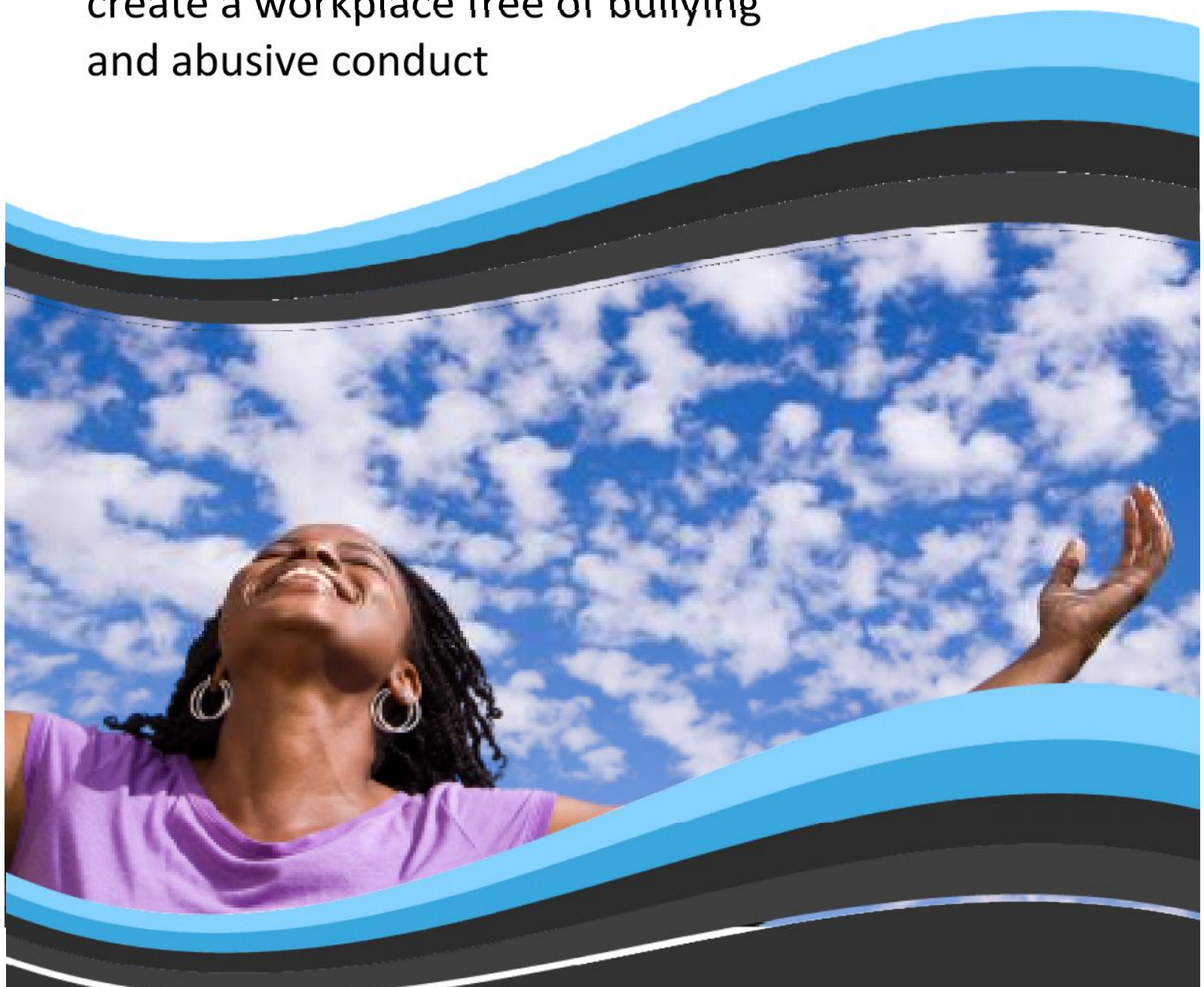# Seeking Civility

How leaders, managers and HR can create a workplace free of bullying and abusive conduct

Catherine Mattice, MA, SPHR

Co-Author of

BACK OFF! Your Kick-A$$ Guide to Ending Bullying at Work

called "the most comprehensive and valuable handbook" on workplace bullying by Ken Blanchard

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Seeking Civility

Introduction

Everywhere you turn it seems there is yet another story about bullying in schools and the resulting damage it caused the targets, the school culture and the school district. Every news station and newspaper out there regularly runs articles about politicians who mistreat each other and harass their staff and interns. Turn on the television and you will find an array of "reality" TV shows that draw viewers with characters who yell at and manipulate each other. Check out your favorite blogger's latest article and you are likely to find it full of comments from people who are just plain mean to each other and the blogger. As you head to bed and give your smart phone one last email check, you may find a nasty email from your co-worker or boss.

I became interested in workplace bullying due to my own experience working as the Director of Compliance & HR for a nonprofit organization. This person was my peer, also director level, and we both reported to the president. I noticed immediately after I started working there that Tom (whose name has been changed) was insubordinate to the president. During staff meetings, for example, Tom would interrupt him and say disdainfully, "No, that's not what we're doing, geez," or, "You're giving the wrong information," as if the president didn't know what he was talking about. Tom targeted almost everyone in the office, including me.

Tom was an uber-excessive micromanager, even to people he didn't manage and who were not in his department. He yelled frequently, and had a way of staring people down to make them crumble. He talked down to everyone. He made life difficult for clients and for the people who referred us business. In fact clients and referral sources secretly came to me for help in order to avoid him. He also ordered and managed the distribution of office supplies, so even something as simple as getting a pad of Post-its® was a traumatic experience.

