



June 2017 Newsletter:

## **Workplace Bullying: Does Your Organization Have One?**

As children we all remember the kid who was considered the "bully". Typically they were always bigger than the rest of us, had a mean scowl permanently frozen on their face, and always had someone else do their homework. From grade school to high school, we all encountered a bully, either from personal experience, or from survival tales of our friends and acquaintances. Although we have left the playground for the workplace, the bully still exists. Though they have traded in their Chuck Taylors and ripped jeans for a pair of dress shoes and a suit, their attitudes remain as callous as ever.

Whether your organization has over 500 employees or under 20, your company is at-risk for having a workplace bully. Studies show that 1 in 10 employees around the United States will be subject to workplace bullying, which is commonly associated with aggressive or unreasonable behavior from colleagues. What this indicates is that your employees may experience intimidation, harassment, office ostracism, to offensive and taunting behavior from a workplace bully. On rare occasions, such practices may even escalate to physical abuse resulting in assault and battery. For most workplaces that have had the displeasure to host a workplace bully, the majority of bullying revolves around damaging a company project or personal property.

Considering the severe negative impact workplace bullies could have on your organization, it is critical that you establish solid interview and hiring practices that limit your exposure to employing a bully. Unfortunately, however, it is not always easy to identify potential or current workplace bullies. Nonetheless your company can take preventative steps to reduce your liability and legal risks by instituting clear workplace policies that strictly prohibit such behavior. Moreover, keeping your management team abreast of the signs that distinguish a workplace bully and the steps to take to remediate such situations aids your cause to prevent workplace bullying.

Depending on your state, there may be specific labor laws that govern the process in which you handle disciplinary issues in regards to workplace bullying. It is important to seek council from a labor law attorney in your state that can assist you in potential compliance issues.

However, when formulating your policies it is important to remember that they are intended to protect your employees and your organization from the damaging effects bullying can have.

Workplace bullying can be all encompassing to chase away your most productive employees, to instigating increased absenteeism from sick leave. Most significant, workplace bullying can affect your bottom line and interrupt revenue. Bullying may be considered by many as a behavior left to the playgrounds of elementary schools. But as more and more employees come forward and more lawsuits are filed against the bully and the organizations employing them, it is

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more important than ever for companies to take pre-emptive steps to challenge such malicious behaviors.

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