistreating co-workers as a result. Single negative acts, such as shouting once or failing to invite someone to the company happy hour are fairly normal if isolated and would generally be called incivility. Bullying is repeated, ongoing, continual... in fact it happens at least once a week for a period of anywhere between six months to five years before the target gives up and quits.

Psychological power imbalance: Bullies start with a light push on people around them – perhaps a snide comment or a short temper tantrum. Some targets of this behavior will stand up for themselves right then to indicate they will not tolerate that type of behavior, while others will brush it off or chose not to stand up for themselves. Over time bullies keep pushing the later group more frequently and more aggressively, ultimately creating a psychological power imbalance. Targets realize their bully has power over them and bullies realize they have power over their targets.

There are, of course, power imbalances at work via normal organizational hierarchy, but when the power imbalance is psychological because the target is feeling abused, that’s bullying. This power imbalance is what makes bullying different than conflict. Conflict happens when two people disagree but both have a voice. Bullying happens when one person has a voice and the other is so eviscerated that he or she does not.

Inability to engage in self-defense: For whatever reason targets of bullying are unable to stand up for themselves, whether because they are conflict avoidant, they don’t feel supported by the organizational leaders, they don’t want to lose their job for making waves, or they are simply afraid of the repercussions. Often the question of perception is part of the bullying equation too, as every target of bullying behaviors will perceive the behaviors differently and accordingly, will respond differently depending on their own position in the organization, personality, communication style, assertiveness, and conflict management skills.

Psychological and physical harm to targets and witnesses: Research has made it very clear that targets of bullying experience anxiety, depression, anger, frustration, distress, humiliation, embarrassment, discouragement, feelings of inadequacy, hopelessness, and burnout. It’s nothing new that stress also causes physical problems such as headache, heartache, stomachache, lack of sleep, and poor diet. Researchers have even linked such problems as heart disease and irritable bowel syndrome to bullying, as well as post traumatic stress disorder and thoughts of suicide and suicide. It is important to note that even people who don’t necessarily self-identify as being bullied (i.e., witnesses) experience some of these same problems, though to a lesser extent than actual targets. This is because they are walking on egg-shells wondering if they will be next, and because they are truly bothered by knowing the targets aren’t getting help from management.

Monetary losses to the organization: If targets of bullying and witnesses to the behavior are experiencing all of these traumatic emotions, they certainly aren’t performing. Thus bullying leads to poor quality work product, low job satisfaction, poor relationships, presenteeism, absenteeism, turnover, poor safety, lack of teamwork, eroded job attachment, greater intention to leave, and all of the other items highlighted in this graphic.



We might say that workplace bullying is more important than workplace violence for two reasons. First, psychological well-being is more greatly impaired through psychologically abusive behavior than physically abusive behavior. In other words, bruises go away but psychological damage takes much longer to get over. Second, bullying occurs for long periods of time and under the radar via manipulation and humiliation, while workplace violence will end relatively quickly because it is conspicuous and against the law.

Speaking of the law, corporate policies tend to cover harassment aimed only at protected classes such as race, religion and sexual orientation, but often do not cover equal-opportunity harassment (i.e., bullying) at all. This is because harassment based on a protected characteristic is illegal, but equal-opportunity harassment is quite legal in the majority of the United States. No laws exist against workplace bullying with the exception of a few small areas where local government has passed a law, or where state law covers one particular group. For example, like most states Nevada updated its school-age bullying laws, but Nevada included a paragraph that indicates adults are prohibited from engaging in bullying, just like students are. The first anti-bullying law in North America was enacted in Quebec, Canada in 2004, with the United States far behind them and other countries such as Ireland and the UK, who already address workplace bullying at the federal level.

Bullying behaviors can be broken down into three “buckets” of behavior, including overt aggressive communication, humiliation, and manipulation. Examples of these behaviors appear in the graphic. Manipulation is the most likely choice for bullies to use because they recognize that yelling, for example, will get them in trouble while being passive-aggressive is hard to spot. Assigning someone tasks that are far out of their level of competency and thus setting them up for failure is easy to hide, and if recognized the bully can easily offer some excuse as to why the work was assigned.

### Examples of Bullying Behaviors

<p><b>Aggressive Communication</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insulting or making offensive remarks</li> <li>• Shouting, yelling, angry outbursts</li> <li>• Going around co-workers in order to avoid communicating with them</li> <li>• Harsh finger pointing, invasion of space</li> <li>• Emails or other e-communication</li> </ul>	<p><b>Manipulation of Work</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Removing tasks imperative to job responsibilities</li> <li>• Giving unmanageable workloads &amp; impossible deadlines</li> <li>• Arbitrarily changing tasks</li> <li>• Using employee evaluations to document supposed decreased quality of work</li> <li>• Purposely withholding pertinent information</li> <li>• Leaving employees out of email correspondence or meeting invites</li> </ul>
<p><b>Acts Aimed at Humiliation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Humiliating or ridiculing, teasing</li> <li>• Spreading rumors or gossip</li> <li>• Ignoring peers when they walk by</li> <li>• Playing harsh practical jokes</li> <li>• Taunting with the use of social media, intranet, etc</li> </ul>	

## Why bullying occurs in the workplace

Much of what’s online today and many self-help books about workplace bullying claim that bullies are simply bad people, psychopaths even, and that targets are innocent bystanders. These websites and self-help books fail to take into account that targets are not inactive passersby’s in their own lives and that communication and relationships, and thus bullying, are an *interaction* - a transaction that involves mutual influence. That means it takes two to tango and it is important to understand targets, bullies, and the system they live in, so that we can understand how to help both parties with their communication skills and address the bullying holistically. Bullying

is systemic and thus systemic solutions are required to eradicate it. So before we get into these solutions let's discuss each party's role in further detail.