Not only did I personally deal with the repercussions of this behavior but as the HR manager I dealt with the organizational repercussions too. I frequently took employee grievances to the president in order to get his assistance in ending the bullying but his response was always, "that's just how he is, people shouldn't let him get to them." Bullying is legal and wasn't against our corporate policy so my hands were tied; I couldn't help complainants. Dealing with bullying directed at me, and the turnover, poor morale and bad customer service the bullying caused the organization, eventually took its toll on me. My performance suffered and I was on the brink of depression, so after five years the president and I decided it would be best if we parted ways.

However, about three years into the job I had started graduate school. Early on in the program I had a class at San Diego State University called the "Dark Side of Communication" where we learned about negative human interactions (e.g., stalking, domestic violence, etc.). Of course we had to write a paper on something dark, so I chose to write about my situation at work. It was during this time in 2004 that I came across the phrase "workplace bullying" and saw that there was 25 years of academic research on the topic from around the world. As I read more and more articles I was mesmerized. Everything I was reading lined up with my situation. I was bullied.

After that, every ounce of research I did in graduate school was on workplace bullying. I even did my thesis paper on workplace bullying and dedicated it to "The Post-it® Nazi," as we called Tom. I have a Master's degree in workplace bullying, if you will, and have since made a career out of maintaining my expertise on the topic. I publish articles, appear on the news, serve as a subject matter expert in legal cases, and provide training and consulting to a variety of businesses. I have worked with third-largest energy company in the world; the military, the FBI, and several other government agencies; several hospitals and universities; and many small businesses and non-profits. I am co-author of the book, *BACK OFF! Your Kick-Ass Guide to Ending Bullying at Work*, with EG Sebastian. Ken Blanchard, the well-known leadership and management expert, called it, "the most comprehensive and valuable handbook on the topic" in his book foreword.

This book will provide guidance to any supervisor or manager, human resources professional, employee assistance professional, consultant, business owner, executive, CEO, or anyone else interested in ending bullying in their workplace. It is written from my own experiences as a consultant, and my goal is to help you understand what bullying is and the steps needed to effectively eradicate it.

What bullying is

According to CareerBuilder, who conducted a survey of approximately 3,800 people in 2012, 35% of people feel bullied at work and half of them don't report the bullying or stand up for themselves. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), found in their 2004 study that almost 25% of American businesses have bullying happening in their workplace and 11% of bullying incidents were committed against customers. Some academic researchers have even found that as much as 50% to 75% of people are bullied, depending on the industry.

Bullying is repeated abuse that creates a psychological power imbalance and an inability of targets to engage in self-defense. It causes psychological and physical harm to targets and witnesses, and monetary losses to the organization.

While this is a nice (long) definition, let's break it down.

REPEATED: Bullying is not about having a bad day and mistreating co-workers as a result. Single negative acts, such as shouting once or failing to invite someone to the company happy hour are fairly normal if isolated and would generally be called incivility. Bullying is repeated, ongoing, continual... in fact it happens at least once a week for a period of anywhere between six months to five years before the target finally gives up and quits.

PSYCHOLOGICAL POWER IMBALANCE: Bullies start with a light push on people around them – perhaps a snide comment or a short temper tantrum. Some targets of this behavior will stand up for themselves right then. Others will brush it off or chose not to stand up for themselves. Over time bullies keep pushing the later group more frequently and more aggressively, ultimately creating a psychological power imbalance. Targets realize their bully has psychological power over them and bullies realize they have psychological power over their targets.

This power imbalance is what makes bullying different than conflict. Conflict happens when two people disagree but both have a voice. Bullying happens when one person has a voice and the other is so eviscerated that he or she does not.

INABILITY TO ENGAGE IN SELF-DEFENSE: For whatever reason targets of bullying are unable to stand up for themselves, whether because they are conflict avoidant, don't feel supported by their organizational leaders, don't want to lose their job for making waves, or simply are afraid of the repercussions.

Often the question of perception is part of the bullying equation as every target of bullying will perceive the behaviors differently and, accordingly, will respond differently.

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHYSICAL HARM TO TARGETS AND WITNESSES: Targets of bullying experience anxiety, depression, anger, frustration, distress, humiliation, embarrassment, discouragement, feelings of inadequacy, hopelessness, burnout and more.

It's not news that stress causes physical problems such as headaches, stomachaches, lack of sleep, and poor diet. Indeed, researchers have even linked bullying to heart disease and other physical ailments, as well as post traumatic stress disorder and even suicide. It is important to note that even people who don't necessarily self-identify as being bullied (i.e., witnesses) experience some of these same health problems as they witness abusive behaviors, though to a lesser extent.

MONETARY LOSSES TO THE ORGANIZATION: If targets of bullying and witnesses to the behavior are experiencing negative emotions, they certainly aren't performing.   Thus bullying leads to poor quality work product, low job satisfaction, poor relationships, presenteeism, absenteeism, turnover, poor safety, lack of teamwork, eroded job attachment, greater intention to leave, and more. The graphic below provides a list of all of the things that go up in an organization, and all of the things that go down, when there's bullying.

Note workplace bullying is more paramount than workplace violence for two reasons.

First, psychological well-being is more greatly impacted and impaired through psychological abuse than physical abuse. Second, bullying occurs for longer periods of time than workplace violence; workplace violence will end relatively quickly because it is conspicuous and against the law. Yet, we have laws and corporate policies against workplace violence but not against workplace bullying.

Speaking of the law...

Damage to the Organization

• Anxiety; depression
• Marginalization
• Detachment from work
• Detachment from customers
• Discouragement
• Psychosomatic symptoms
• Absenteeism; presenteeism
• Employee turnover
• Wasted time
• Gossip
• Workers comp claims
• Health insurance costs
• Litigation
• Suicide
• Violence

• Quality of work
• Quantity of work
• Safety
• Self-esteem
• Job satisfaction
• Customer satisfaction
• Company loyalty
• Effective decision making
• Learning
• Innovation
• Physical health
• Community reputation
• Relationships
• Internal communication
• Ability to meet goals
• Bottom line/revenue

Harassment based on a protected characteristic is illegal, but equal-opportunity harassment (i.e., bullying) is legal in the majority of the United States. The first anti-bullying law in North America was enacted in Quebec, Canada in 2004, while other countries such as Ireland and the United Kingdom already address workplace bullying at the federal level. In America, only three states have passed laws regarding workplace bullying, but they are not as thorough as something like Title VII, the federal law that prohibits harassment based on race, religion or disability.

