Workplace Bullying - The Action Plan

Bullying in the workplace has a significant impact on health and productivity. Many workplaces have a "it doesn't happen here" view of workplace bullying but it is often ignored due to fear. Bullying happens in all types of workplaces and includes a wide variety of behaviors. **It's important to recognize the behaviors and take quick action to stop the bullying and prevent continuance of these behavior patterns before they become the cultural norm.**

A 2012 SHRM Survey defines bullying as, "persistent, offensive, abusive, intimidating or insulting behavior or unfair actions directed at another individual, causing the individual to feel threatened, abused, humiliated or vulnerable. Workplace bullies and targets may be employees, clients or vendors of the organization."

The harm done to the target of bullying is tangible and includes:

- Physical harm- triggers stress response resulting in wide range of physical symptoms, hypertension, heart problems, digestive problems, and lowered immunity
- Psychological harm- depression, anxiety, self -deprecation
- Harm to social status-isolation, loss of identity and peer group
- Economic harm- many quit or lose jobs and are not rehired at same economic level

The **harm to the organization is also significant** and includes decreased morale, decreased productivity, increased stress, depression, increased suicide risk, lack of trust among coworkers, decreased employee commitment, increased absenteeism, increased turnover, increased workers compensation and disability costs.

Bullying is under reported for fear of retaliation and managers often compound the problem with poor leadership and lack of accountability because they don't know how to stop the bully. **When management doesn't act they are complicit with the bully and it continues unchecked.**

What can managers do to stop the bully? The organization must take the first step with a comprehensive policy that addresses bullying as part of their harassment policies. Training for managers is an important next step so they recognize the bullying quickly to stop behaviors before they become entrenched in the culture.

The **behavior of the leadership in the organization is key**. An organization should evaluate the communication patterns of leadership to ensure that it is consistent with the stated policies regarding harassment and bullying. It is imperative that top leaders embody healthy communication patterns that are congruent with stated policy expectations. Unenforced policies at the top management level leads to cynicism, lack of trust and continued bullying behavior at all levels.

Clear reporting, investigation and mediation processes and procedures that emphasize anti-retaliation provisions are an important part of the policy so employees can see a clear path to fair resolution of the problem.

The **EAP can assist** by being an independent support for the target and counseling services for the perpetrator to help examine behavior patterns and explore new ways of behaving in the workplace. The EAP can also act as an organizational consultant to help evaluate the culture, train managers in respectful workplace behaviors and assist in development of policies that stem future bullying behavior.

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