### **The bully**

It's easy to think that bullies are ruthless people out for blood every morning when they wake up to go to work. While that may feel like the case if you're bullied, it's just not true. Many bullies are not even aware of the damage they are causing others, and if they are aware they may simply not care about hurting another person's feelings. But don't mistake this lack of caring as the behavior of a definite psychopath – that's just not accurate.

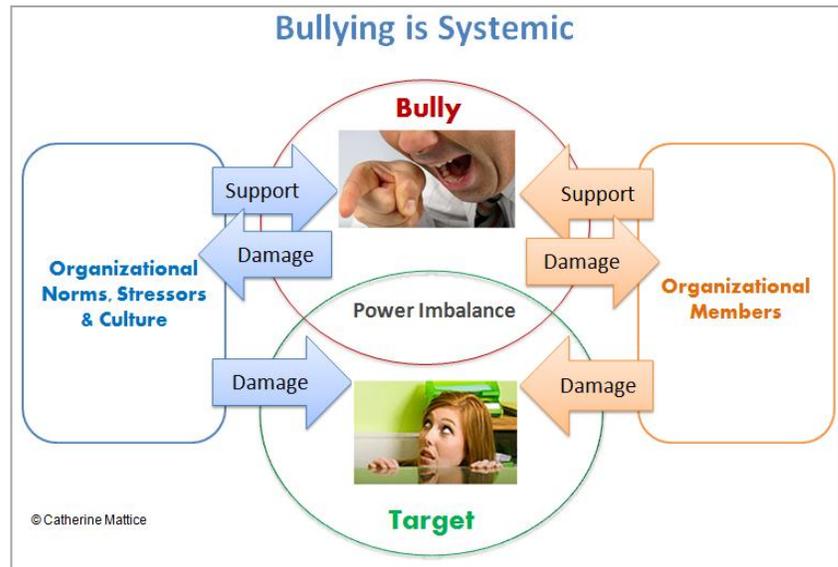
Bullies often bully because they feel threatened by someone or something

happening in the environment. They also lack social and emotional intelligence, communication skills, and the ability to effectively tolerate and deal with stress. This lack of caring for the target stems from self-preservation – they are fighting someone who they perceive threatens their organizational position, whether because they believe that target is a higher performer than they, or because they believe the target is incapable of doing the job well. (For example, I coached a manager who bullied another manager because she wholeheartedly believed he was incompetent. It wasn't her call to make because he didn't report to her, but his perceived incompetence drove this dedicated individual to so much frustration that bullying was the only way she knew how to deal with it.)

Bullies may also simply use a more aggressive communication style because they learned the behavior from their parents or other organizational members. They might also be motivated by power and authority and thus attempt to gain it through bullying, or they may have a higher threshold for negativity than others (they tolerate negativity more easily than others and thus use negative messages more often simply because negativity seems acceptable to them).

### **The target**

Researchers have avoided looking at targets too closely because they hesitate to place blame on them. But we have to acknowledge that bullying is a relationship, or a transaction that occurs between two people. While we certainly don't want to blame the target or indicate that they deserve to be treated with hostility, we do have to acknowledge that they play a role in their own situation. We are all influencers of our environment – even targets of bullying. If we can identify what targets are doing (or not doing), we can teach them the skills they need to become a more assertive member of the workplace or to adjust their social skills.



Researchers have found that targets do tend to be high performers and are thus well-liked by the organization's leaders. The target is therefore a perceived threat to the bully, and the bully lashes out with his or her fight reflex in order to ensure the threat is eliminated. As discussed earlier, some targets will perceive the bully as a threat too, and fight back by standing up for themselves. Many, however, will respond with the flight or freeze response (i.e., not stand up for themselves). While it's not entirely clear why some people are able to stand up for themselves and some are not, we could guess that it has to do with personality, communication skills, assertiveness, conflict management style, position within the organization, resilience, optimism, leadership skills, and a host of other such reasons.

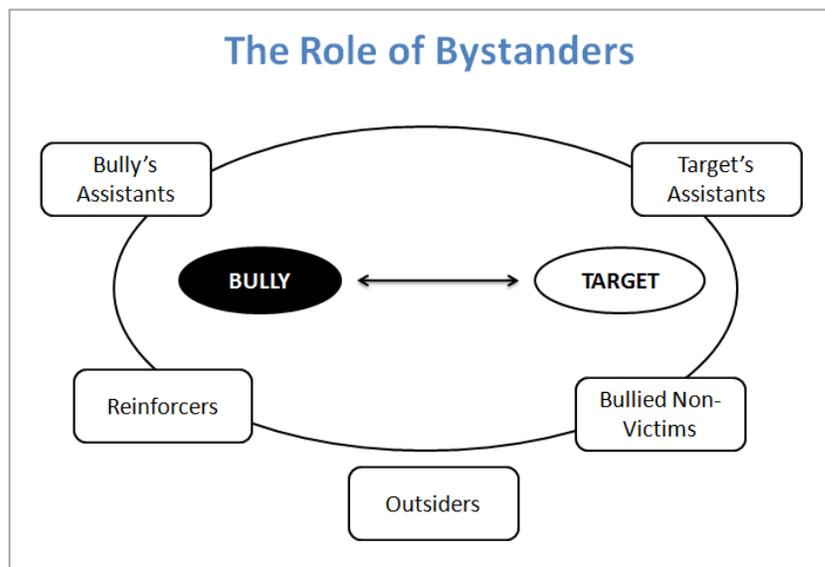
Some human resources professionals believe that targets of bullying are just poor performers who take constructive criticism and demands for high performance as bullying. While that may be the case sometimes, it is the exception to the rule. This issue is highlighted by the story of one woman who worked at a community college in my area. At the end of one of my community presentations on workplace bullying Diane approached me in tears and explained that everything in my presentation resonated with her as this was exactly what she was going through. She asked me if I could meet her for coffee to help her determine her next steps, and I agreed. During our meeting she handed me 20 years of great employee reviews. She described her last 20 years of employment at the college, where she'd had five managers, a few promotions along the way, and raving performance reviews. Now on her sixth manager and 22<sup>nd</sup> year, she provided me with her last two employee evaluations. This newest manager believed Diane was a poor employee and had even suggested in the review that if Diane didn't change she would be considered for a demotion and pay cut.