Nevada was the first to pass a law in 2010, however it only protects those working in the school system. Essentially Nevada enhanced its school-age bullying laws (like many states have as a result of media attention on teen-suicides) to make schools more accountable for addressing bullying and students who bully more accountable for their actions. Nevada included in the law that administrators, teachers, faculty and staff are all prohibited from engaging in bullying too.

Tennessee passed a law in 2014, however it only covers government agencies and only strongly encourages them to implement an anti-bullying policy. If they don't the target can take legal recourse against them. If the policy is in place, however, the target cannot. In other words, government agencies are not required to prohibit workplace bullying, but incentivized to do so.

Finally, California also passed a law in 2014. In California, employers with 50 or more employees were already required to hold a bi-annual sexual harassment training for managers and supervisors. Thanks to the new law this mandatory sexual harassment training must now include prevention of abusive conduct (i.e., workplace bullying), but the law doesn't actually prohibit it.

Bullying behaviors can be broken into three buckets: overt aggressive communication, humiliation and manipulation. Manipulation is the most likely choice for bullies to use because they recognize that yelling, for example, will get them in trouble while being passive-aggressive is hard to spot. Assigning someone tasks that are far outside of their level of competency and thus setting them up for failure is easy to hide. If recognized the bully can simply offer some excuse as to why the work was assigned.

Below are other examples of bullying behaviors. Any behaviors happening in your workplace will no doubt fit into one of these three buckets.

The Three Types of Bullying Behavior

Aggressive Communication
- Insulting or making offensive remarks
- Shouting, yelling, angry outbursts
- Going around co-workers in order to avoid communicating with them
- Harsh finger pointing, invasion of space
- Emails or other e-communication

Acts Aimed at Humiliation
- Humiliating or ridiculing, teasing
- Spreading rumors or gossip
- Ignoring peers when they walk by
- Playing harsh practical jokes
- Taunting with the use of social media, intranet, etc

Manipulation of Work
- Removing tasks imperative to job responsibilities
- Giving unmanageable workloads & impossible deadlines
- Arbitrarily changing tasks
- Using employee evaluations to document supposed decreased quality of work
- Purposely withholding pertinent information
- Leaving employees out of email correspondence or meeting invites

Why bullying happens

A performance issue?

Some believe targets of bullying are just poor performers who take constructive criticism and demands for high performance as bullying. While that may be the case sometimes, it is the exception. This issue is highlighted by the story of one woman who worked at a community college in my area. Diane asked me if I would meet her for coffee, and during our meeting she handed me 20 years of great employee reviews. She'd had five managers, a few promotions, and good reviews. Now on her sixth and newest manager, Diane's evaluations indicated she was a poor employee and due for a demotion and pay cut.

Perhaps Diane's performance had suffered recently, or perhaps this new manager was holding her accountable to higher level work - I don't know because I didn't work with her. However the performance evaluation lacked crucial components to make it an effective one and therefore Diane perceived it as bullying (when combined with many other behaviors she was experiencing).

If the manager really believed Diane was lacking the right skills or that her performance wasn't up to par, the evaluation would have included all of the things Diane was doing well, the list of opportunities for improvement, quantifiable goals and a timeframe in which to improve, what resources will be provided to help Diane reach these goals, how often the manager will check in, and what will happen if the goals are or are not met. Without that information, all Diane was left with is a document that says her performance stinks and there's nothing she can do about it – and that's bullying.

Much of what's online and many self-help books about workplace bullying claim that bullies are simply bad people, psychopaths even, and that targets are innocent bystanders. These websites and self-help books fail to take into account that targets are not inactive passerbys in their own lives and that communication and relationships, and thus bullying, are an *interaction* - a transaction that involves mutual influence. That means it takes two to tango and it is important to understand targets, bullies, and the system they live in, so that we can understand how to help both parties with their communication skills and address the bullying holistically. `Bullying is systemic and thus systemic solutions are required to eradicate it.` Before we get into these solutions let's discuss each party's role in further detail.

THE BULLY: It's easy to think that bullies are ruthless people out for blood each morning when they wake up to go to work. While that may feel like the case if you're bullied, it's just not true according to research. Many bullies are not even aware of the heartache they cause, and if they are they may simply not care. But that doesn't make them a psychopath. Read on.

Bullies often bully because they feel threatened by someone or something – it's fight or flight. They also lack social and emotional intelligence, communication skills, and the ability to effectively tolerate and deal with stress. This lack of caring for the target stems from self-preservation – they are bullying someone they perceive to threaten their organizational position. Perhaps they believe that target is a higher performer than they are, or they believe the target is incapable of doing the job well

and that feels threatening for them. I coached a manager, for example, who bullied another manager because she wholeheartedly believed he was incompetent. It wasn't her call to make because he didn't report to her, but his perceived incompetence drove this dedicated individual to so much frustration that bullying was the only way she knew how to deal with it. She couldn't understand why no one else saw what she perceived to be blatant incompetence. Feeling stuck, she resorted to bullying. Was that right? Certainly not, but in coaching we were able to work out other ways for her to communicate with him.

THE TARGET: Many researchers have avoided looking at targets too closely because they hesitate to place blame on them. But we have to acknowledge that bullying is a relationship, or a transaction occurring between two people. While we certainly don't want to blame the target or indicate they deserve to be treated with hostility, we do have to acknowledge that they play a role in their own situation. We are all influencers of our environment – even targets of bullying. If we can identify what targets are doing (or not doing), we can teach them the skills they need to become a more assertive member of the workplace.

