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Ray Williams is the author of *Breaking Bad Habits* and *The Leadership Edge*. [more...](#)

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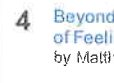
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Current Issue

The Silent Epidemic: Workplace Bullying

By Ray Williams on May 3, 2011 in Wired for Success

Workplace bullying has become a silent epidemic North America, one that has huge hidden costs in terms of employee well being and productivity. [Read More](#)

Thank you for writing about this subject!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Submitted by 09876 on May 3, 2011 - 5:33pm.

I really see a fair amount of this type of bullying in my academic workplaces since a few people with tenure have all the power and the vast majority of people without tenure have almost no power. This rarely gets addressed as a real problem either.

I saw a therapist to cope with my negative feelings, anger, anxieties from this situation, and I was told basically to "sell my soul" and to do whatever I was asked to do by the tenured professors. In other words, therapy wasn't helping me to deal with the situation. Some therapists even made me the problem because I didn't go along with the bullies.

Also, I agree that the more competent employees are the ones frequently bullied. In some organizations where my credentials stood out in a positive way, my bosses challenged me and bullied me more often than weaker employees. My independence and experience threatened them. What I found was the weaker the organization the more strong employees threaten the boss, the more prestigious and stronger the organization the more the boss is similarly attracted to prestigious and strong employees.

[reply](#) [quote](#)

This article is interesting

Submitted by Anonymous on May 4, 2011 - 6:22am.

This article is interesting but does not go far enough, focusing only on bullying by bosses. Like the first person to comment, I was bullied by a peer in an academic setting at a major university. This person was clearly dangerous and mentally instable and people at the highest level of the university were afraid of her, even though she held a clerical position. When I went to our boss and HR about her behavior, I was told I should learn to live with it, that if they tried to do anything we would "have another Virginia Tech on our hands". I was on medical leave for several months with stress-related illness and, when my doctor wrote a letter saying I was not to return to that position, HR made me the bad guy, insisting that I return or face disciplinary action. I resigned my position. The bully still has hers. I guess having a ticking time bomb working with students every day is a risk they're willing to take.

[reply](#) [quote](#)

Don't Agonize

Submitted by Anonymous on May 4, 2011 - 8:08am.

Organize! Bullying in the workplace is just a reflection of how the corporation -- and now even state governments -- bully workers into putting in longer hours for less money. If we can end this systemic bullying then the individual bullying will also abate because companies will learn that it is not profitable for them to promote tyrants and bullies to manage their workforce. For that to happen, people have to get busy organizing. And U.S. law makes it very difficult to organize a workplace so the organizing will have to be political also. The first step could be throwing the bums out of the Wisconsin statehouse!

[reply](#) [quote](#)

Bully Bosses and Bully Co-Workers

Submitted by Marilyn E. Veincentotzs on May 4, 2011 - 6:21pm.

As a writer, researcher and one who has experienced workplace bullying I must say the following:

Workers have more power than they realize and that is what many organizations do not want workers to know or to feel. The problem is more that workers are afraid to speak up and to confront their bully bosses and failure to do so allows them to continue their deviant behavior. Empowerment comes when you take control of the situation instead of allowing it to take control over you.

1. Document any experiences with bullying with the date, the place, who, what, when and where it happened.
2. Do not comment to others regarding your experience unless you know for sure they are not going to go behind your back and label you a trouble maker.
3. If the person or persons continue to consistently harass, bully, etc. you, then report it to your immediate supervisor if they are the one bullying you, then you must report it to that person's supervisor and maybe even one level higher (as I did in my case) sometimes one level up is not good enough because there may be two levels deep of bullies. Better to let upper management know what is going on.
4. Continue to write complaints to the management and upper management to keep them informed about the harassment. If the incidents start to escalate then the management would have the context and background to substantiate your complaints.

Many workers wait until the harassment becomes unbearable and then when they finally complain to upper management they are not believed.

Not speaking up will not save you from the bully; they thrive on intimidating people into helplessness. Standing up may at first bring more grief but in the long run if you do get fired it will be with your head held up instead of down. If they are going to fire you, nothing will stop them except someone who is wiser in upper management and that is the purpose in letting them know!

[reply](#) [quote](#)

Interesting...

Submitted by Anonymous on May 4, 2011 - 8:41pm.

Wow, several in academe. Ok so watching a Dept chair only read one out of a stack of 30 student eval packets and rest immediately forwarded to the Professors... The one they read was the youngest and most popular of the group. They were gone for about a year after that... the person's evals were not bad at all.. new Chair and they're back..

Interesting that the clerical could bully 'up' so well..

See that frequently as well. To point of students crying, complaining with no resolution and even further inappropriate behaviors, brandy nips at work, coercion to hand over computer program passwords to evade scrutiny of their work by Admins, etc, etc. Ill employees (bullied) not allowed to take time off for serious illness unless formal action is taken by FMLA form through HR office - one situation resulting in premature birth of a child at literal cost of \$50,000 to the institution's health insurance..