Perhaps Diane's performance had suffered recently, or perhaps this new manager was more willing to hold her employees accountable to high level work and Diane wasn't used to that... I don't know because I didn't work with her. However the performance evaluation lacked crucial components to make it an effective evaluation and therefore Diane perceived the evaluation as a bullying tactic (combined with many other behaviors this new manager engaged in such as yelling and sending nasty emails). Essentially, the manager may as well have stamped "loser" on the cover page, because that about sums up what was in the document. If the manager really believed Diane was lacking the right skills or that her performance wasn't up to par, the evaluation would have included all of the things Diane was doing well, the list of opportunities for improvement, quantifiable goals to improve, a timeframe for improvement, what resources will be provided to help Diane reach these goals, how often the manager will check in, and what will happen if the goals are or are not met. Without that information, all Diane was left with as a document that says her performance stinks and there's nothing she can do about it – and that's bullying.

### ***Organizational members***

Bullying doesn't happen in a vacuum but rather in an organizational system. That means the bullying influences the system and the system influences the bullying. Bystanders are certainly part of the system and they determine whether bullying will thrive in an organization or not. Bystanders play many roles in the bully-target relationship, an abbreviated list of which appears here in this graphic. (My book, *BACK OFF! Your Kick-A\$\$ Guide to Ending Bullying at Work*, with EG Sebastian, offers a more extensive list of roles.)

Some of the bystanders will encourage the bully, whether because they are friends with the bully and agree with the bullying, or because they fear being bullied themselves. These are the bully's assistants. Other bystanders will become the target's assistants, serving as ad hoc counselors when the target needs to vent. In fact the Canadian Safety Council found that targets of bullying spend about 52% of their day doing stuff other than working – including talking about the bullying with other employees. Some bystanders are bullied non-victims, which means that although they are bullied by



researchers' standards they do not themselves self-identify as being a target of workplace bullying. For them the bullying is normalized or considered just part of "the way it is around here." Outsiders are bystanders who simply don't see the bullying because they are at a different worksite or are far enough removed that it's just out of their sightline.

The final group of bystanders are reinforcers. Reinforcers are people who reinforce bullying behavior simply by not speaking up to the bully or to management. These witnesses to the bullying are not "bystanders" at all, because that word alludes to innocence – that they are passively uninvolved. On the contrary, these bystanders make a conscious choice not to speak up and are therefore actively involved in and reinforcing workplace bullying.

### **Organizational culture**

Organizational culture is the way an organization's members as a whole think, act, and understand the world around them. You might say it is simply, "the way it is around here." Culture dictates behavior, and there are several reasons culture may dictate that bullying behavior is considered acceptable within an organization. Researchers have found that factors such as tenured employees, organizational change, ambiguity in work responsibilities, high competition, well-educated employees, and "weak leadership" could all allow bullying to thrive.

When an organization has several tenured employees these employees may feel threatened by all of the new and innovative things their organization is doing, and by all of the new employees coming into their workplace disrupting the way they've always done things. This could cause the tenured employees to feel stress and a strong desire to ensure their worth is clear to leadership; one way to achieve that goal is to bully others. Organizational change of any kind also causes stress. Downsizing, laying employees off, reassigning workgroups, or hiring new managers can make everyone uneasy as they struggle to understand where they fit in to the changes and whether the organization will still find them valuable as the restructuring occurs. Further, change causes ambiguity in workload, roles, hierarchy and power, so some will attempt to ease the ambiguity by bullying others to gain power and clarity. In addition, high competition and well-educated employees can breed bullying simply because

everyone is fighting to be on top and show who's better and smarter. Finally, researchers have also found that "weak leaders," leaders who won't stand up to the bully, also allow bullying to thrive simply because they aren't putting an end to it.

Understanding that organizational culture plays a role in bullying is important because it highlights the fact that bullying doesn't occur between two people – the entire department, if not the entire organization, is a part of the problem. This means that simply punishing the bully or transferring the target to a different department isn't going to effectively eradicate bullying altogether. Solutions must be systemic and holistic in order to get at the culture, and that's what we'll discuss next.