Researchers have found targets are often perceived to be high performers and are thus well-liked. The target is therefore a perceived threat to the bully, and the bully lashes out with his or her fight reflex in order to ensure the threat is eliminated. Targets will respond with the flight or freeze response and the bullying ensues. While it's not entirely clear why some people are able to stand up for themselves and some are not, we could guess that it has to do with personality traits, communication skills, assertiveness, conflict management style, position within the organization, resilience, optimism, leadership skills, and a host of other such reasons.

ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERS: Bullying doesn't happen in a vacuum but rather in an organizational system. That means the `bullying influences the system and the system influences the bullying.` Bystanders are certainly part of the system and they determine whether bullying will thrive in an organization or not. Bystanders play many roles in the bully-target relationship, an abbreviated list of which appears in the graphic. (My book, *BACK OFF! Your Kick-A$$ Guide to Ending Bullying at Work*, with EG Sebastian, offers a more extensive list of roles.)

Some of the bystanders will encourage the bully, whether because they are friends with the bully and agree with the bullying, or because they fear being bullied themselves. These are the *bully's assistants*.

Other bystanders will become the *target's assistants*, serving as ad hoc counselors when the target needs to vent. In fact the Canadian Safety Council found that targets of bullying spend about 52% of their day doing stuff other than working – including talking about the bullying with other employees.

Some bystanders are *bullied non-victims*. Although they are bullied by researchers' standards they do not self-identify as being a target of workplace bullying. For them the bullying is normalized.

Outsiders are bystanders who simply don't see the bullying because they are at a different worksite or are far enough removed that it's just out of their sightline.

The Roles of Bystanders
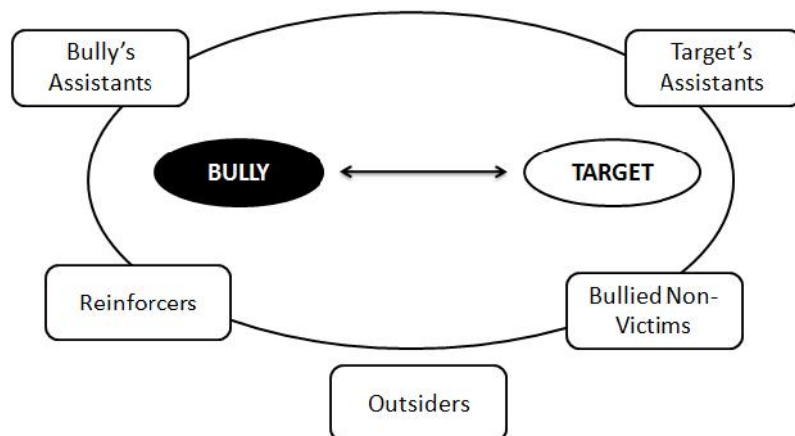
The final group of bystanders are _reinforcers_. Reinforcers encourage bullying behavior simply by not speaking up to the bully or to management. These witnesses are not "bystanders" at all, because that word alludes to innocence – that they are passively uninvolved. On the contrary, bystanders make a conscious choice not to stand up to bad behavior and are therefore actively involved in, and reinforcing, workplace bullying.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE: Organizational culture is the way an organization's members think, act, and understand the world around them. You might say it is simply, "the way it is around here." Culture dictates behavior, and there are several reasons culture may dictate that bullying behavior is acceptable. Researchers have found, for example, that numerous tenured employees, organizational change, ambiguity in work responsibilities, high competition, bureaucracy, well-educated employees, and "weak leadership" could all allow bullying to thrive.

Understanding that organizational culture plays a role in bullying is important because it highlights the fact that bullying doesn't occur between two people – the entire department, if not the entire organization, is a part of the problem. This means that simply punishing the bully or transferring the target to a different department isn't going to effectively eradicate bullying altogether. Solutions must be systemic and holistic in order to get at the culture, and that's what we'll discuss next.

This book offers ten steps you can take to reach a civil work environment. These are just ten suggestions out of hundreds of options - which can be scary and exciting all at the same time. Let this book be your starting point, and go from there. But no matter what you do, your efforts must focus on three areas: policy, leadership, and culture.

Areas of Focus for Building a Civil Workplace Culture
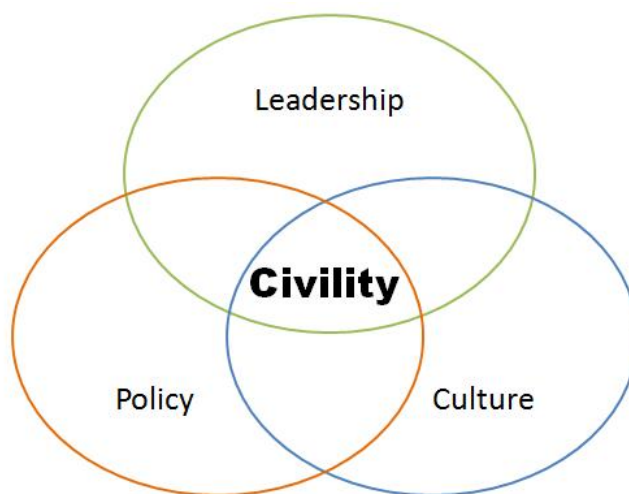
10 Steps to Civility

Once I got out of graduate school I founded the website NoWorkplaceBullies.com. At the time it spoke to what I was trying to accomplish – end bullying. As I worked with clients I realized I wasn't trying to end bullying at all, I was creating a positive workplace. This is an important distinction - you can't tell employees what not to do if you're not going to provide alternatives. Employees can't do a don't. If you tell them, "don't bully" you've left them with nothing to accomplish other than to not do something. If you tell employees, "do be respectful to each other" now you've given them a goal that is possible to accomplish (and measure).

