Bullies Hurt More than Just Feelings:
Don’t Let Bullies Push Your Business Around
According to a CareerBuilder survey of approximately 3,800 people in 2012, 35% of people feel bullied at work at some point in their life.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), found in their 2004 study that almost 25% of American businesses have bullying happening in their workplace, and that 11% of bullying incidents were committed against customers.

Some academic researchers have even found that as much as 50% to 75% of people are bullied, depending on the industry.
WORKPLACE BULLYING DEFINED

Bullying is repeated abuse that creates a psychological power imbalance and an inability for targets to engage in self-defense. It causes psychological and physical harm to targets and witnesses, and monetary losses to the organization.

Take note of a few things about this definition:

- Bullying is repeated. It is ongoing, pervasive, continued behavior. In fact, academic researchers, who have to quantify things in order to study them, define bullying as something that happens once a week for a period of six months. They’ve also discovered it often goes on for three to five years before the target quits.

- Bullying causes psychological damage. 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 very loud, overbearing voice and the other has no voice at all.

- Bullying results in an 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, don’t feel supported by their organizational leaders, don’t want to lose their job for making waves, or are afraid of retaliation. If you don’t have a policy about bullying, or talk about bullying, or let employees know that you know about workplace bullying, they are even less likely to stand up for themselves and each other.

- Bullying causes psychological and physical damage. Targets – and witnesses - of bullying experience stress, anxiety, depression, anger, frustration, distress, humiliation, embarrassment, discouragement, feelings of inadequacy, hopelessness, burnout and more. It’s not news that these feelings cause physical problems such as headaches, stomachaches, lack of sleep, and poor diet, as well as heart disease, migraines and IBS. A lot of research has even connected feeling bullied with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Do I have your attention?

- Bullying is costly. I’m absolutely positive you’ve never read an article that said the things I described in item 4 above create productive work environments. When people can’t function at top capacity the organization pays with a decline in customer service, production, quality work, innovation, relationships, communication, poor decision making and a host of other problems.
Manipulation is most often the weapon of choice because bullies recognize that yelling, for example, will get them in trouble while being passive-aggressive is hard to spot. Assigning someone tasks that are far outside of their level of competency, and thus setting them up for failure, is easier to hide than a nasty email. If someone calls the bully out, he or she can easily offer some excuse as to why the work was assigned.
WORKPLACE BULLYING IS LEGAL

Harassment based on a protected characteristic is illegal, but equal-opportunity harassment (i.e., bullying) is legal in the majority of the United States. Four states do have laws about workplace bullying.

Nevada
Nevada enhanced its school-age bullying laws (like many states have as a result of media attention on teen-suicides) to make schools more accountable for addressing bullying and students who bully more accountable for their actions. Nevada included in their law that administrators, teachers, faculty and staff are all prohibited from engaging in bullying too.

Tennessee
Tennessee’s law only covers government agencies and only strongly encourages them to implement an anti-bullying policy. If agencies have one, they are immune from legal recourse. The idea was that government agencies with policies against bullying will likely hang the bully out to dry when the target sues the bully in civil court.

Utah
Utah’s law is also for government agencies only, and requires that in alternating years they have trainings about workplace bullying, and leadership and civility.

California
In California, employers with 50 or more employees are already required to hold a bi-annual sexual harassment training for managers and supervisors. Employers must now include prevention of abusive conduct (i.e., workplace bullying) in that training. If you’re a California employer, check out this blog post for more information about the action items this law has created for you. In California, employers with 50 or more employees are already required to hold a bi-annual sexual harassment training for managers and supervisors. Employers must now include prevention of abusive conduct (i.e., workplace bullying) in that training. If you’re a California employer, check out this blog post for more information about the action items this law has created for you.
PUTTING A STOP TO WORKPLACE BULLYING

In order to put an end to workplace bullying, you have to focus on changing your workplace culture. I know that sounds daunting, and you were hoping this white paper would explain just a few easy steps to stop bullying, but it’s just not that simple. Workplace bullying happens because of the organization’s culture, and therefore the culture must be addressed.

LEADERSHIP

Leadership must be transparent about their support for a civil work environment. Need help convincing them bullying is an important issue? Make a business case by pointing out the costs of bullying in your organization.

Pull up a blank Excel sheet and start brainstorming. You can quantify how many hours you’ve spent handling complaints about bullying, for example. If you’ve spent 15 hours dealing with complaints and you make $65 an hour, the bully has already cost the organization $975 in your time alone. What other costs can you come up with?

Here’s an example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time spent by HR hiring replacements for people who quit because of the bully</td>
<td>$20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overtime costs associated with unreasonable demands of the bully</td>
<td>$15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of client who left because he was being bullied</td>
<td>$50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time spent by manager dealing with complaints of bullying</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated total cost</td>
<td>$90,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Another option is to conduct a prevalence audit. A prevalence audit is a low cost survey that will give you the opportunity to really understand where the bullying is happening and how it’s affecting your workforce.