## 10 Steps to Delivering a Healthy Work Environment

Once I got out of graduate school I founded the website [www.NoWorkplaceBullies.com](http://www.NoWorkplaceBullies.com). At the time this website spoke to what I was trying to accomplish – end bullying. Over time I realized as I worked with clients that I wasn't trying to end bullying at all, I was trying to help them create a positive workplace. This is an important distinction because you can't tell employees what not to do if you're not going to provide alternatives. Employees can't do a don't. If you tell them, "don't bully" you've left them with nothing to accomplish other than to not do something. If you tell employees, "do be respectful to each other" now you've given them a goal that is possible to accomplish and you can even measure success.

One of my favorite quotes is from the book, *Positive Organizational Behavior* (Quick & Macik-Frey, 2007): "It is more than the *absence* of communication disorders; it is the *presence* of communication competence." In other words you should be focused on the presence of a positive workplace, not the absence of workplace bullying. I live by this quote, and you'll find that all of the solutions offered below are focused on creating a positive and civil workplace culture. Do that, and the bullying will go away. Bullies will either conform to the new culture or they will leave all on their own because the new culture doesn't suit them.

Beyond ending bullying, an added bonus is that civility is the platform for organizational success – it is absolutely necessary for an organization to reach its goals. Where there is civility, there is good communication and healthy employee relationships. Everyone is talking to each other, sharing ideas and feeling comfortable to be themselves. When you have good relationships you have good decision making, innovation and learning from one another. People are making better decisions because they feel free to talk to each other about their ideas and get



input from their peers. They are being more innovative because they feel free to share their crazy ideas without fear of being belittled or made fun of. People are also more open to learning from the people they get along with, literally. (Research has found that our minds open up to learning when we have positive experiences – in the field of positive psychology this phenomenon is called “broaden and build.”) When employees are learning and feeling empowered to be innovative, then they are engaged, motivated and loyal. Engaged, motivated and loyal employees come to work and stay at work, so they reduce turnover and absenteeism. When engaged employees are at work they are producing and providing customer service, which allows the organization to meet its goals and produce bottom line results.

The initiatives you can implement to reach a civil work environment are unlimited. This can be scary and exciting all at the same time, but hopefully this e-book will help you get started. No matter what you do, your efforts must focus on three areas: Policy, leadership and culture. You have to have a policy regarding a civil work environment so that you can enforce it, leadership always has to be on board when making a culture change, and culture must be the centerpiece of eradicating bullying because culture dictates behavior.



### ***Step 1. Implement a healthy workplace policy***

No doubt you have all of the required harassment and discrimination policies in your employee handbook – so you’ve already provided your employees a list of what they *should not do*. But have you provided a list of what they *should do*? When you remove behaviors, you have to replace them. If you tell employees not to do something, you have to offer alternatives. Therefore, implement a *healthy workplace corporate policy* - not an anti-bully policy - that provides information about what respectful and civil behavior looks like in your organization. (See the template healthy workplace policy provided at the end of this e-book.) This policy will also allow you to address behavior that may not be as egregious as sexual harassment, for example, but is uncivil enough to cause a breakdown in communication and damage work product and customer service. In other words it gives you the power to enforce respectful behavior.

In order to gain buy-in for your new policy, seek help from your employees in writing it. During your next staff meeting or harassment training, break your attendees into groups and give them 10 minutes to brainstorm what behaviors they would like to see from their co-workers and managers. Then ask each group to share their answers, and as they do so write them on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper. This is an important step in the exercise because they need to see that their desires and needs from each other are very similar. I’ve done this exercise in over 100 organizations of all industries and sizes, and the list is always of the same 25 or so items. Now that you have a list of behaviors employees have agreed to, put them in the healthy workplace policy. You’ll get

buy-in because the behaviors the employees are being held accountable to came straight from them. You'll also be able to use those behaviors for a variety of other things, as highlighted in some of the other steps below.

One a final note, remember that once you implement a policy you have to enforce it. See Step 7 for more information on that.

**Step 2. Get leadership on board**

Leadership must be transparent about their support for a civil work environment for it to come to fruition. Need help convincing them this is an important issue that should be addressed? Make a business case and point out the costs of bullying in your organization. Revisit the graphic that describes the damage bullying causes an organization (above) and figure out how to quantify some of the damage. While you can't quantify increased anxiety necessarily, you can monetize how many hours you've spent handling complaints about bullying by determining your hourly wage. If

you've spent 15 hours dealing with complaints about the bully and you make \$65 an hour, the bully has already cost the organization \$975 in your time alone. See the example provided for more ideas.

Leadership must also be held accountable for being an example themselves, being transparent about their support for culture change, and rewarding positive behavior.

Description	Cost
Time spent by human resources hiring replacements for people who have left as a result of the incivility	\$20,000
Time spent by five employees talking about the behaviors exhibited in the last meeting, after the staff meeting is over	\$1,000
Overtime costs associated with high demands of bully that go beyond normal working requests	\$15,000
Cost of lost client because employee called in sick due to fear of dealing with abusive behaviors	\$10,000
<b>Estimated total cost of incivility:</b>	<b>\$46,000</b>

**Step 3. Create a vision and values around a positive workplace**

Step 1 provided an activity for you to do with your employees in order to gain a list of behaviors for your healthy workplace corporate policy, but there's so much more you can do with those behaviors. As you look over your list, look for themes, and even group the words together among different categories. From there you can discern what people are really looking for – often something like respect emerges as a very clear theme, for example, or more positive communication. Whatever emerges as the dominating themes can be used to create a social vision statement. It is wise to get a group of employees to work on this with you so that the vision statement isn't coming from you, but from advocates for the employees. Gather a committee of five or six, and let them come up with something based on the list you obtained in Step 1. They should come up with a few options and send them out for a vote so that everyone feels like they had a say. The statement must be short, memorable, powerful and clear. Some examples include:

- Everyone is included.
- Striving to be the best, every day.
- Always focused on maximizing potential.
- We respect each other.