One of my favorite quotes is from the book, *Positive Organizational Behavior* (Quick & Macik-Frey, 2007): "It is more than the *absence* of communication disorders; it is the *presence* of communication competence." In other words you should be focused on the presence of a positive workplace (e.g., civility), not the absence of workplace bullying. Focus on the later and you're left with a hole. Focus on the former and you have something to strive for. Thus you'll find that all of the solutions offered in this book are focused on creating a positive and civil workplace culture. Do that, and the bullying (and harassment and discrimination) will go away. The social pressure will force bullies to conform to the new culture, or they will leave your organization all on their own whether by quitting or through your step-disciplinary procedure.

Civility is the platform for organizational success – it is absolutely necessary for an organization to reach its goals. Where there is civility, there is good communication and healthy employee relationships. Good relationships facilitate good decision making, and empower innovation and learning. (No one is innovating or learning when they are in fear.) When employees are feeling empowered they are engaged, motivated and loyal, and so they come to work, produce and provide customer service. Only then can the organization meet its goals and impact your bottom line.

Bottom Line Impact

Meet Organizational Goals

Productivity & Customer Service

Reduced Turnover and Absenteeism

Engaged, Motivated & Loyal Employees

Good Decision Making; Innovation; Learning

Effective Communication and Relationships

Civil and Safe Workplace

Step 1. Get Leadership On Board

Leadership must be transparent about their support for a civil work environment for it to come to fruition. Need help convincing them bullying is an important issue? Make a business case by pointing out the costs of bullying in your organization.

Revisit the graphic in this book that describes the damage bullying causes and figure out how to quantify it. While you can't quantify everything, you can quantify how many hours you've spent handling complaints about bullying, for example. If you've spent 15 hours dealing with complaints and you make $65 an hour, the bully has already cost the organization $975 in your time alone. See the example provided below for more ideas.

Description	Cost
Time spent by HR hiring replacements for people who quit because of bully	$20,000
Overtime costs associated with unreasonable demands of bully	$15,000
Cost of client who left because he was being bullied	$50,000
Time spent by manager dealing with complaints of bullying	$5,000
Estimated total cost of bullying	**$90,000**

You might also try tying bullying into your already existent risk management program.

Step 2. Implement a Healthy Workplace Policy

No doubt you have all of the required harassment and discrimination policies in your employee handbook - you've provided your employees a list of what they should not do. Have you provided a list of what they *should do*? If you tell employees not to do something, you have to offer alternatives.

Implement a *healthy workplace corporate policy* (not an anti-bullying policy) that provides information about what respectful and civil behavior looks like in your organization.

See the template healthy workplace policy provided at the end of this book for ideas on what your policy might entail. Your policy will allow you to address bad behavior that extends beyond harassment and discrimination of protected classes. Some might suggest you include bullying in your harassment and discrimination policies, but I know several attorneys who would advise against doing so simply because one set of behaviors is illegal while the other is not. And as I indicated previously, the goal of your new policy is to create a positive workplace – something your harassment and discrimination policies probably do not do.

In order to gain buy-in for your new policy, seek help from your employees to write it. During your next staff meeting or harassment training, break your attendees into groups and give them 10 minutes to brainstorm what behaviors

The 10 Steps to Civility:

1. Get leadership on board
2. Implement a healthy workplace policy
3. Create a vision and values
4. Develop an action plan
5. Provide training
6. Review and update performance management
7. Use 360 degree reviews
8. Take grievances seriously
9. Conduct assessments
10. Lather, rinse, repeat

they would like to see from their co-workers and managers.

Then ask each group to share their answers, and as they do so write them on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper. This is an important step in the exercise because they need to see that their desires and needs are very similar.

I've done this exercise many times in many organizations of all industries and sizes, and while the list is always of the same 15-20 items there is value in employees creating it themselves. Now that you have a list of behaviors employees have agreed to, put them in the healthy workplace policy. You'll get buy-in because the behaviors the employees are being held accountable to came straight from them. You'll also be able to use those behaviors for a variety of other things, as highlighted in the next steps. Finally, remember that once you implement a policy you have to enforce it.

Step 3. Create a Social Vision and Corresponding Values

As you look over your list, look for themes and group similar items together. From there you can discern what people are really looking for – often something like respect emerges as a very clear theme, for example, or positive communication. Whatever emerges as the dominating themes can be used to create a social vision statement. It is wise to get a group of employees to work on this with you so that the vision statement isn't coming from you, but from advocates for the employees. Gather a committee of five or six, and let them come up with something. They should come up with a few options and send them out for a vote so that everyone feels like they had a say. The statement must be short, memorable, powerful and clear. Some examples include:

- Keep it weird. (Method cleaning and household products)
- Don't be evil. (Google)
- Everyone is included.
- Striving to be the best, every day.
- Always focused on maximizing potential.
- Always respecting each other.
- A place for us to thrive.

You might be thinking, "my organization already has a vision statement on our website." That vision statement tells the world and your employees what the organization is trying to accomplish. The vision statement I'm talking about, related to your culture, is an internal statement that describes where your organizational culture is going. This vision need not replace the one you have – it serves a different purpose.

In addition to using your list of behaviors to create a vision statement, you can use the list to create a set of values statements. As you create your categories, or discern themes from your list of words, your values statements will emerge.

For example, over the course of four, two-hour departmental trainings about respect at work I obtained about 60 phrases from nurses at a hospital. After categorizing these phrases into groups of similar ideas, the following five themes emerged:

- Gratitude and recognition

> **Vision, Values and Actions:**
>
> A social vision statement defines what the organization's culture will be in the future.
>
> Values statements define how people will behave in order to achieve the social vision.
>
> Action plans are a to-do list of tasks that will allow your organization to achieve the social vision.