The monetary cost alone is enough for employers to take notice.

Good article, keep up the great work!

[reply](#) [quote](#)

Countering Workplace Bullying With Communication Tactics

Submitted by Dianna Booher on September 20, 2011 - 11:40am.

Granted, adults typically don't show up on the playground or cafeteria flanked by their buddies, punch you in the face, and dare you to slug them back, but there is definitely bullying going on in the workplace.

Workplace bullying tends to be less overt, and offenders may even label them "politically astute."

Consider these signs of workplace bullying:

Firing someone on-the-spot without cause

Pulling rank to get projects moved ahead "through the system" or to get special privileges at the expense of someone else's career

Lying about others' performance in an effort to stall their career or block a promotion

To read more--and learn how to combat bullying with communication techniques--read my article on the topic at

<http://www.booher.com/booherbanter/2011/09/20/communication-skills-count..>

[reply](#) [quote](#)

Only a fraction of bullying is addressed

Submitted by PolishKnight on October 4, 2011 - 7:26am.

Like with sexual harassment, workplace bullying in the article is defined in such a way to exacerbate, or ignore, many offenders. I found most bullying to come from co-workers who behaved like they were in high school and to form "cliques". Ironically, sexual harassment complaints are the most popular form of bullying among women bullies who apply it selectively. A member of their clique says something sexist, and they laugh at it. When someone not in their clique says something that can only remotely be considered offensive, they'll file a complaint with HR. In 25 years in the workplace, I have NEVER heard or seen a complaint in my workplace or those of my associates that would fit the original definition of "sexual harassment" (men threatening women with losing their job/promotion if she didn't date them or making her unable to do her job because she was extremely uncomfortable due to sexist abuse.) It ALWAYS is a woman filing the complaint over some minor incident to go after some guy she doesn't like or appears weak. Like I said, high school.

Kudos to Dianna for her FAQ. Here's mine:

- 1) Check to see if certain people ALWAYS eat lunch together and rarely invite any outsiders to "their table". This is because they're incessantly gossiping about co-workers and ultimately will craft a complaint to pass onto management



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2) Lookout for "private"/public conversations. Cliques will engage in loud banter in the office about sports, TV, etc. and even risqué topics such as dating and if an "outsider" joins in, they'll drop the topic. They either don't want to risk you turning them in for SH OR they want to wait to see if you'll start your own topic and they can take notes.

3) Never say no to them or confront them for bullying behavior. Even if they are aware of their behavior, they behave as part of a group and don't accept individual responsibility for their actions.

4) Don't bother with management. The bullies always get some members to chum up with management (such tactics are even part of the promotion ladder)

5) Don't bother with HR. HR takes it over to management...

6) DO get an essential skill and then quietly don't share it. If they come to you to try to learn it (in order to make you obsolete), give them out info as asked but don't volunteer anything. They'll always be one step behind. That single measure beat nearly every bully squad I dealt with.

7) DO take notes. Plenty of them. They get arrogant and make mistakes.

8) Turn them upon each other. This isn't impossible since they are naturally distrusting. One tactic is to take any request they make of you and give them a little info and suggest they finish up with one of their clique members. Cliques try to dump work on non-clique members and redirecting them upon each other will help create tension in their ranks.

[reply](#) [quote](#)

I Believe We Need to Stop Calling It Bullying

Submitted by Alice on March 30, 2012 - 2:26am.

The proper term is verbal abuse. I am the moderator of an abused survivors' group, and have written a paper entitled: Society's Hidden Pandemic: Verbal Abuse, Precursor to Physical Violence and a Form of Biochemical Assault.

Verbal abuse shreds ones' soul.

The Verbally Abusive Relationship by Patricia Evans is a book which I feel should be required reading for everyone on the planet.

[reply](#) [quote](#)

A few suggestions

Submitted by Frank Sargent on March 30, 2012 - 5:21am.

May I suggest that the following may offer insights into this subject, though not in the usual ways:

"The Gentle Art of Verbal Self-Defense" by Suzette Haden Elgin, not just for it's content, but because she wrote it 30 years ago. We knew about bullying and verbal abuse among and between adults, or at least some us knew, so why has it taken so long for America to confront this? Did we need shootings in schools and workplaces in order to make us open our eyes, see, and think?

Robert W. Fuller's work on Rankism, the ism of all isms, the root of their tree. He wrote "Somebodies and Nobodies: Overcoming the Abuse of Rank" in 1997. If we would uproot our isms, must we not go to the roots?

Abraham Maslow's "The Psychology of Science" 1966. Whenever we turn to science, hard or soft, science or "science," it might help if we remember Maslow's concerns, penned so long ago.