I know you're thinking, "my organization already has a vision statement and it's on our website." That vision statement tells the world and your employees what the organization is trying to accomplish. This vision statement, related to your culture, is an internal statement that describes where your organizational culture is going. Therefore this vision need not replace the one you have – it serves a different purpose.

In addition to using your list of behaviors from Step 1 to create a vision statement, you can use the list to create a set of values statements too. As you create your categories, or discern themes from your list of words, your values statements will emerge. For example, over the course of four, two-hour departmental trainings about respect at work I obtained about 60 phrases from nurses at a hospital. After categorizing these phrases, the following themes emerged:

- Gratitude and recognition
- Personal conduct (which we later renamed partnership to have more impact)
- Respectful communication
- Teamwork
- Positive experiences at work.

Using these categories and the phrases that fell within them, we created values statements. Using the hospital as an example, your values statements might look something like this:

- *Gratitude.* We acknowledge each other when we witness a good deed or excellent performance. We give praise, say thank you, and recognize each other's hard work.
- *Partnership.* We are polite, respectful, supportive and positive. We are humble and strive for constant self-awareness regarding our own actions.
- *Respectful communication.* We practice active listening and having an open mind. We focus on being professional, civil, and professional in all we say and do.
- *Teamwork.* We seek the assistance of our peers and when it is sought from us we are willing to help. We are inclusive of all team members, maintain personal accountability, offer positive constructive feedback, and standup for one another.
- *Create positive experiences.* We respect that we are all extremely busy and do not make assumptions about others' workload. We strive for a stress-free environment. We encourage each other in professional growth.

Again, you might be thinking that your organization already has values statements. If so, consider comparing the values statements you have with the new ones that emerged from your employees. You may find some overlap, which is great. All you have to do is make some modifications to include the employees' ideas. But if you don't, seriously consider the new values statements as they came straight from your employees. This is your employees saying, "this is how we want to behave at work" and that shouldn't be taken lightly. What good are the already implemented values statements if they don't resonate with your employees?

#### ***Step 4. Develop action plans***

If culture dictates behavior, then you have to focus on behavior to fix the culture. Now that you have a social vision statement that describes where the culture is going, and a list of corporate values that define the behaviors

everyone will engage in to reach the vision, now you have to create action items. These action items will dictate behavior change, and eventually you will see a change in your culture.

One way to create action items is to charge each department manager with this task. Provide them with the list of behaviors from the training, categorized into themes, and ask them to work with their employees to develop one or two action items that each person in the department will engage in. Don't forget to make the action items SMART – specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and timely.

Some examples of SMART action items include:

- Hold one open brainstorming session per month to collect ideas for healthy workplace projects for a period of three months.
- By June 15, 2014, collect information from each employee about what they are thankful for in their fellow employees, and hold a meeting to share what was collected.
- By March 31, 2014, participate as a department in a community volunteer project.
- Obtain personal pledges for positive communication from all staff not later than February 28, 2014.

The options for action items are really endless, so here are some ideas to get you started (remember all action items must be SMART, I'm just offering brainstorming ideas here):

- Start each employee meeting by giving praise to one another.
- Start a wall of fame in the lunch room where employees can praise each other.
- Charge employees to start a journal where, at the end of each day, they write down three things that made them smile or that they are thankful for from the day. (Research has actually shown over and over again that doing this simple exercise increases one's life satisfaction exponentially after a period of only three months, and even more after six months. In other words this exercise will spark everyone's satisfaction with life in general, which will translate into treating each other better.)
- Do a community project one Saturday, such as cleaning up the parks or beaches, in order to build teamwork.
- Send an email out to department staff with a list of all staff in the department. Request that they respond to your email with two things they are grateful for in each person on the list. It could be something general like a personality trait, or something specific about a project or issue that occurred last month. Combine all of the answers for each employee and at your next staff meeting, review them. For example, you would read off the top four or five things said about Sue, and then hand Sue the sheet of paper with all of her feedback. Then read off the top items for John, and then hand John his sheet. This way everyone receives something they can take back to their desk that reminds them others appreciate them.
- Charge each employee with finding a bright spot for the department (do something small for another employee, for example)
- Remind employees what doing good deeds feels like – ask each employee to do something nice for a stranger
- Set one performance goal that's a little outrageous and achieve it

### ***Step 5. Provide training***

When you establish a new healthy workplace policy and begin the process of culture change, you absolutely have to deliver a training around the policy so that employees know what the new policy entails and how it affects them, and so that they understand what the culture change means for them. What is the vision for the new culture? What behaviors will be required of them? What will happen if they don't conform? What if they disagree with the new culture? These are all questions your training should address.

Also establish ongoing training programs that include new hires and scheduled trainings thereafter. At the very least, training should remind employees and managers that they have a responsibility to contribute to achieving a healthy and civil work environment that does not tolerate bullying. At the very best, training should include skills such as conflict resolution, negotiation, interpersonal communication, assertiveness, empathy, stress management, leadership, optimism and self-examination. These are valuable skills that promote a healthy workplace and the "presence of communication competence." Expectations regarding proficiency in these areas should be tied to performance and career advancement and show up in employee goals and awards programs.

