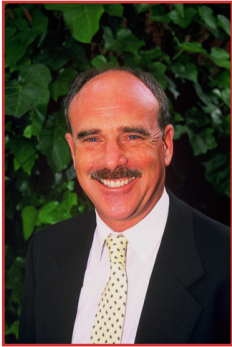


FIRE UP YOUR CAREER



Self-Defense for Bullied Employees

[By Robert Mueller, J.D.]

Almost half of all employees have been targeted by a workplace bully. According to a March 2007 study by the Employment Law Alliance, 44% of us have been bullied by an abusive manager or supervisor. Here are some more statistics:

- 81% of bullies are managers.
- 50% of bullies are women, and 50% are men.
- 84% of targets are women.
- 82% of targets ultimately lose their jobs.
- 95% of bullying is witnessed.

And the statistic that causes the most indignation? It's estimated that only 7% of workplace bullies end up censured, transferred, or terminated.

With new and better information, however, that last statistic can change. Employees no longer have to sit back and "take it." Employees don't have to quit. All targets or victims of workplace bullying can become what I call "workplace warriors," using some tried-and-true self-defense strategies designed to restore power, dignity, and options to the bullied employee.

Myths and Truths about Bullying Bosses

Before we get into self-defense strategies, let's clear up some common misconceptions about bully bosses.

Myth: It's a good idea to confront your bully so he or she sees that you're not afraid.

Truth: Personal confrontations with bullies are almost never productive.

Myth: The first thing an employee should do following a bullying incident is talk to management.

Truth: Management team members interpret any confrontation an employee might have with a boss as also being a confrontation with them, and without well-documented proof of a pattern of behavior, they will likely view the employee as the problem.

Myth: You should avoid your bullying boss whenever possible.

Truth: If bullies notice you're ducking them, they will not see this as sensible avoidance but as cowering behavior.

Myth: Don't look a bully right in the eye. It's provocative.

Truth: On the contrary, maintain steady eye contact. If that is too difficult, then focus between his or her eyes or on the bridge of his or her nose. One bullied employee even removed his Coke-bottle-thick glasses before a meeting so he could maintain direct eye contact with his boss without feeling intimidated.

Myth: Get personal with a bully to diffuse some of his or her anger and to show him or her your human side.

Truth: Bullies not only don't do the

personal, most don't tolerate it in others either. Details of your personal, spiritual, or emotional life are weapons in your antagonist's hands.

Myth: Seek help from the company's HR department. That's what they're there for.

Truth: HR can be the chilliest place any employee can visit and also one of the most dangerous. HR's allegiance is to the employer-and protecting the employer from legal claims. Approach rarely, with caution, and only when fully prepared.

Myth: It's good strategy to relate your story to as many coworkers as possible, right after an incident, if possible.

Truth: Unfortunately, your story has a negative emotional quality that can repel listeners. Allies must be identified and groomed carefully before you enlist their support. Moreover, it's better to be circumspect about sharing your story-write down detailed notes about it first. You can present it in a more organized and effective way later, when the timing is strategically advantageous.

The Seven Types of Workplace Bullies

As you've already learned, bully bosses are as likely to be male as female. All bullies have certain personality traits in

FIRE UP YOUR CAREER

common, however. For example, bullies are impersonal—if you go away, they will use exactly the same tactics on their next victim. They communicate only indirectly through the languages of rules and hierarchy. They often display status symbols and consider targets their trophies. They issue citations rather than employing give and take. And they are not particularly interested in business solutions.

Learn what to look for in these seven types:

- **Subtle bullies**—These bullies torment their targets with quiet but piercing techniques.
- **Abusive bullies**—These bosses hound a target employee without mercy.
- **Crude bullies**—These people throw their weight around loudly and physically.
- **Raging bullies**—These people intimidate everyone in the vicinity with their out-of-control anger.
- **Echo bullies**—Not normally abusive, these bullies mimic bullying behavior with their own subordinates.
- **Ghost bullies**—These bullies guide, mentor, and supervise lower-level bosses in bullying techniques and tactics.
- **Satellite bullies**—These are people of stature who undermine the target by contributing to someone else's bullying.