- Personal conduct (which we later renamed partnership to have more impact)
- Respectful communication
- Teamwork
- Develop positive experiences at work

Using these categories and the phrases that fell within them, we created values statements:

Gratitude. We acknowledge each other when we witness a good deed or excellent performance. We give praise, say thank you, and recognize each other's hard work.

Partnership. We are polite, respectful, supportive and positive. We are humble and strive for constant self-awareness regarding our own actions.

Respectful communication. We practice active listening and having an open mind. We focus on being respectful, civil and professional in all we say and do.

Teamwork. We seek the assistance of our peers and when it is sought from us we are willing to help. We are inclusive of all team members, maintain personal accountability, offer positive constructive feedback, and standup for one another.

Create positive experiences. We strive for a stress-free environment. We encourage each other in professional growth. We never make assumptions. We focus on ensuring positive interactions with everyone we come in contact with.

You might be thinking that your organization already has values statements. If so, consider comparing the values statements you have with the new ones that emerged from your employees. You may find some overlap, which is great. All you have to do is make some modifications to include the employees' ideas.

If none of them match up or if you currently don't have values statements, seriously consider implementing the new values statements that came straight from your employees. Your employees have said, "this is how we want to behave at work" and that shouldn't be taken lightly. What good are values statements if they don't resonate with your employees?

Step 4. Develop an Action Plan

Now that you have a social vision statement describing where the culture is going, and a list of values that define the behaviors everyone will engage in to reach that vision, you have to bring them to life with action items. These action items will facilitate behavior change, and eventually you will see a change in your culture.

Culture and behavior are intertwined. In order to change culture you have to push back on behavior. As behavior changes, so will the culture.

One way to create action items is to charge each department manager with this task. Provide them with the list of behaviors from the training, and the new values, and ask them to work with their employees to develop action items.

Start small; ask for only one or two action

items and build from there. Don't forget to make the action items SMART – specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and timely.

Some examples of SMART action items include:

- Starting (date), and for three months, hold one open brainstorming session on the last Friday of each month to collect ideas for healthy workplace projects.
- By (date), collect information from each employee about what they are thankful for in their fellow employees, and hold a meeting to share what was collected.
- Create and obtain personal pledges for positive communication from all staff no later than (date).
- By (date), create a lunch-and-learn schedule for staff, who will present an hour training to their peers on one positive communication skill of their choice.
- At the staff meeting on (date), hold an open discussion about giving constructive feedback.
- By (date), ask each staff member to provide a list of three things they are currently doing or will do to champion a more positive workplace.
- Starting at the next meeting, and at all meetings moving forward, ask employees to give praise or say thank you to one another.
- By Friday of this week, start a wall of fame in the lunch room where employees can celebrate success.
- Starting tomorrow, charge employees to write down three things that made them smile over the course of the day. (Research has repeatedly shown that doing this simple exercise increases one's life satisfaction after only three months, and even more so after six.) After one month, discuss how the lists are going and what feels different for people.
- Within the next three months, do a community volunteer project to build teamwork (such as cleaning up the parks or beaches). Don't forget to send pictures to your PR Department!
- Charge each employee to do something small for another employee, or even a stranger, by next Friday.
- Within 30 days, implement a healthy workplace policy. Within 45 days, obtain signatures from all staff to acknowledge receipt.
- By (date), set one team performance goal that is a little outrageous... and achieve it.

Small Actions With BIG Impact

Josh Yandt was bullied at his old high school. Out of ideas on how to stop it, he and his mother decided to move so he could attend a new school.

Now with a fresh start Josh decided to change his path and hold the door open for fellow students. Morning after morning he greeted strangers as they walked through the door, and while the students thought it odd at first, after awhile they began to appreciate his gesture, learned his name, and greeted him back.

Then something interesting happened – the school's culture changed. Students reported that they looked forward to Josh's pleasant greeting and they noticed more kindness overall around campus. Josh's small action impacted the entire school.

Still not convinced small actions can have a big impact?

In another example, a few researchers decided to determine if a small gesture of kindness could impact employee performance at work. They gave several test groups a piece of candy before they sent the groups off to solve a word problem. Several control groups were asked to solve the same problem, but received no candy.

Over and over again, the groups who received the piece of candy talked more openly, were more innovative in finding a resolution, had less conflict, and solved the word problem faster than the control groups who received nothing. In fact, the groups who received a piece of candy often got up and offered to assist the groups who hadn't finished solving the problem yet.

Another small gesture with a big impact.

Training

At the very least, training should remind employees and managers they have a responsibility to contribute to achieving a healthy and civil work environment that does not tolerate bullying.

At the very best, training programs should include skills such as conflict resolution, negotiation, interpersonal communication, assertiveness, empathy, stress management, leadership, optimism and self-examination. These are valuable skills that promote a healthy workplace and the "presence of communication competence."

Step 5. Provide Training

When you establish a new policy and begin a culture change, you absolutely have to deliver training. You must offer training around the new policy so employees know what it entails and how it affects them. You must talk openly about and train on the culture change so employees know what it means for them. What is the vision for the new culture? What behaviors will be required of them? What will happen if they don't conform? What if they disagree with the new culture? These, and more, are all questions your training should address.

Also establish training programs that include new hires, and schedule ongoing trainings thereafter. Expectations regarding proficiency in these areas should be tied to performance and career advancement, and should show up in employee goals and awards programs.

Supervisors and managers need additional training on workplace bullying specifically, so they understand what it is, how to detect it, how to handle grievances, and how to coach aggressive employees into more positive contributors. Additionally, bullying can be confused with a tough management style, so it is wise to ensure supervisors and managers who may be tough understand what is okay and what is not. See the graphic below for more information on that.

Also consider training in skills that will ensure they will be setting positive examples. Training topics might include positive leadership skills and coaching uncivil employees, for example. Leaders should also publicly reward those who engage in exemplary positive workplace behaviors. Employees need to see that those who act in accordance with the new culture are being acknowledged for doing so.