[reply](#) [quote](#)

Thank you.

Submitted by Alice on March 30, 2012 - 6:00am.

I might look into that book, however (after 36 years of abuse) and years of research, I found that there is no way to defend oneself (OR respond) to verbal abuse.

Disengagement is the best thing to do.

If we understand the "secret" of an abuser, (control) we have the beginning of understanding....they want/need....our attention and for us to continually defend/explain ourselves. They are vampires and constantly need their "fix."

In other words, it doesn't matter HOW we respond to an abuser. Why? Because they don't care what we think or feel. They are living in a "power over" realm, and not a "personal power" place.

I have been writing to the media for over 10 years to have a chance to speak of this horrific "shredding of souls" and will never stop. I just had a newspaper article written about me and what I am trying to accomplish.

[reply](#) [quote](#)

You're welcome.

Submitted by Frank Sargent on March 30, 2012 - 5:20pm.

I wouldn't necessarily suggest "The Gentle Art of Verbal Self Defense" to any particular person, not for use in self defense, not unless I knew the person sufficiently well. There are so many variations of so many forms of abuse, and so many factors

I cited Suzette Haden Elgin because she's been writing about this subject for so very long, and yet only "lately" does it seem that we, America, laypeople and professionals, may be ready to take it seriously. We'll see.

~You said: "They are living in a "power over" realm, and not a "personal power" place."

Precisely. This is why I mentioned Robert W. Fuller's work on Rankism. He understands just exactly what you mean, and has identified it as a common root to many forms of the mistreatment of others.

Maslow? Because he championed a better scientific approach to understanding people.

Finally, I might add Robert Jay Lifton for his remarkable contribution, the concept of a totalism. Now if we were to just apply that concept to what we do internally as well as socially.

All my best wishes.

[reply](#) [quote](#)

I neglected to ask for a way to read the article about you.

Submitted by Frank Sargent on March 30, 2012 - 5:26pm.

I neglected to ask for a way to read the article you mentioned, the one about you. Can you provide a link? Or the title and published source?

Too often, we pay too much attention to those who speak about experiences, and not enough attention to those who speak from experiences.

[reply](#) [quote](#)

Bullied Teacher

Submitted by Anonymous on April 22, 2012 - 5:31pm.

This problem is so much more widespread than the general public would believe. Everyone has their own idea of what it's like to be a teacher, but only real teachers know. www.thebulliedteacher.com

[reply](#) [quote](#)

Disney Bullies

Submitted by Anonymous on August 11, 2012 - 10:17am.

I recently quit my job due to workplace bullying, of all companies Disney says that they have a zero tolerance for workplace bullying, when I came forward, they said they investigated into it although all the witnesses I talked to said they never received any communication and Disney then stated that there was no workplace bullying. I was told that Employee Services was the department that investigated and when I contacted them to follow up they told me that they only deal with payroll and that wouldn't have involved that department at all. When I did finally resign I was blacklisted from the company. I can never work anywhere with Disney or any of the subsidiaries.

[reply](#) [quote](#)

Organizations

Submitted by Anonymous on August 13, 2012 - 7:23am.

Maybe if we all start placing the names of the organizations who are so abusive, that might help things. After all, who wants to work for a toxic bully organization, except for bullies. Maybe once that starts happening, we can know with confidence which organizations to avoid at all cost and they will sink their own ship.

[reply](#) [quote](#)

That is a great idea

Submitted by Anonymous on January 10, 2015 - 8:30am.

There should be a way to shame organizations for bad behavior since there is no legislation or other recourse to protect employees and remedy a toxic environment.

I left an organization that still allows a bully to go ramped because the bully is their main bread winner. Any complaints about the bully was in vain and caused the victim to either leave or eventually get fired since the leadership saw more value in keeping the bully than promoting a healthy environment for their employees. They talked about having a healthy culture in theory but they did not live up to it since they allowed the bully to take over and go as far as demand that other employees behaved in the same way as she did. The place was a nightmare and it really hurt my mental and physical health.

Perhaps an external third party organization with a voice that allowed employees to provide concrete examples of bullying would put pressure and drive some organizations to truly strive to become a "best place to work" since there is no legislation that protects employees and no true recourse to remedy a toxic situation other than leaving.

I have the technical know how to start such resource/website. I just don't have the legal know how to know all the legal implications of starting such resource that accuses organizations of being bully enablers.

But wouldn't be great to have a trustworthy resource when you are considering a new position? Just like a BBB rating for employers but specifically for bullying and their true environment other than meaningless culture statements that are not followed in practice.

[reply](#) [quote](#)

Workplace Bullying

Submitted by Anonymous on October 6, 2012 - 7:25am.

