

Dealing with the Office Bully

Written by: Jason Orloske | December 13, 2017



Bullying. We hear about it on TV and read it in the news almost daily. Kids getting pushed around on playgrounds or cyber-bullied through social media. It saddens and angers us. We think it will get better for them once they're older. Bullying ends when people mature. But does bullying go away once we are in the workforce?

The answer is no, it does not. Statistics show that anywhere between 50-75% of employees are affected by workplace bullying as a target or witnessed it. According to the Workplace Bullying Institute (yes, there is so much an institute was created), **workplace bullying is a repeated, health-harming mistreatment of one or more persons (the targets) by one or more perpetrators. It is abusive conduct that is: Threatening, humiliating, or intimidating, or Work interference - sabotage - which prevents work from getting done, or verbal abuse.**

But wait, I graduated from high school years ago! Shouldn't bullies have grown up by now? Not necessarily. The workplace bully is usually not the weakest person in the office looking for attention, but more often the strongest. They can be a smart, tenured employee, or even

someone in a management position. They're skilled at manipulation and see everything as a competition. They will target someone who they feel is a threat; someone smarter in a specific area, has a higher EQ, or respected and liked more. Before you know it, you hate your job and despise going in every day.

But how do I stop being bullied? Well, it's a bit more complex than meeting them out back and roughing them up (though we'd probably love to do that). Here are four recommendations:

- **Don't give them a reaction.** What makes a bully happier than getting a reaction out of you? Find a way to keep your game face on and don't give them a reaction. Stay calm, even though I know from experience it's not easy.
- **Document.** Write down what was said, when it was said, and who may have been around to witness it. Be as detailed as possible in the event HR needs it for action later.
- **Get some help.** I was a consultant at a company where the director would put me and a few others down and damaged our reputations behind our backs. As a rule, consultants couldn't engage the client's HR department in these matters. Instead, we talked to another director who watched our backs and was happy to intervene. Though this person couldn't solve all our issues, they helped.
- **Call them out.** There are some people out there that don't even know what they're doing is impacting you. Let them know their actions are creating issues for you at work. Let them know their behavior is not okay and you're either taking steps to document it or will start if behaviors don't change. Follow it up with a conversation with HR.

Early in my career, I worked for a project manager who was the typical bully to those working on his project. He called me all types of names, loved embarrassing me in meetings, and talked non-stop behind my back. I finally discussed my concerns with HR, but they told me it was a "Personality Conflict" and to either deal with it or leave. Eventually, however, this person got so mad at our team he threw the project plan in my face and told me to do it better. Seventeen years later I'm in the project management seat and can promise, I treat my team with the respect they deserve.

If you witness a bullying event, do not be afraid to step in. Recently I witnessed a senior leader berating an employee in a way I felt was inappropriate. After hearing the employee called names, I stepped into the room and told the senior leader he and I needed to chat, now, alone. Once the employee left, I stated the way he spoke to the employee was NOT OK and we should be treating those who report to us with respect. I gave examples from the conversation I overheard and ended with the discussion by saying "we shouldn't bully our employees." Bullying doesn't end on the playground. It is unfortunately alive and well in the workplace. When you do experience a bully, don't react, document, get help and don't be afraid to call them out.

References:

About the Author



Jason Orloske

I am a seasoned project, program and portfolio manager with over 15 years' experience in the healthcare, retail, legal, and regulatory sectors. I believe that a successful project is more than just delivering on time, scope, budget and quality. It starts with a solid understanding of the requested project and ensuring it aligns with organizational goals and market needs. Through a governance process, I have worked with executive teams so only the right projects are approved, as well as agreement on priority. I have created a culture of success with project teams through well-defined processes, open communication with and among team members, and continual stakeholder engagement. I'm a clear communicator who can interact with executives and their teams about technology, business and financial topics.