Tough Boss	Bullying Boss
Coach poor performance	Call employees "stupid"
Give credit when it's due	Take credit for others' work
Motivate employees	Punitively punish employees
Give employees information when they can	Withhold information
Point out mistakes in private	Publicly point out, or even ridicule, mistakes
Open about changes and why	Make changes without explaining why
Stop gossip	Perpetuate gossip

Step 6. Review and Update Performance Management Process and Programs

Some believe bullying is really about poor performers who simply don't like being told their performance is below standard. Sometimes it might be, but many times it is not. Get rid of the mystery and review your performance management process to ensure you will understand the difference between a poor performer and a real target of workplace bullying. Do performance evaluations require you to set specific goals for low performers? What resources are given to underperformers to help them improve? What follow up is required from management? If performance evaluations do not include this info you will find it difficult to discern if an issue is bullying or poor performance. Don't let your performance evaluations be a tool managers can use to bully.

Also ensure your new positive workplace training programs are included in performance management processes. If employees are sent to a respectful communication course, for example, then hold them accountable for actually engaging in the behaviors laid out in the training via performance management. (Again, pushing on behaviors will push on your culture.)

Further, many managers are never taught how to conduct performance evaluation conversations or how to manage performance at all. Instead they are given a corporate form and left to figure it out. Imperative to a healthy workplace is managers who know how to correct bad behavior, and so they need training.

If you are the manager or supervisor delivering evaluations, and you have no say over what performance evaluation forms include, you can still be sure you are doing your due diligence. Whatever's on the forms provided by HR, make sure you are providing subordinates with information about what they are doing well, along with where they could improve. Discuss what resources are needed to make improvements, and how and when improvements will be made. Talk about how you will help, and when you will check in. Be clear about what will happen if the improvements are not made, and what will happen if they are.

On a final note, I've met many people who discussed using their performance management processes to change a bully, but they hesitated to do so. To be honest I don't understand this point of view. If an employee is late enough times, he will be written up. If the behavior continues, he will likely go through the step-disciplinary procedure and eventually be terminated – or he will start being on time. Talk with bullies about their behavior and why it needs to change. If it doesn't, send them down your step-disciplinary procedure, right up to and including termination.

Step 7. Use 360° Reviews Periodically

Traditionally, annual employee reviews put managers into the position of high-powered judges who tell employees if their work met company goals or not. The reviews trickle down from up above, with each person receiving a review from somebody higher on the corporate ladder. Beyond the lack of training mentioned above, managers may be careless or vary in leniency and strictness leading relatively equal employees to receive vastly different marks. Traditional reviews may provide the tyrannical manager a corporate-approved tool to keep pay and promotional opportunities repressed.

360° reviews provide each and every organizational member with reviews from everyone they work with including peers, managers, and subordinates. This provides an avenue for managers to learn from the people they direct, rather than only those who direct them. Generally 360° reviews receive high employee involvement, have the strongest impact on behavior and performance, and greatly increase effective internal communication.

Ultimately, 360° reviews give leaders a chance to see who is perceived to be a bully.

Step 8. Take Grievances Seriously and Investigate Them Immediately

Handle complaints just like you would any harassment or discrimination complaint. Assure confidentiality, investigate, take notes, collect documentation, and act accordingly based on the outcome. If the complaint is found to be legitimate the perpetrator should be punished according to your disciplinary procedures.

If the complaint is found invalid, determine if the complaint was false, or if the target may still need your assistance (a transfer, for example). Generally, even if the investigation finds no one is guilty of bullying, understand the target came to you because he or she feels threatened, so this employee needs your help despite the investigation's outcome. (Of course, you must have rules around fake complaints and take action accordingly in those instances.)

Step 9. Use Audits and Surveys to Locate Problems and Measure Success

Communication audits, climate or culture assessments, and employee satisfaction surveys serve different purposes, but any are useful in the process of culture change. All three provide the opportunity to learn about leader successes and failures in communicating the organization's mission, managing the culture, and keeping employees engaged and satisfied.

I personally am a fan of the communication audit because it magnifies interactions that take place among people and can help you determine who is perceived as a bully, bottleneck, buck-passer, know-it-all, chronic complainer, or poor time-manager. Audits also take a comprehensive look at how the organization communicates with its employees, and at the relationships between employees, managers, departments and leaders.

For example, a manufacturing company called me in to help solve a bullying issue. The perpetrator started as an intern in college and had worked his way up to VP of Production, as well as worked his way into the CEO's heart. As is often typical in a bullying situation, the CEO thought this VP was indispensible and couldn't understand why the rest of the company was so aggravated. Another VP convinced the CEO to let me shed light on the issue with an audit.

During the audit I learned employees thought the bully created a toxic environment by speaking in a condescending tone, embarrassing people in front of others, sabotaging work, micromanaging, bottlenecking information, yelling, not responding to requests unless they were made exactly to his specifications, and putting people's safety in jeopardy. (He made a maintenance technician clean a stove at 400° because of a client's rush order.)

In addition to the problems created by the bully, however, I learned the maintenance manager - whose job was to receive, assign and manage maintenance requests – was a poor project manager. Maintenance techs reported that when they asked him for something (like a tool) they knew there was a good chance they would not get it; other departments estimated only 50% of maintenance requests were completed. I further discovered the VP of Production (the bully) often told his staff to fix things themselves rather than rely on the maintenance techs, and in turn, maintenance was spending a lot of time fixing new problems created by production's failed repair attempts.

I also learned that while employees respected the CEO, they wished he were more assertive with the

bully and with them. They were dying to understand the company's performance standards and how bonuses were determined. The only way they knew if they were doing well is that no one told them they were not doing well. This ambiguity created unnecessary stress for the employees.

The audit provided a list of opportunities for improvement beyond the bullying, including a formal performance management program, a project management process for maintenance, leadership training and coaching for several VP's and line-managers, and working towards the family-oriented culture the organization had once known.