Supervisors and managers should also receive training about workplace bullying specifically, so that they understand what it is, how to detect it, how to handle grievances, and how to coach aggressive employees.

Leaders should be trained in skills that will ensure they will be setting positive examples. Training topics might include positive leadership skills and coaching uncivil employees, for example. Leaders should also publicly reward those who engage in positive workplace behaviors. Employees need to see that those who act in accordance with the new culture are being acknowledged and receiving benefits for doing so.

### ***Step 6. Update your performance management program***

As mentioned earlier, many HR managers believe bullying is really about poor performers who simply don't like being told that their performance is below standard. In order to avoid this trap, review your performance management process to ensure that you will understand the difference between a poor performer and a real target of workplace bullying. Do your performance evaluations require that managers set specific goals for low performers? What resources are given to underperformers to help them improve? What follow up is required from management? If performance evaluations do not have goals, resources and required follow up you will find it difficult to discern if an issue is bullying or poor performance. Don't let your performance evaluations be a tool that managers can use to bully.

Also ensure that your new training programs around positive workplace behaviors are included in your performance management processes. If employees are sent to a respectful communication course, for example, then hold them accountable for actually engaging in the behaviors laid out in the training via performance management.

### ***Step 7. Take grievances seriously and investigate them immediately***

The simplest way to address this step is to simply say that you should handle complaints just like you would any harassment or discrimination complaint. Assure confidentiality, investigate, take notes and collect documentation, and act accordingly based on the outcome. If the complaint is found to be legitimate the

perpetrator should be punished according to your disciplinary procedures. If the complaint is not found to be legitimate, the target may still need your assistance (a transfer, for example).

### ***Step 8. Perform periodic audits of internal communication processes***

Communication audits put an important perspective on things in that they magnify interactions that take place among people. Communication provides the framework for getting things done, and communication audits can discover potential areas for concern.

Among other things, audits offer a comprehensive review of communication patterns that provide information about the structure of the organization, effectiveness of communication, and employee loyalty. This facilitates strategic planning and learning the success with which internal information is conveyed, and of course detects whether some employees feel others are bullies (or bottlenecks, buck-passers, know-it-all's, chronic complainers). In addition, through interviews and ultimately implementation of some of the employee's ideas, audits are a useful way to develop participation and provide a vehicle for taking ownership in the organization - not to mention the simple act of performing an audit conveys intent to make changes.

### ***Step 9. Use 360° reviews***

Traditionally, employee reviews put managers into the position of high-powered judges, ostensibly telling employees if their work met company goals or not. The reviews trickle down from up above, with each person receiving a review from somebody higher than them. But raters may be careless or use appraisals for political reasons, and managers may vary in leniency and strictness leading relatively equal employees to receive vastly different marks. Of course, traditional reviews also provide the tyrannical manager a corporate-approved tool with which to keep pay and promotional opportunities repressed.

360° reviews provide each and every organizational member with reviews from everyone they work with including peers, managers, and subordinates; providing an avenue for managers to learn from the people they direct, rather than only those who direct them. Generally 360° reviews receive high employee involvement, have the strongest impact on behavior and performance, and greatly increase effective internal communication.

### ***Step 10. Avoid traditional conflict management as a resolution strategy***

Bullying creates an unhealthy power imbalance. Over time the aggression becomes more frequent and belligerent, pushing targets into a state of helplessness not much different than that of a battered wife. Therefore bullying should not be confused with conflict; conflict is disagreement and bullying is psychological abuse. Tread lightly if thinking about mediation, conflict management coaching or traditional communication skills training. They are generally considered inappropriate in a bullying situation because of this abusive power imbalance.

## **The Bottom Line**

Culture change is a long and tedious process. It will take about three years before you can officially say that you've really changed your culture. But, it will only take a few months to start seeing some results. One

government agency I worked with saw two of the worst bullying perpetrators quit within three months of us getting started on culture change. These two people saw very quickly that the social power they'd had for so long was quickly being eliminated as others were not just going to "take it" anymore. This made them uncomfortable so they left voluntarily. Good riddance; let them go tear another company apart. Remember that everyone is replaceable, so don't be fearful of pushing out a top performer because of change. If they're truly a top performer with your company's best interests at heart they will conform to your new culture. If they are the snag in your culture change and aren't leaving willingly, then hold them accountable to the healthy workplace policy and values and let them go through your progressive disciplinary process. Remember that civility is the cornerstone of your success, so you need civil and positive people in your workplace.

Addressing workplace bullying and developing techniques to keep sustainable change means only good things will happen. A proactive approach to eradicating bullying in your workplace can provide all sorts of benefits including reduced turnover, absenteeism, medical leaves, and costs associated with workers compensation and litigation. Healthy workplaces motivate and develop staff, minimize workplace politics, excel at internal communication processes and customer service, have better reputations, increase the quality and quantity of work product, reduce workplace stress, and overall have improved health in employees and the organization – to name just a few of the competitive advantages.

## **Does your organization foster a culture of workplace bullying?**

Reprinted from *BACK OFF! Your Kick-Ass Guide to Ending Bullying at Work*

Bullying behaviors often occur when the organization allows them to. If managers and leaders were to step in and address the behavior, for example, the bullying behaviors would STOP. Take this assessment to find out if your workplace fosters a culture of workplace bullying.

Circle yes or no for each of the following questions.

