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WORKPLACE

Bullying Defined and What Companies Can Do

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If you're being bullied or your employee says she is, here's the right words to describe what's going on.

By Annie Finnigan

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What makes a bully? The [Workplace Bullying Institute](#) says it's "repeated, health-harming mistreatment" of victims by perpetrators employing such tactics as:

- Offensive behavior that's threatening, humiliating or intimidating
- Verbal abuse

• Work interference and sabotage "There's a long list of things one human being can do to bully another, ranging from eye rolling to extreme violence," adds Stanford University professor [Dr. Robert Sutton](#). There's also digital bullying—a growing problem for workers, says Fort Lauderdale, FL, attorney Eugene Pettis. "The medium invites instantaneous communications, often sent in the heat of the moment, that can be much more aggressive online than in person."



Dr. Sutton concludes: Bullying is any occasional or frequent behavior that leaves the target demeaned and de-energized.

What Companies Can Do

Here's an eight-step blueprint businesses can use to end workplace bullying, from WBI's Gary and Ruth Namie, co-authors of [The Bully-Free Workplace: Stop Jerks, Weasels & Snakes from Killing Your Organization](#).

1. Assess the culture, surveying staff to find out whether and how bullying is happening.
2. Create a policy to prevent bullying, one that has strong top-down support.
3. Develop informal solutions employees can use before bullying escalates to the point where it requires a formal complaint.
4. Create formal enforcement procedures to correct bullying and ensure personal and organizational accountability.
5. Provide restorative justice to targets, with bullies acknowledging their behavior and promising to stop it.
6. Deal with confirmed violators through mandated participation in anti-bullying clinics (such as the WBI's Respectful Conduct Clinic) or one-on-one sessions, followed by regular evaluations.
7. Get the word out, educating employees about the anti-bullying policy and procedures and how to use them.
8. Optimize accountability through a variety of measures, including having employees evaluate their boss's behavior (and using those evaluations as factors in determining raises and bonuses) and asking job applicants to provide references from employees they managed.

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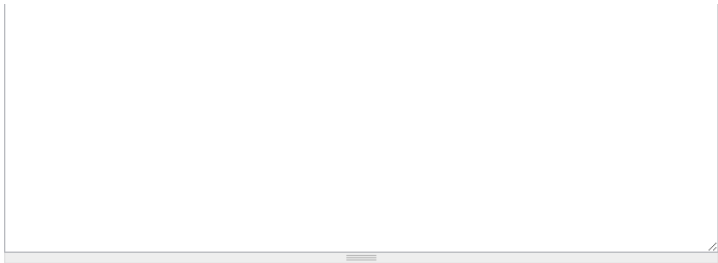
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