

Bullying at Workplace and in Trade Union Organizations

Workplace bullying has been defined by Gary and Ruth Namie as "repeated, health-harming mistreatment, verbal abuse, or conduct which is threatening, humiliating, intimidating, or sabotage that interferes with work or some combination of the three."

This definition may be extended beyond the walls of the workplace to that of the organization. There are times when the actions of individuals who claim to be acting in the interest of the organization of which they are apart, undermines legitimate business interests when their personal agendas take precedence over that of the organization. Many of those in the trade union movement who tend to engage in this practice, resort to hiding behind the curtain of customs and practice and antecedents.

Whether at the workplace or within the organization bullying is a serious thing. The impact of workplace bullying is widespread, as it not only sours the relationship between the parties involved, by heightens tensions at the enterprise. The wider impact is felt where there is low productivity, increased absenteeism and poor morale amongst staff members on the one hand, and staff members and management on the other.

According to the findings published in The Wall Street Journal on research completed by a Professor at the Columbia University Business School and a doctoral candidate at the school, those who are guilty of using bullying at workplace "possess scant empathy when it comes to understanding how their behavior is perceived by others. For instance, people generally underestimate their own aggressiveness. They're inclined to view themselves in a positive light (a protective sense of self-esteem), and expect others to share their perception."

This behaviour is characteristic of what happens within all organizations, including trade unions. This manifest itself where egos tend to take root, with leaders and individuals beginning to assume importance and the belief that they are power brokers. The challenge in trade unions organizations is one of resistance of some to change, and to continue to live in the past. Archaic thinking along with holding on to traditions can help to cloud both judgments and reasoning.

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It would seem that the problem of bullying would escalate if there is not a concerted attempt by the leadership and management of workplaces and organizations to stamp it out. It therefore requires an embrace of the view that “Zero-tolerance policies can be established and enforced, but they will only be effective if actively promoted by senior leaders in an organization. Holding bullies accountable for their behavior with disciplinary consequences must start at the top of organizations, be modeled by senior leaders, and become part of the organization’s cultural values and norms.”

Accepting that prevention is key for any organization, preventative action is paramount. Leaders must be fixed on promoting mutual respect in the workplace and send a clear message that bullying and similar behaviors will not be tolerated. Organizations should educate their employees about workplace bullying and create a policy and procedures for addressing reports of bullying both fairly and promptly.

It ought to be known that the perpetrators of the act of bullying, are sending a clear message of disrespect for the individual or the process. This is a form of abuse which shows a lack of care, understanding, appreciation and tolerance. In both the case of the individual and the organization bullying can be frustrating, particularly when the actor (s) is expected to know better and can do better. It is a burning shame when the individual who is performing the act is a person held in high esteem by their colleagues and peers.

Taking a closer inside look at bullying in the organization, it jumps out at you that it is tantamount to not showing respect for the democratic process. There can be no defence for such reprehensible behaviour. While there is nothing wrong with mounting a challenge, it is how it is done. It must not appear that a robust challenge or presentation of a case should mean calling the integrity of individuals, the process and/or the organization into question. Neither should the hurling of insults and abuse across the table be entertained.

The training of staff at the workplace and the enforcement of standards can help to eliminate incidences of bullying. Leaders of organizations who recognize the importance of exposing future leaders to training, ought to be conscious that they should practice what they preach and refrain from setting poor examples for others

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to follow. The question is left to be answered.... Is it a case of do as I say and not as I do?