

Workplace Bullies Column Hits Home

By Holly Culhane, Contributing Columnist



Last week's Strictly Business column about bullies in the workplace hit a nerve with readers. Several people called my office to report they have been bullied at work, and others e-mailed to seek advice. Comments about the column were also posted on the story commenting of *The Californian's* website and Facebook page.

From the reaction, it appears workplace bullying is not just happening to an isolated few. It is happening to many workers, including those in Kern County.

One call my office received last week summed up the misery bullies are inflicting. To maintain confidentiality and protect the caller from retribution, I have changed a few details and omitted the caller's name and employer identification.

After reading "Workplace bullies may soon get busted," the individual called my office to say my message "really hit home." The caller has worked for the same large company with a major presence in Kern County for many years, enduring bullying by a co-worker, who recently became a supervisor.

The caller has been experiencing a number of health problems, some quite serious, and believes a lot of these health issues are related to the bullying.

This person noted the bullying is happening to others, as well, but has not complained to the company's human resources department fearing retribution and job loss.

Readers with these types of problem are encouraged to seek help through their human resources department. If these problems are reported properly, human resources representatives can investigate. Some companies also have an employee hotline or ombudsman program for employees who are reticent to come forward.

If a company seems reluctant to investigate or punishes an employee for filing a complaint, the law generally protects an employee who brings a legitimate concern forward.

The caller was encouraged to talk to a human resources representative about the health issues believed to be linked to the bullying. They can give options to pursue and hopefully some peace of mind. Large firms often provide employees with access to an employee assistance program (EAP) that provide counselors to help employees deal with a variety of issues, including bullying.

Other callers to my office also noted the toll bullying was taking on their job performance, as well as their physical and mental health. Similar comments were posted on *The Californian's* website and Facebook page.

Whistleblower12 posted on the website that bullying is a "silent killer" among nursing colleagues. "This epidemic is becoming so widespread that everyone from administration to nurse's aides is affected by it."

Another commented they ran a hardware store for 10 years. One of the managers above this person was a former high school classmate. "He was a notorious bully in school and I ended up working under him as an adult."

"Thank you Holly," wrote a woman. "I sure could have used you in my corner a few years ago. As the youngest member (by about 15 years) of a senior executive team, life was pretty rough. From vicious public tongue lashings, to crude e-mails, to actually having my work sabotaged, it was a very tough time. "Why did I stay? I was a single mom that didn't believe in taking my children 100+ miles from their dad, just for a job. So, I toughed it out. I'm thankful to see this issue is coming to light, and hope it saves others from similar scenarios."

Those who posted comments on *The Californian's* Facebook page were equally compelling.

Jessica Erwin wrote she was repeatedly bullied at one of her jobs, but "I didn't do anything about it. I wish I had. Next time I will, though. Thank God it's being taken seriously in the workplace! Bullying doesn't only happen on playgrounds!"

Like others who commented on Facebook, Judy Harris said she reported bullying to managers, who declined to take corrective action. "I went to the top management with e-mails and proof of bullying. Nothing was done. It got to the point I would go home after work physically ill. Since it was affecting my health, I retired. The bully is still there, probably still bullying."

Parents and educators are urged to tackle this head-on with our kids as you witness such behavior in their formative years.

Employers must not ignore behavior that is obvious to many. Bullying is affecting company bottom lines. People who have called my office and posted comments on *The Californian's* website and Facebook have testified to the toll bullying is having on their productivity.

Business leadership authority Ken Blanchard says it best when he observes that employee productivity and employee engagement (or satisfaction) are two sides to the same coin. You'll never have one without the other.

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