

Workplace Bullying: The Ignored Epidemic

Mini Feature By Dr. Lisa M. S. Barrow



The target of malicious rumours.

It was at the beginning of last summer that Ontario passed Bill 168: A New Workplace Violence & Harassment Law with the hope of curbing bullying and intimidating behaviour in the workplace. More than a year later, the legislation hasn't had the impact many of its supporters expected...

Benjamin, a 55 year-old, full-time, 30-year tenured employee at a local manufacturing company is regularly yelled at, berated and publicly humiliated by his boss.

He is never acknowledged or rewarded for doing his job well. Benjamin suffers silently as his boss continues to hurl insults at him and denies his worth and contributions.

Often when Benjamin's boss is berating him in front of his colleagues, he resembles a little boy standing in front of his mother, being scolded for doing something wrong. Benjamin's shoulders droop and his head hangs in shame. He doesn't dare look up. He stares intently at the floor,

waiting patiently for the round of insults to end. He feels embarrassed, helpless, alone, dejected and devalued. Though Benjamin would like to speak up about the treatment he is receiving, he is afraid to do so for fear of losing his job or being subjected to increased abuse.

What Benjamin is experiencing is workplace bullying and he is not alone. Millions of employees experience some form of workplace bullying on a daily basis.

According to the Workplace Bullying Institute, located in Bellingham, WA; (www.workplacebullying.org), 37% of employees are bullied at work.

Workplace bullying is an epidemic. It is literally killing or severely incapacitating individuals who have fallen prey to the workplace bully.

Workplace bullying is repetitive, abusive behaviour that devalues and harms other people on the job. It is not usually physically violent but relies instead on the formidable weapons of hostile actions and words.

Workplace bullying intimidates and torments the targeted individual, putting

his or her self-esteem and overall health at risk.

At first glance, bullying behaviours may appear to be innocuous; however, when experienced over an extended period of time, bullying has a devastating effect on the targeted individuals.

When most people think of bullying, they immediately envision children bullying each other on the playground. Perhaps some reflect on their own bullying experiences as a targeted person, a bully, or a bystander who witnessed others being bullied. Very few people relate bullying to the workplace – unless of course, they are the unfortunate target of a bullying boss or colleague.

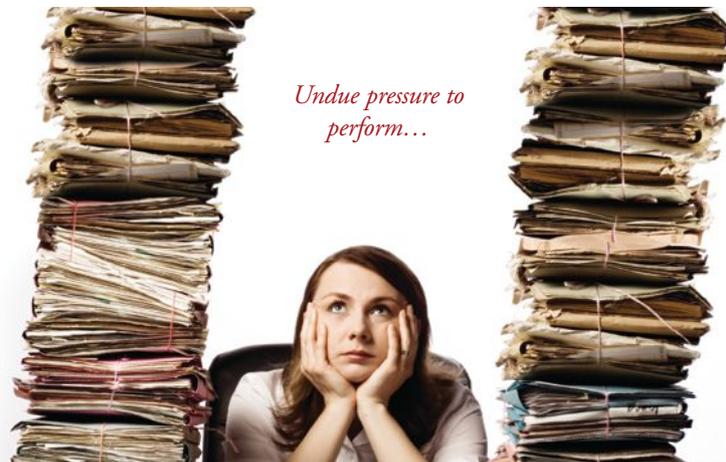
Bullies exist in our workplaces, just as they do in our schools and playgrounds. Some school yard bullies have grown up and are now workplace bullies; they are wreaking havoc in the workplace but very little is being done to address this issue.

Benjamin fits the profile of an employee who is likely to be bullied by a narcissistic boss who treats employees as disposable, inanimate objects.

According to my recent research findings, full-time, tenured, older, male employees are more likely to be bullied at work than other employees.

Bullied employees will likely experience public humiliation, become the subject of malicious rumours, and not receive acknowledgement for positively contributing to the organization.