In one company I worked with, the CEO didn’t think the bullying was “that bad,” but agreed to let me do an audit. The CEO was shocked to discover that over half of the organization told me they were thinking of quitting because of the bully. The CEO was also unhappy to learn that many people said they used to respect him, but that respect was on a steady decline. Needless to say the CEO immediately took action against bullying in his organization.

Email me at Catherine@CivilityPartners.com if you’d like more information on the audit.

**POLICY**

No doubt you have all of the required harassment and discrimination policies in your employee handbook - you’ve provided your employees a list of what they should not do. Have you provided a list of what they should do?

During your next company-wide meeting break your attendees into groups of four and give them 15 minutes to answer this question: How would you like to be treated by your peers and managers? (If your company is too large or spread out to do company-wide meetings, or if you just don’t have them, you can always pass this exercise along to the department heads and let them run the exercise in their own teams.)

After 15 minutes ask each group to share their answers. As they call them out, write them on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper. Or you can type them out onto a Word document that is projected onto a screen. This is an important step in the exercise because they need to see that their desires and needs are similar.

I’ve done this exercise many times in many organizations of all industries and sizes, and the list is always the same. We’re all humans, and we all want to feel valued by others. Period.

Once you’ve completed the exercise, go back to your desk and group similar items together in order to make a more manageable list. I often just start making categories as I see them, and then move bullet
points into the categories where it seems they fit. For example, you may notice a trend of bullet points that say, “acknowledge,” “praise,” “say thank you,” and “recognize others’ good work.” You can put those bullet points all into a category called, “Appreciation.” You may also notice there are several bullet points around communication, such as, “listen,” “use a civil tone of voice,” and “share information with everyone who needs it.” You might then create a category called, “Effective Communication.”

Now that you have whittled your own list down into something manageable you can use this consolidated list for all sorts of things, including your healthy workplace policy. You’ll get buy-in for the policy because the behaviors the employees are being held accountable for come straight from them.

You’ll also be able to use your list of behaviors for a variety of other things including corporate values, performance management, lunch-n’-learns, rewards programs, and more.

Check out this blog post for more information on conducting this exercise, and for examples from my clients about how they used their list.

**CULTURE**

Important to culture change is training and a strategic plan laying out the necessary action items.

**Training**

You must conduct training for your entire organization on the topic of workplace bullying. Teach them what it is and why it’s unacceptable. Tell them about the new policy and have them sign an acknowledgment that they received it.

Your training should also focus on positive workplace behaviors. Discuss giving constructive feedback, listening skills, and other tools for effective communication. In other words, don’t focus on what not to do, instead focus on what to do.

In addition to this training, managers should also get information on how to manage bullying within their own department. Teach them how to coach bullies, how to create a positive environment within their department, and how to “do” performance management.
Strategic Plan
They say it’s easier to act your way into thinking that it is to think your way into acting. In other words, get people to act differently, and they will start thinking differently.

To change your culture, then, you have to focus on actions. You can do that by creating a strategic plan that lays out what action items you and each department will take to build a new, more positive culture.

Sometimes these actions have to be unconventional. You want a new status quo, so you have to shake the old one up. For example, at Moz the CEO prefers radical honesty, and he writes a personal blog that details everything about the company, and often his personal life too. He’s found that people often chime in with their own stories, and that employees feel comfortable being radically honest about their work. In an organization like this people will surely speak up if they feel bullied, and therefore it would certainly not thrive.

In another example, new hires at Crowdfire are greeted with a bottle of champagne and a choreographed dance performance. Talk about collaboration! An organization that gets this much pleasure out of their jobs would never let bullying fly. If their amazing workplace is threatened by a bully, the bully will no doubt be removed.

What I’m saying is that action items focused on a positive culture will push the bullying behaviors out.
CONCLUSION

Bullying is a complicated social phenomenon and there is no easy fix to stop it. But the hard work will be well worth it.

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.
Catherine M. Mattice, MA, SPHR, SHRM-SCP

Catherine is President of consulting and training firm, Civility Partners, and has been successfully providing programs in workplace bullying and building positive workplaces since 2007. She has published in a variety of trade magazines and has appeared several times on national affiliates of FOX, NBC, and ABC as an expert, as well as in USA Today, Inc Magazine, Huffington Post, Entrepreneur Magazine, and other major venues.

Catherine's clients include the third largest energy company in the world, the US Marine Corps and Navy, aerospace, the public and private sector, universities, hospitals, nonprofits, and large and small businesses. In his book foreword, Ken Blanchard called her book, BACK OFF! Your Kick-Ass Guide to Ending Bullying at Work, “the most comprehensive and valuable handbook on the topic.”