I have just left a job after many years of bullying. When, I finally decided I had enough, it took me a year to find a new one. My boss was horrible. She also had 2 other friends, who also bullied me. She was in a position of power and knew it. My experience caused me so much grief and distress it lead to extreme depression and affected every aspect of my life. I now have a new job, and I will report any bullying, as soon as it happens. I am a passive person, who has always gotten excellent reviews of going above and beyond. But with this situation, I never could gain her approval. I now can hold me head up high, and move on with my life.

[reply](#) [quote](#)

It's a different experience which I never wanted

Submitted by Anonymous on March 12, 2013 - 6:01am.

I have been worked with the Dutch (Insurance) client. I am from India & my colleagues were Dutch. Before joining to this Dutch project I had a very good idea about the Dutch people. I thought that in Europe transparency (in terms of recognition & respect for individuals) at work place is more as compare to India. But once I joined the project I found that there is a little difference in the workplace when I compare with India. In a meeting full with my Dutch counterparts I noticed that suddenly they start laughing on me because I asked a question(technical) they were not in mood to listen this. It was really surprising for me. Later they asked for the apology by stating that they didn't laugh on me but laugh on some other issue. What an irony!!! Later in several cases I found that if I suggest anything they thought I tried to find out the fault of them. It was really a surprising thing for me. In any Netherland govt. site I found that it has been projected that Dutch people are very direct, but my personal experience proves me wrong. My Dutch colleagues were also complaining about Germans & others. I do 'no why I found that French complains about Dutch & Dutch complains about Germans & others. Before joining this project I had a very good feeling about the work & the people of Holland. I thought that I will get the rationale work environment which is not always there in India but my experience proved me wrong. I also found the Dutch people (not all) are open to discuss any matter in open mind rather they also do pretend like Indians do. They also do not consider non Dutch people equally. Especially they think all Indians are the Indians what has been depicted in the movie slum dog millionaires. I am really in a deep shock, trying to recover myself from this shock.

[reply](#) [quote](#)

I wrote a book on how to overcome bullying

Submitted by Beejal Patel on May 2, 2013 - 10:08am.

Based on a personal experience

You can find it here:

<http://www.lulu.com/shop/beejal-patel/rich-in-peace/ebook/product-209899..>

[reply](#) [quote](#)

Workplace Bullying

Submitted by Anonymous on October 26, 2013 - 8:18am.

I have experienced workplace bullying first hand. It is so interesting how one person can disrupt a company. I had been with the company from the ground floor to nearly twenty years. And had witnessed the company's bully destroy the spirits of many. Although I made several attempts to discuss the situation with owner, he believed the differences would work themselves out (he is not one who deals with conflict and believes things will go away).

The bully in this company however was gaining more and more power. He would intimate, verbally abuse and threaten his target. I witnessed the bully's behavior over several years. He would make the co-worker so miserable they would either end up quitting or he would wear down the owner until they were terminated.

There was always a new target for the bully. The pleasure this guy takes in breaking the confidence of a person is frightening. Needless to say I became his next victim. My position held power and I was on the company corporate charter, something he set his design on. At first I ignored the attacks. But as time went by they increasingly became worse. I spoke with the Vice President regarding the matter multiple times, but due to the fact his office was located in another state he could not see first handedly what was occurring. Other employees/co-workers saw it but were afraid to speak up and when they did, well they would be attacked by the bully.

I contacted the state file a complaint against this guy but my loyalty to the owner/company convinced me that it would do more harm to the depleted moral which already existed. Looking back it might have helped out future employees.

After two years, my health became compromised, I had to undergo surgery and could not return within the six weeks allotted. I lost my job.

I must say all the stress went away. I felt a weight lifted. I miss my job but the circumstances I faced each day were not worth it. I am healthier than I have been in two years, my outlook on life is much clearer. About two months after losing my job, I received a call from the Vice President. He acknowledged the bullying and was saddened by the outcome. Perhaps more attention will be paid to eliminating future attacks on the staff.

My advice to anyone being threatened or attacked is to confide in your manager or human resource director. Do not engage in any attack from an individual (for it gives them pleasure knowing they have found your weakness). If all efforts fail you have choices, contact the EEOC. Document everything (I kept a daily journal). File a complaint against the individual and/or company but remember once things are in motion they may get worse until the claim is investigated then resolved. If nothing else start looking for new employment elsewhere.

No one should treat you with disrespect.

[reply](#) [quote](#)

There are still jerks and

Submitted by Anonymous on November 19, 2013 - 11:51pm.

There are still jerks and bullies at companies with "no jerk" policies. The bullies are just better at hiding their actions behind covert malicious gossiping etc.

[reply](#) [quote](#)

bringing the abuse back home

Submitted by Virginia Rodino on June 27, 2014 - 6:57am.

I just wrote about an abusive boss and bullying and how it doesn't stop at the workplace. Would be interested in folks' feedback on it: dearjohnnarron.wordpress.com

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