1. Does your organization acknowledge or give awards for effective communication skills?	Yes	No
2. Do company meetings start with an open forum, where people are allowed to openly share ideas, thoughts, questions, and concerns?	Yes	No
3. Are bonuses and other rewards directly related to positive evaluations of communication and interpersonal skills?	Yes	No
4. During training sessions, does your organization promote and emphasize a culture of respect and civility?	Yes	No
5. Is your team generally collaborative, where everyone feels free to offer suggestions and information to make projects successful?	Yes	No
6. Are yours and other employee evaluations focused on strengths and opportunities for growth?	Yes	No
7. Do your managers encourage employees to think for themselves, and trust employees to make the right decisions?	Yes	No

8. Does your organization provide training and other types of programs that focus on topics such as interpersonal skills, leadership, and teamwork?	Yes	No
9. Have you or a coworker made a complaint to your manager that you were being treated disrespectfully, only to be dismissed?	Yes	No
10. Is there unhealthy competition among staff?	Yes	No
11. Is your organization going through stressful organizational changes without much communication from the top about what will happen?	Yes	No
12. Does your organization strictly enforce and follow rules, policies, and guidelines in order to do <i>anything</i> ?	Yes	No
13. Do employees spend a lot of time complaining about “the way it is around here” or about management?	Yes	No
14. Are you and your co-workers generally stressed out about short deadlines, impossible workloads, and other types of workplace stressors?	Yes	No
15. Have you seen others yelled at, attacked, ridiculed, or made to look stupid without any intervention from management to get the behavior to stop?	Yes	No
16. Is feedback from your manager usually focused on what you’re doing wrong, instead of what you are doing right? Does this feedback lack suggestions for improvement?	Yes	No

Take a look at your answers. If you answered “no” to any of questions 1–8, or “yes” to any of questions 9–16, it is very possible your organization is allowing bullying to thrive.

Organizations that focus on respect, civility, collaboration, innovation, and positive internal relationships generally would not allow bullying people to behave that way. Organizations that have a highly competitive environment and leaders who do not step in when someone is being disrespectful probably have bullying. Organizations that focus only on what is being done wrong and how to fix it, and think about the bottom line more their most valuable asset—employees—foster a workplace where bullying is just a normal way of life.

(Please note that this assessment cannot and should not replace a corporate culture assessment or communication audit completed by a trained consultant. This assessment is meant to help you gauge what part your management and workplace culture might play in the issue of workplace bullying, but only an experienced consultant can conduct a climate assessment to determine where and why bullying behaviors occur.)

## **Template Healthy Workplace Corporate Policy**

### **Company and Management Commitment**

It is the commitment of this company and its management to ensure this place of work is free from negative, aggressive, and inappropriate behaviors, and that the environment is aimed at providing high quality products and services in an atmosphere of respect, collaboration, openness, safety and equality. All employees have the right to be treated with dignity and respect. (Terms are used interchangeably throughout this policy.)

All complaints of negative and inappropriate workplace behaviors will be taken seriously and followed through to resolution, and employees who file complaints will not be victimized for “whistle-blowing” or reporting others for their inappropriate behavior.

### **Scope**

Protection from negative, aggressive, and inappropriate behaviors extends to management, fellow employees, subordinates, clients, customers and other business contacts and expands beyond the place of work to off-site and work-related social events. It is the responsibility of all employees and managers of this company to provide a healthy workplace environment to peers and co-workers, where all communication and interactions are marked by dignity and respect.

### **Acceptable and Healthy Workplace Behaviors Defined**

Acceptable and healthy workplace behaviors are any behaviors that promote respect, positivity and civility in our workplace. They include, but are not limited to (*this list will come from your employees per Step 1 above, but here are some examples*):

- Using respectful, supportive, and encouraging language in all interactions, no matter the subject of conversation
- Questioning a peer’s position on an issue politely rather than asserting your position is the right one; listening to your peer’s position with an open mind
- Giving peers direct, non-personal feedback as opposed to criticism
- Expressing appreciation when a peer does something correctly and in a timely manner
- Respecting each other as adults and trusting their decision making abilities
- Approaching conflict with maturity and true desire for resolution, rather than as a fight or opportunity to belittle a co-worker
- Maintaining a positive attitude, even when you are having a bad day

### **Inappropriate and Unacceptable Behaviors Defined**

Inappropriate and unacceptable behaviors are defined as negative and even aggressive acts aimed at one or more individual and causing them to feel hurt, embarrassed, incompetent, disrespected, anxious, or depressed.

Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Excessive yelling, repeated emotional outbursts, berating others, using a harsh tone of voice
- Talking down to others or using degrading remarks or tone of voice
- Criticizing or talking down to others in front of a group; using a condescending tone
- Social exclusion or ostracism, ignoring others, silent treatment
- Treating some less favorably than others
- Undermining another’s work by giving impossible to meet deadlines or workloads
- Excessive monitoring of work or unnecessary micromanagement
- Arbitrary or punitive punishment without cause; inconsistent discipline
- Withholding pertinent work-related information; undermining another’s work by not giving them enough information to do what is required of them
- Gossiping or spreading rumors

- Manipulating a person’s job content; unwarranted removal of core responsibilities to make them feel bad
- Blaming others for things out of their control
- Acting “out to get” others; making threats; using intimidating tactics
- Any malicious behavior a reasonable person would find unprofessional, disturbing and harmful to their psychological health

These types of behaviors are well recognized as having damaging consequences for their recipients, the observers of the behavior, and the organization as a whole and are therefore not tolerated.

