

Bullying in the Workplace

Arising from the behaviours being exhibited by students in schools within the western world, the discussion on bullying has become a topical subject. The nature of the behaviour is associated with individuals who attempt to abuse others by tactics that are intended to intimidate, threaten, insult, torment and or in some way cause harm to another. It ought to be understood that the act of bullying is not limited to physical attacks made on an individual, by is also to the verbal abuse that is inflicted, which has the effect of causing the individual psychological and emotional harm. Irrespective of what form the act of bullying is perpetrated, the general objective of the perpetrator is to deliberately misuse perceived power over an individual, who is considered to be vulnerable or weak. Based on this outlook, bullying may best be described as calculated and malicious behaviour.

Those who are bullied are faced with unwanted and aggressive behaviours. This is not limited to what happens in the school system, but the claim can be levied that it takes place within the workplace. As a matter of fact, it would be inconceivable to think that bullying is localized as a community or parochial problem. It has moved beyond these confines to become a major societal problem. One a daily basis, employees face the onslaught of psychological harm by virtue of being verbally bullied. They suffer at the hands of others who call them inappropriate names, resort to teasing and taunting them, making what some may call idol threats, uttering inappropriate sexual comments, engaging in acts of discrimination and harassment.

At a next level, individuals encounter what is known as social bullying. Basically this is about acts that are intended to tarnish the individual's reputation, character or relationship. This is categorized as inconsiderate behaviour, which usually takes the form of the spreading of rumors or by attempting to embarrass someone in public. Individuals who experience physical bullying are exposed to physical violence. Such actions constitute an assault on the persons. These can range from hitting or striking, kicking, slapping, pushing, tripping, spitting on or at the person, making mean and rude hand gestures. These are offences in law which warrant reporting to the police.

Bullying in the workplace can sometimes go unnoticed, but it is advisable that management personnel, senior and lower level employees maintain a consciousness

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that they are experiencing being bullied, if they are continually being disrespected, the subject of rumors, unnecessarily targeted and repeatedly made to look stupid or incapable of doing what is required of the individual. In this technological age where there is a wide use of online communication, persons can easily find themselves being the victims of bullying. They can be at the receiving end of offensive telephone calls, emails, whatsapps messages and uploads on social media platforms.

Researchers tend to agree that employees whether at the management or subordinate levels, do not report incidences of bullying. In many instances this maybe because of the possible outcome, as many of those who may be accused, are likely to be high level employees. Moreover, the average employee is fearful of threats to their job and career consequences. This response amounts to an accommodation of the abuse.

Where such absurd behaviour is allowed to happen unchecked, this opens the door for a greater level of exploitation and abuse to occur. It gives rise to a toxic work environment that can have an impact on the workplace morale, team building, worker productivity, employee disengagement, absenteeism and staff retention. Employers who turn a blind eye to this development, may wish to take a closer look at the fallout from not having a company's policy on bullying in place; and moreover, a policy that is enforced. Employees should be encouraged to report acts of bullying, with the full knowledge that they will be investigated and that the appropriate disciplinary action would be taken against offenders, if found to be guilty. Employers should always remember that they have a legal duty of care to protect their employees while at work, and that this includes safeguarding them against acts of bullying.