10 Self-Defense Tips for Bullied Employees

If you find yourself the target of a bullying boss, there are definite dos and don'ts in terms of how you should proceed. The most time-consuming aspect—and the one that's the most difficult and involved—is documenting the patterns of abuse and building and nurturing allies and supporters. You can find helpful advice and more detailed strategy information at www.bullyingbosses.com.

Nevertheless, here are the basic strategies that will point you in the right direction.

- **Approach your bullying problem like a work project.** Be methodical in how you behave, perform, document, and strategize. Take notes after an incident. Try to stay unemotional. Even though he or she is trying to make you think the opposite, it is the bully who has a serious personal and professional problem, not you.
- **Be a workplace warrior as you look for other work.** Even as you put feelers out for other jobs, dedicate yourself wholeheartedly to vanquishing your abuser and not being a victim.
- **Sweat the small stuff.** Document even the smallest incidents, which often become the most important, illustrating a pattern of bullying that might not otherwise be apparent. Teasing counts. Sarcasm counts. Ignoring or criticism counts. A very public glare or silent treatment counts.
- **Don't let yourself get isolated.** Every day, pick out someone you haven't talked to for a while. Have a brief but focused, attentive conversation. Bullies work hard to alienate targets from their coworkers. Don't let that happen to you.
- **Display self-esteem and broadcast positive attitude.** Pay attention to how your appearance—such as hair and clothes—is perceived by others. Have a comfy chair in your office for coworkers. Put fresh flowers on your desk. Decorate with tasteful art that will be pleasing to others. Make your personal space an oasis of calm and taste.
- **Try to stay in safe spots.** Your abuser is less likely to attack when you are around other supervisors, known allies (particularly upright employees), and customers or other outsiders of importance to the employer. Make a list of those people and places.
- **During a bullying situation, excuse yourself.** Don't beat a hasty retreat, and don't leave the building. Tell your abuser that you're late for an appointment with HR, for example. Or casually excuse yourself to the restroom. Never enter the restroom if you are being pursued by a bully.
- **During an attack, try distracting your abuser.** Pick up something physical—as long as it's not a threatening item—such as a critical file that needs the bully's attention or a note with an important phone number that needs to be called. Sometimes a simple distraction is

FIRE UP YOUR CAREER

enough to get him or her to stop.

- **Protect your personal information.** Tell bullies as little as possible about your life, family, friends, hobbies, interests, religion, and so on. Information about you gives them power.
- **Hold your cards close to your vest.** As you're building a case against a bully boss, the less you talk about your story to others at work, the better. Controlling what you say, when you say it, and to whom needs to be part of your overall, well-organized strategy.

Where to Go for Help

After you have documented a substantial pattern of abuse, made allies, collected witness statements from well-groomed

supporters, and done everything in your power to disarm your bully (such as putting a bouquet of flowers on your desk the day after an incident to show him or her that you are feeling just fine, thank you), then it may be time to seek outside help.

There are agencies such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the National Labor Relations Board, the Occupational Health and Safety Administration, and the Department of Labor. All of these have information at their websites that might be relevant or useful. There are unions and, of course, your HR department. There are also many aid and support groups that focus on representing a special issue or population, such as women or members of a particular minority group. Among the more notable organizations are The National Organization of Women, La Raza, NAACP, and the Asian Law Caucus.

There are also attorney groups like the National Lawyers Guild that represent multiple cases, as well as the ACLU, which specifically defends our constitutional rights, such as those associated with the First Amendment. Labor attorneys and workplace-conflict counselors are other good options.

However you choose to deal with your bully boss, be a workplace warrior, not a victim.

About the Author:

Robert Mueller, J.D., is an expert on labor-management law, a widely recognized workplace-conflicts counselor and consultant, and the author of *Bullying Bosses: A Survivor's Guide* (www.bullyingbosses.com, \$17.50).

EmploymentCrossing is the largest collection of active jobs in the world.

We continuously monitor the hiring needs of more than 750,000 employers, including virtually every corporation and organization in the United States. We do not charge employers to post their jobs, and we aggressively contact and investigate thousands of employers each day to learn of new positions. No one works harder than EmploymentCrossing.

Let EmploymentCrossing go to work for you.