

Wilkins Safety Group

Weekly Update Newsletter



Welcome to this issue - Friday 18th March 2011 - of our Update Newsletter

Please feel free to forward this newsletter to colleagues and friends.

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Bullying!

A predator is watching you.

Look around all you will; its camouflage is so perfect you may never spot it until the shocking moment when it has you all alone.

It passes you in the hallway at work every day. Maybe it sits in the next office or stands at the counter beside you. You've probably shared chitchat during coffee breaks, even dropped a confidence or two into its attentive ears. It isn't a rare species, either. As many as one out of every 25 people in the world is just like it.



This creature is known by several names: sociopath, psychopath, socialised psychopath, corporate psychopath, workplace bully, serial bully. And, if you are a competent person with integrity and a respectable work record, it wants to drive you out of your job.

Workplace bullying is one of the fastest-growing forms of workplace violence; it constitutes offensive behaviour through vindictive, cruel, malicious or humiliating attempts to undermine an individual or groups of employees...



But wait, you say. Aren't bullies just loners and losers? When we were children, wasn't there always a mean kid hanging around the schoolyard who bullied the smaller children; the sad, solitary product of a broken home?

Anyone can be tempted in a weak moment to bully and many people never develop good social skills, for instance children who grow up in dysfunctional homes and come to believe that abusive behaviour is normal.

The methods and behaviour patterns of bullies are the same whether the bullying is learned or pathological...

Most researchers agree that 'sociopath' and 'psychopath' describe the same basic condition: a complete lack of conscience. From there, however, opinions diverge. One school of thought considers the two terms to be interchangeable. Another attributes psychopath to genetic and biological factors influenced by upbringing, and sociopath to family and community factors, flavoured perhaps by a dash of biological predisposition.

Psychiatrists and other medical professionals have very good reasons to fine-tune their definitions for the purpose of making accurate diagnoses.



Workplace bullies are also very much a part of the social organisations on which they prey. Like other successful and dangerous parasites, they work from within and are adept at hiding their real nature from the host they are busily destroying. To keep this fact in the foreground, we would prefer to describe them as sociopaths.

Finally, there's a tendency to associate psychopaths only with acts of extreme violence, like serial murder, although they are quite capable of emotional and psychological violence as well. Workplace bullies can commit physical violence but are more likely to inflict psychological and emotional injuries, which are easier to cover up in a social setting.

By whatever names they are known, these creatures - it can be hard to think of them as fully human - never feel regret, never try to change, and will take their abusive behaviour to levels that are seriously dangerous to their targets and to the organisations in which they work. You are likely to know more than one...



How to Fight a Workplace Bully

Guidelines for fighting a workplace bully

Review your situation. Does your organisation have a policy against bullying? If yes, does it have a history of enforcing the policy?

- Who are your allies? Do you have a union? Is there a grievance procedure? Is there someone you can ask for advice?
- Can you afford legal and medical expenses? Services like psychological counselling may not be covered by your company health insurance.
- If you suspect you're being mobbed, can you identify the instigator?
- Will your co-workers support you? Or is the workplace so toxic that they will be silent out of fear?

Serial bullies don't change their behaviour - has the bully been disciplined before?

- reprimands
- dismissals with cause
- contracts cancelled or not renewed
- acting appointments terminated early or not renewed
- formal grievances
- complaints from clients, staff, or management
- criminal convictions

Identify the type of bullying. Remember, bullying is a repeated pattern of behaviour, not just one or two incidents.

- denial of information or resources needed to do the job
- mobbing
- unreasonable criticism, constant trivial fault finding
- overloading with work
- denying work
- transferring the bully's responsibilities to the target
- increasing responsibility while removing authority
- invading privacy, demanding personal favours
- constantly changing the rules and deadlines
- assigning demeaning tasks
- denying credit where it is due or stealing credit
- lying to or about the target
- insults, putdowns, public humiliation, ridicule
- scapegoating
- yelling, screaming, browbeating
- treating an adult as a child
- threats, intimidating words or acts
- denying reasonable requests for leave, especially compassionate leave
- gating (repeatedly demanding overtime work at the last minute)
- illegal acts
- Offences against The European Human Rights Act...

Bully Dirty Tricks

Here are some common verbal attacks that workplace bullies use to disorient and demoralise their targets, and what you can do to protect yourself.

"You need psychiatric help!"

All bullies try to make their targets feel that they are to blame for the abuse. Only a qualified medical practitioner like a family doctor or psychiatrist can make a diagnosis of mental illness. Demand proof of the bully's qualifications to make such a diagnosis.

That said; it is a sad and sorry fact that sociopaths are often attracted to the medical profession because it gives them both the high status they crave and easy access to vulnerable people. If you work in a hospital, doctor's office, or similar environment and a medical professional tries to make you think that you are mentally disturbed, be very suspicious.

Compare the individual's behaviour against a bullying checklist [available from our office]. A sociopath who has a medical education and who occupies a responsible, respected position will be very well camouflaged and can even fool other professionals, but a liar can't hide forever. Keep records. Ask your family doctor for a second opinion about your mental health, and look hard for another job.

"There have been lots of complaints about you and your work."

This is an attempt to make a target feel isolated and defenceless. Employees have the right to know about complaints: demand details! Also, no competent supervisor would fail to give an employee the chance to correct a problem. No competent supervisor would let a problem continue until there are 'lots' of complaints, either. Point that out. And remember, bullies lie!

"Your doctor/your lawyer confided to me that you're sick/in the wrong."

Bullies will try to make their targets feel utterly cut off from help. Doctors do not give out patient information without the patient's express written consent. Breaching patient confidentiality could mean the loss of a doctor's licence to practice medicine. Likewise, lawyers do not give out client information and could be disbarred if they did. Inform your doctor or lawyer. Their professional reputations are under attack by the bully, the same as yours...

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If you are an employer and have any questions about the topics in this newsletter then contact jon@jonwilkins.co.uk, or ask our HR adviser, Martin Royal on [01458 253682](tel:01458253682) if you are an employee you should contact your company HR manager and ask what procedures are in place for assistance, remember all information of this nature is strictly confidential and should be treated as such by all staff.