### **Management Responsibility**

Management and others in positions of authority and workplace representatives have a particular responsibility to ensure that healthy and appropriate behaviors are being exhibited at all times and that complaints to the contrary are addressed speedily. Management will:

- Provide good examples by treating all with courtesy and respect
- Promote awareness of the policy and complaint procedures
- Be vigilant for signs of inappropriate behaviors at work through observation and information seeking, and take action to resolve the behavior before it escalates
- Deal sensitively with employees involved in a complaint, whether as complainant or alleged aggressor
- Explain the procedures to be followed if a complaint of inappropriate behavior at work is made
- Ensure that an employee making a complaint is not victimized for doing so, and seek resolution of such behavior if it occurs
- Monitor and follow up the situation after a complaint is made so as to prevent recurrence of the behavior.

### **Employee Responsibility**

Employees can contribute to achieving a work environment which does not tolerate aggressive behavior at work. Employees should report what they see in the workplace as it relates to behaviors defined as unacceptable; employees are in a far better position than management to know what is happening with peers and co-workers. Employees should also co-operate with preventative measures introduced by management, and recognize that a finding of unacceptable behaviors at work will be dealt with through appropriate disciplinary procedures. Equally, a finding of vexatious complaints will also be dealt with through appropriate disciplinary procedures.

### **Training Programs**

As part of its commitment to encouraging positive and healthy behaviors, the company has established training programs for all employees and managers. Training is included as part of the new hire orientation, and thereafter annually as scheduled by the Company. Training will identify factors which contribute to a bully-free environment, familiarize participants with responsibilities under this policy, and provide steps to overcoming a bullying incident, including filing an adequate and informed report to the appropriate party.

### **Process for Investigation of Complaints**

The aim and objectives of a formal complaint process include a thorough investigation of negative, aggressive, and inappropriate behaviors allegations, written documentation from all parties involved, and resolution in a

timely manner. Resolution will include any number and combination of possibilities, depending upon the outcome of the complaint process (e.g., training, disciplinary actions, transfer of employees involved, etc).

Any employee or manager seeking to file a complaint against an alleged aggressor should take special care to ensure the complaint is confined to and consists of precise details of each incident of negative, aggressive, and inappropriate behaviors, including dates, times, locations and any witnesses. Formal complaints should be filed with your manager or with your Human Resources Representative (HRR), and should be documented in writing.

The person complained against will be notified in writing by the HRR that an allegation has been made against him or her, and assured of the organization's presumption of innocence at this juncture.

The HRR receiving the complaint or another representative from Human Resources will act as an investigator, unless otherwise specified by management. The objective of the investigation is to ascertain whether or not the behaviors complained of occurred, and therefore will include interviewing the person complained of, witnesses, managers and any other party that may be involved with or had witness to the alleged behaviors. All interviews will be documented in writing in order to maintain clarity throughout the investigation. The investigation will be conducted thoroughly, objectively, with sensitivity and utmost confidentiality, and with due respect for the rights of both the complainant and the alleged aggressor. The investigation will be completed as quickly as possible.

Upon completion of the investigation, the investigator will submit a report to management or another party deemed appropriate at the outset of the complaint that will include the investigator's conclusions.

The employer will decide in light of the investigator's report and follow up comments by the parties what, if any, action will be taken. The HRR will inform the complainant and the person complained against in writing of the action plan, and each will have the opportunity to appeal the report and/or the action plan. Appeals should include a detailed outline of the reason for the appeal in writing, and should be submitted to and heard by another party that did not participate in the initial report or investigation as designated by management.

Where a complaint has been upheld, management will follow appropriate disciplinary procedures and decide what action in regards to the complaint is necessary. The employer will continue to keep the situation under review, and may provide counseling for the complainant where appropriate. Preventative measures will also be taken to ensure elimination of the hazard in the future and reduce effects of the prior exposure.

*This policy does not serve as legal advice. As with any policy you implement, it should only be implemented after your attorney has reviewed and approved it.*

## Catherine M. Mattice, MA, SPHR

Catherine Mattice, MA, SPHR, is a professional consultant and trainer who assists organizations in developing systemic action plans to build positive corporate cultures. Her firm, Civility Partners, LLC, offers consulting and training in the areas of strategic communication audits, internal communication processes, conflict resolution, workplace bullying, sexual harassment, diversity, intercultural communication, hostile work environments, and interpersonal communication skills.

Civility Partners has had the pleasure of serving a variety of clients including the third-largest energy company in the world, the military, hospitals, universities, small businesses, government agencies and non-profits.

Catherine has presented her research and training programs both nationally and internationally. She has also made several appearances on news stations around the country, including FOX, NBC, and ABC, and she has been cited in such media outlets as MSNBC, *Inc Magazine*, *Entrepreneur*, *Huffington Post*, and *USA Today*.

Catherine is co-author of the book, *BACK OFF! Your Kick-Ass Guide to Ending Bullying at Work*, available on most major online bookstores. Some of her other publications include the foreword in the book, *Verbal Self Defense in the Workplace: Proven Psychological Secrets to Help You Beat the Office Bully* by Daniel Scott (Bookshaker, 2009); a chapter in the book, *What Every Target of Workplace Bullying Needs to Know*; an article featured on the cover of *HR Times Magazine*, *The Bully-Free Workplace*; and articles in over 40 trade magazines.

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