The bullied employees may be ostracized at work and denied promotional opportunities. They may experience undue pressure to perform or be given unreasonable deadlines. If they fail, these employees are quickly labelled as incompetent and incapable of performing their jobs. The bully then takes steps to discipline, demote and terminate the targeted employees for poor job performance.



Undue pressure to perform...

The Workplace Bullying Institute research findings suggest that 44% of targeted employees lose their jobs as a result of being bullied.

Many bullied employees are left to fend for themselves as they have limited options available to stop the bullying. They may silently endure the bullying or may choose to speak up. If the employees choose to confront the bully or to involve human resources but the bullying continues, they may decide to take matters into their own hands. Some employees may pursue legal action against the organization and the bully. Others may seek to end the bullying by taking their own lives and the lives of others.

My research reveals that 7% of targeted employees are so desperate that they consider suicide or homicide as viable options for ending their ordeal.

These employees have exhausted their options within the organization. They have confronted the bully and yet the bullying continues. They have contacted human resources and are treated as if they are the problem; their concerns are ignored or are not properly addressed.

In many cases, employees feel as if the human resource representatives dismiss their concerns as being frivolous and unwarranted. Often the bullied employees are seen as the problem rather than the bully. The wheels are then set in motion to terminate the targeted employees but not the bully.

The Workplace Bullying Institute research findings show that only 1.5% of bullies lose their jobs, but 44% of targeted employees lose theirs.

Organizations are not holding bullies accountable for their actions; thus bullied employees suffer the greatest loss.

What can organizations do to address workplace bullying?

1. Create, implement, and enforce a zero tolerance workplace bullying policy.
2. Develop procedures for filing and investigating bullying complaints and for correcting bullying behaviour.
3. Provide annual bullying awareness training.
4. Provide support for bullied employees.
5. Commit to creating a bully-free workplace.

What can employees do if they are being bullied?

1. Confront the bully.
2. Document bullying incidents.
3. Notify human resources.
4. Seek legal and medical assistance.

Though invisible to others, the wounds caused by workplace bullies are real. If targeted employees cannot turn to others for help in healing their wounds, they may resort to drastic measures to bring attention to their pain. By then it may be too late.

Jodie, a 31-year old mother of two made the tragic decision to end her life because she could no longer deal with the bullying behaviour of her boss. Now due to a workplace bully, Jodie's children will grow up without their mother's love, touch and guidance. Their wounds will never heal.

Workplace bullying can no longer be ignored. A life should not be lost because an organization failed to address bullying. If left unchecked, workplace bullying has a negative effect on targeted employees, the organization and society. No one is exempt from being bullied. Everyone can do something to stop workplace bullying. We must speak up for those who are unable to speak for themselves. X



Dr. Lisa M. S. Barrow is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Business at Brock University. She is the author of two books, "In Darkness Light Dawns: Exposing Workplace Bullying" and "Hope For A Healthy Workplace". For additional details visit www.bulliednomore.com.

Essex VACUUM
The vacuum you'll flip over!



Rugs, carpets and bare floors too...
There's *nothing* this canister can't do!

5 year warranty.
We service all makes & models.

519-735-5999
www.esxvachtz.com

J. WHISTON
Financial Services Ltd.

#1 in CANADA'S LEADING PLAN

Group Benefits
For Firms with 1-50 Employees

AT WORK FOR SMALL BUSINESS



Jason Whiston
MBA, CFP, RHU, CLU

SINCE 1970
Chambers of Commerce
Group Insurance Plan

519-975-1414
jlwtd@sympatico.ca

Call us now for your complimentary quote

Are you a Biz X Award winner?



Then let everyone know about it!

Advertise in our November/December Award tribute and re-live your past glory!

DEADLINE OCT. 20, 2011

Special Congratulatory Rates AVAILABLE NOW!

Call: **519-977-2199**

Or email: deborah@bizxmagazine.com