



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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Beating the Bully!

All about workplace bullying

Key Learnings

- Defining workplace bullying
- The impact of workplace bullying
- Steps to curb workplace bullying

It's been six months since Nancy joined a reputed MNC as a junior executive. She has been working in a team of three senior executives and has been doing extremely well. In fact she has been performing better than all of them. The top management has acknowledged her contribution. Nancy is very satisfied with her job. Yet she is in the verge of quitting. What could the possible reasons be?

There can be many reasons for an employee wanting to leave an organization. As in Nancy's case it has been the tormenting she has undergone in the hands of her seniors. Her seniors kept monitoring her all the time. Given a chance they put her down. Also they ignored and excluded her even during casual occasions such as during lunch hours. Nancy didn't know how to react to this kind of treatment. She didn't know if it was appropriate to report this to the top management and if they would take it seriously. Such is the case in many organizations.

As Taru Bahl in his article in The Hindu Business Line says, "unlike everyday conflicts at work, bullying is a long-lasting conflict. One or more colleagues or superiors continually harass one person thereby causing severe damage to the victim's psychological and physical health. It also creates an unhealthy working atmosphere usually intimidating the rest."

Know the bully's act!

Sometimes people find it difficult to identify a bully's act. This is simply because workplace bullying may not be obvious. For instance, Nancy's case was one of constant monitoring, a subtle way of tormenting her. As seniors their act of monitoring would be justified. However, such interference is not a welcome act in any workplace, which many people may not be aware of.

Examples of bullying may include

- Threatening and abusing
- Physical assault
- Setting impossible deadlines
- Belittling a person's capacity



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- Constant criticism
- Spying, intruding
- Intentionally excluding a person in a social situation
- Making fun of people
- Nitpicking
- Yelling
- Frequent change in policies, work procedure or guidelines

Bullying is all about power. It's usually the person in power who takes the subordinate for a ride. Victims of workplace bullying generally undergo distress in silence. Very few pick up the courage to confront it.

Bullying can have a great negative impact on people. For instance, in 1999 a man stepped into a public transit company in Ottawa and shot four people. It was later discovered that the man had been a victim of workplace bullying and he had wreaked his vengeance on the four people who tormented him. This is an extreme case.

Shock, depression, anger, frustration, vengeance are some common symptoms of victims of bullying. The negative impact on the organization would be visible in various ways such as:

- Fall in employee morale
- Increasing absenteeism
- Downslide in productivity
- Escalation of recruitment and training expenditure

Organizations must nip bullying in the bud for the benefit of the employees and the organization as a whole.

Charting a policy

Organizations could charter policies to prevent workplace bullying. Some guidelines are as follows:

- Define workplace bullying in clear terms
- Cite examples
- State the procedure to report incidents of bullying
- Promise and maintain confidentiality of information
- Enforce preventive measures
- State the penalty for the guilty
- Reinforce the organization's commitment to employee well-being



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Workplace bullying affects the employee concerned more than the organization. To avoid being victim of workplace bullying every employee must:

- Tell the person concerned firmly that his behavior is inappropriate
- Keep a written record of the date, instance and witness of the bully's act
- Record all emails and letters received from the person concerned
- Report to the senior authorities immediately

Harassment and violence are punishable offences. Every organization must foresee such offenses and take strict measures to curb them.