

When the Bullies Come to Work

Dear Conflict Doctor:

I am a receptionist working in a large corporation. I really enjoy my job – except for the bullies.

One bully has been with the company many years. She even retains the help of other bullies to make sure they give me a hard time. They make jokes behind my back and look for any little thing that I could do wrong.

My boss won't act because he does not like confrontation. Is there a way to deal with these people and still keep my job and do it well?

Signed,

Bullied

Dear Bullied:

You describe a very typical situation of workplace bullying. It demonstrates how certain people can make other's lives miserable and make them feel powerless to make things better. The reason that bullying is not addressed in corporations is because of some underlying myths about bullying that prevents managers dealing with it promptly and appropriately. If not dealt with, bullying will not only harm you and future receptionists, but as indicated in your situation, it will create a culture where bullying is accepted. As a result, the workplace becomes toxic, people lose their motivation, turnover increases and morale plummets.

In my experience there are only two ways to deal with bullying – remove the bully or liberate the bully. But first you must be sure that the situation is truly one of bullying.

I like to start with the assumption that the individual is not acting intentionally and that

the situation does not involve a serial bully or socio-path.

Here are three steps to take:

Step 1

Diagnose the situation to determine whether it is a true case of bullying. Gather specific information about specific events and facts. Speak to other employees about the situation, not the bully. When speaking to the bully stick to the facts and do not get emotional or "sucker-punched" by their tactics. Educate yourself and others about bullying and the cost of bullying to individuals and the organization. Understand what bullying is. If it is intentional it will not go away without being directly addressed.

Step 2

Liberate the bully. The best way to "out" a bully is by letting the bully know that everyone knows what is going on. Because of a lack of empathy, most bullies will not understand the full impact of their behavior until confronted with it face to face. If others show the bully how it feels, the bully (unless a socio-path) will begin to understand and will begin to think before acting badly.

One of the best ways to do this is by having a safe and candid group conversation, such as a Corporate Circle (based on the book: *Corporate Circles* by Maureen F. Fitzgerald, 2006). Because bullying is not just a fight between two employees but involves several people to shift the situation, all those impacted should be involved.

(continued next page)



The best way
to "out"
a bully is
by letting the bully
know that
everyone knows
what is
going on.



