

The New Scourge of Cyber Bullying

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An insidious new wave of bullying has arrived, and it is important to be able to identify it.



Last week I delivered a presentation on workplace bullying to a group of volunteers in a large retail company in the UK. This group have volunteered to provide a listening and sign-posting service for anyone within their organisation who has been subject to workplace bullying, harassment or discrimination. They have all been professionally trained to give guidance to any individual who feels they are at risk, and their role is to be proactive and to provide an informal route for an employee if they experience such a problem.

Bullying issues are, unfortunately, experienced around the world, but not every organisation will make a commitment to provide this support to their staff, so the commitment and motivation from this team is to be greatly admired.

You may wonder why there is a need for such a team of people. Well, with many managers under pressure to achieve targets and meet

deadlines, it is inevitable that the high levels of stress they have to endure is going to affect them. Some managers, when under stress, may demonstrate bullying behaviour without being consciously aware of it, but that does not make it acceptable.

Bullying, of course, is perceived differently by everyone. What is acceptable for one person is unacceptable to another. What makes one person laugh, makes another person cry. That which may work in one culture, does not work in another.

Visible signs

There are many signs of bullying behaviour that are highly visible, for instance a person being publicly humiliated by their manager or an individual wrongly taking credit for someone else's work. However, there is another more insidious form of bullying that needs to be addressed: cyber bullying.

New technology has provided more sophisticated ways in which those inclined to bully, can harass and abuse others. Bullying by email, or blogging, over the phone or by text messages are all increasingly used by certain individuals to cause harm to others. Sending email or images to a colleague or friend which can be seen as offensive, is unacceptable.

Email threats may include relatively inoffensive messages in terms of content, but the implied meaning behind the message can constitute a form of bullying. An example of this might be where a superior is emailing instructions to a team-member with far more work than the recipient can reasonably be expected to handle, whilst other members of the team are not being pushed in the same way.

Anonymous comments

Posting blogs and comments on networking sites can also be offensive. Quite often a person may not experience any direct form of cyber bullying, but instead the bully may leave behind anonymous comments about them on the internet which can be viewed by others.

It is always unacceptable to post someone else's personal data on line without specific authority. This is an unwarranted invasion of privacy.

So what can you do about it?

- Save emails that contain bullying messages, and report them.
- Do not use your work email for anything other than work.
- Never post your personal details online e.g. address, telephone number or age.

Cyber bullying may be a passive form of bullying, but it is every bit as serious as other types of intimidation. It also has the potential to be more damaging as it involves a wider audience. It should be treated the same as for any other form of intimidation or aggression, requiring a risk assessment and appropriate procedures and measures to counter it.

As bullying and cyber bullying become ever more ubiquitous, it is increasingly important that it is identified early and dealt with efficiently by managers or others who have been trained to recognise its incidence and its effects.

It is unfortunate such support teams are needed but modern technology has thrown up ways through which bullying can be anonymous and damaging to the individual, and whenever this occurs it must be dealt with strongly and at the earliest time.

about the author



Carole Spiers' credibility is rooted in 20 years of success as CEO of a leading UK Stress Management Consultancy. As a world authority on Corporate Stress, BBC Guest Broadcaster and Author, Carole's mission is to empower organisations to achieve sustainable success through a healthy workplace culture where her stress management expertise is in demand around the world. Carole is a high-energy, motivational Speaker able to combine inspiration with insight. Her charismatic style has made her into a sought-after Keynote Speaker working with top corporations in the contrasting cultures of the UK and the Middle East. Carole is a VP of the International Stress Management Association. For more information on its Stress Management Training and nationwide Counselling service, contact info@carolespiersgroup.co.uk or visit www.carolespiersgroup.co.uk

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