Communication audits, climate or culture assessments, and employee satisfaction surveys can also work in conjunction with one another. One client, a credit union, found in their employee satisfaction survey that employees were extraordinarily dissatisfied in the communication categories of the survey, while very satisfied in most others. After performing a communication audit to understand why communication suffered, I learned that mostly people were just angry with the marketing department. They were notorious for sending out new forms and policies about programs, and then retracting them a few weeks later. They were also a black hole of information, as emails were sent in to the department but rarely answered in a timely manner. Of course there were some other small issues, but overall we adjusted marketing's communication with the organization and the next employee satisfaction survey showed a marked improvement.

No matter what assessment you chose, know that you will find some interesting things happening in your organization and can use what you learn as a starting place to make change. You can also use those initial results as a benchmark to measure progress of your change efforts.

Step 10. Lather, rinse, repeat

The last step in building a culture of civility is an ongoing one. It involves trying things out to see what might work in your organization (lather); meeting to determine what's working and what's not, and what revisions need to be made (rinse); and then moving forward to try out more ideas (repeat). In other words, during your journey there will be a constant push to construct, stabilize, reinforce and sustain the change, and thus a constant need to communicate often with all change champions, leaders and employees to revise plans as needed.

So far this book has asked you to create a policy, develop a vision and values statements, charge department managers with executing action items, implement training programs and performance management updates, and perform an audit or survey to determine and resolve problem areas. As these things unfold, at least once per month for as long as you need, gather anyone involved in championing the culture change to discuss what is going well and what is receiving pushback. Work through those problems, make changes to the original plan as needed, and keep going. Talk about how you're measuring success with each action. How do you know the culture is shifting for the better?

Also know that no matter how good a change is, most people won't like it at the beginning. The desire to know exactly what will happen is basic human instinct, and thus change of any kind will meet resistance. Change is an emotional journey. Everyone fears losing something of value. For bullies, it's their social power, and for others it might be their job, that impending promotion they've been counting on, or a strong bond with a co-worker. Other reasons people resist change are mistrust of the leaders or disagreement that change is needed.

To overcome this resistance, at each stage of the process you must understand where those affected by the change are in their emotional journeys and then take an active role in helping them deal with those emotions.

Therefore, before the change is even announced, sell the need for change. Start talking with employees about the state of the organization's culture and the damage it is causing. Don't be afraid to use real numbers and talk openly about how the toxic environment threatens production, safety, customer satisfaction and the bottom line. Sell the problem, not the solution.

As the change begins to unfold, people will start to feel fear and anger, and the resistance will begin. This is why creating the healthy workplace policy, social vision, values statements and departmental action items should occur in the trenches. Let employees co-create their future, listen to and acknowledge their pain and their ideas, and communicate with them often and with as much as you know about the change.

Once the change is well underway, people will start to experiment in order to understand their new environment. Much like they did on their first day of work and as they on-boarded in the following months, employees will actively seek information about the culture and how it dictates their behavior. Encourage people to push the boundaries of civility, and encourage them to reflect on the past and what they've learned.

As people try out new behaviors, as departments try out new action items and performance measures, and as leaders continue to push the change forward, as often as possible lather, rinse and repeat.

The bottom line

Culture change is a long and tedious process. But it will only take a few months to start seeing some results. One government agency I worked with saw two of the worst bullies quit within six months of the start of culture change. They saw very quickly that their longtime social power was disappearing as others were just not going to take it anymore. The social pressure to conform was strong and this made them uncomfortable, so they left. (Good riddance.)

Everyone is replaceable; don't be fearful of pushing out a "top" performer. If they are the snag in your culture change, hold them accountable to the healthy workplace policy and let them go through your progressive disciplinary process. Remember that civility is the cornerstone of your success, so you need civil and positive people in your workplace.

Addressing workplace bullying and developing techniques to keep sustainable change means only good things will happen. A proactive approach to eradicating bullying in your workplace can provide all sorts of benefits including reduced turnover, absenteeism, medical leaves, and costs associated with workers compensation and litigation. Healthy workplaces motivate and develop staff, minimize workplace politics, excel at internal communication processes and customer service, have better reputations, increase the quality and quantity of work product, reduce workplace stress, and overall have improved health in employees and the organization – to name just a few of the competitive advantages.

Catherine Mattice, MA, SPHR is a professional consultant and trainer who assists organizations in developing systemic action plans to build positive corporate cultures. Her firm, Civility Partners, offers consulting services in the areas of communication audits and culture change, and offers training in the areas of conflict resolution, workplace bullying, sexual harassment, diversity, intercultural communication, professionalism and civility, and interpersonal communication skills.

Civility Partners has had the pleasure of serving such clients as the third largest energy company in the world, The American Red Cross, the United States Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Goodwill Industries, Long Beach Port Authority, University of California, and a variety of other educational institutions, government agencies, non-profit organizations, and private businesses in a variety of industries.

Catherine has presented her research and training programs on the topic of workplace bullying nationally and internationally. She has also made several appearances on news stations around the country, including FOX, NBC, and ABC affiliates, and she has been cited in such media outlets as MSNBC, *Inc Magazine*, *Entrepreneur, Huffington Post, Psychology Today,* and *USA Today*. Catherine has also published articles in many industry trade magazines, and is co-author of the book, *BACK OFF! Your Kick-Ass Guide To Ending Bullying at Work*, with a foreword by world renowned leadership guru Ken Blanchard.

Catherine is Past-President of the San Diego Chapter of the Association for Talent Development (formerly the American Society of Training & Development), and an adjunct professor at National University and San Diego City College. She is an active member of the International Association for Workplace Bullying and Harassment (IAWBH) and is a founding member of the National Workplace Bullying Coalition.

www.CivilityPartners.com

www.NoWorkplaceBullies.com

Catherine@CivilityPartners.com

619-454-4489

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