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# Bullying and Mobbing in the Workplace

## Research Paper

June 22, 2007

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## Introduction

During 2004 and 2005, the Support Staff Employee/Employer Relations Committee (EERC) undertook the task of investigating "workplace wellness" and two reports were issued:

1. Workplace Wellness: Issues and Stressors June 22, 2004, outlined workplace wellness trends and issues, workplace stressors and components of workplace wellness.
2. Workplace Wellness Findings April 21, 2005, provided an overview of the survey responses from college employees and supervisors concerning workload, work-life balance, organizational culture, effects of stress and wellness initiatives.

EERC agreed to continue its discussions and looked at some of the factors that impact peoples' perception of workplace wellness. An area identified to be of interest was "bullying" and "harassment".

Both these behaviours can significantly impact an organization's wellness. Since bullying behaviour tends to be least understood and recognized, EERC agreed to focus its research on this behaviour and provide information on how bullying can be identified and eliminated to create a more positive work environment.

## Definitions

The terms bullying and harassment are sometimes used interchangeably and while on the surface they appear to be the same, there are important differences.

Definitions of harassment and workplace bullying vary and often overlap but both are within the framework of **psychological violence**.

Acts of **harassment** usually centre around unwanted, offensive and intrusive behaviour with a sexual, racial or physical component. **Bullying** also includes similar behaviours but differs from harassment in that the focus is rarely based on gender, race or disability. The focus is often on the individual's competence, or lack of competence as portrayed by the bully. In reality, the target of bullying is often competent and popular, and the bully is aggressively projecting his/her own social, interpersonal and professional inadequacy on to the target (Fields, 2005).

Another element of bullying is a behaviour identified as "mobbing". **Mobbing** is defined as a malicious attempt to force a person out of the workplace through unjustified accusations, humiliation, general harassment, emotional abuse, and/or terror. The term "mobbing" is preferred to other definitions of harassment in order to clearly identify the behaviour as abusive group behaviour, instead of, the term bullying that implies individual acts of aggression. (Shallcross, 2003).

## What is Bullying and Mobbing?

Tim Fields of the UK National Workplace Bullying Advice Line defines workplace bullying:

*Bullying is a compulsive need to displace aggression and is achieved by the expression of inadequacy (social, personal, interpersonal, behavioural, professional) by projection of that inadequacy onto others through control and subjugation (criticism, exclusion, isolation, etc). Bullying is sustained by abdication of responsibility (denial, counter-accusation, pretence of victimhood) and perpetuated by a climate of fear, ignorance, indifference, silence, denial, disbelief, deception, evasion of accountability, tolerance and reward (eg. promotion) for the bully.*

In 2004, Quebec introduced the first anti-bullying legislation in North America with the following:

*Psychological harassment" refers to any vexatious behaviour taking the form of repeated, hostile and unwanted conduct, comments, actions or gestures, that affects an employee's dignity or psychological or physical integrity and that results in a harmful work environment.*

Many researchers use the terms "bullying" and "mobbing" to mean the same but bullying does not necessarily include mobbing. Bullying is generally understood to refer to managers who bully the staff they supervise often targeting an individual in a direct and obvious way. By contrast, mobbing refers to covert collective behaviours of "ganging up" and targeting co-workers and managers as well as subordinates using passive aggressive behaviours with malicious intent to cause harm (Shallcross, 2003). These passive aggressive behaviours include slander, gossip, constant criticism, psychological abuse and isolation.

According to German psychologist Heinz Leymann, the first person to study and name the phenomenon 20 years ago, bullying and mobbing do not involve a single incident but behaviour that continues several times a week for at least six months. He also estimated that 2% - 5% of people will be bullied or mobbed some time during their work life.

### ***Bullying Behaviours***

Bullying behaviours are rarely isolated incidents. The first incident usually signals the beginning of a pattern. Single incidents may be seen as too subtle to be considered as bullying but after several incidents, a pattern emerges. It's the pattern that is important - a bully can usually explain a single incident - the pattern reveals the intent (Fields, 2001).

It is often thought that bullying is aggressive and intimidating behaviour but it can also include isolation and humiliating actions, such as insensitive jokes or comments.

In a 1998 study in the *Journal of Emotional Abuse* (Vol. 1, No. 1, pages 85, 115), Loreleigh Keashly, identified seven key components of bullying:

- verbal (eg. sarcasm) and nonverbal (eg. evasiveness)
- repetitive or patterned
- unwelcome and unsolicited by the target
- violations of a standard of appropriate conduct towards others
- harm or cause psychological or physical injury to the target
- intent to harm or control
- exploitation of bully's position of power

### ***Mobbing Behaviours***

Mobbing is a lesser known form of workplace harassment than bullying, but it's just as destructive. In fact, some argue that mobbing can be even worse. Unlike bullying, which is carried out by one person, which stops if that person is transferred or fired, mobbing can start with one or two people, then spread like a virus throughout an entire organization (Kerr, 2004).

Generally, it's a group ganging up on someone because they don't fit in. It can be as trivial as acting or dressing differently or having a stronger work ethic, etc. Mobbing can best be understood as the stressor to beat all stressors. It is an impassioned, collective campaign by co-workers to exclude, punish and humiliate a targeted

worker. Initiated most often by a person of influence, mobbing is a desperate attempt to crush and eliminate the target. The target is viewed as absolutely abhorrent, with no redeeming qualities, outside the circle of acceptance and respectability, deserving only contempt. As it proceeds, the hostile ploys and communications against the target becomes legitimate to others, who are then pulled into the gang behaviour (Westhues, 2002).

The worker most vulnerable to being mobbed is an average or high achiever, who somehow threatens or puts to shame co-workers and/or managers. The target's acceptable work performance does not provide the organization legally defensible grounds for termination, and the target usually fails to pick up the subtle hints (by co-workers, supervisor) to leave voluntarily (Westhues, 2002).

### ***What Bullying Isn't***

Most people are capable of bullying behaviours but most do not carry out the behaviour. It is not bullying to feel frustrated, angry or upset at another person's behaviour; it is bullying when we act on our feelings in an inappropriate way (Peyton 2003).

Reasonable action by an employer (or manager) in the course of managing the workplace is not bullying. Examples of this include:

- the transfer, demotion, discipline, counsel or dismissal of an employee in a reasonable manner;
- a decision, based on reasonable grounds and facts, not to promote or grant another benefit in connection with an employee's employment or performance.

### **Examples of Bullying**

Of the reported cases, bullying does not only occur downwards in an organization's hierarchy, though this is the most frequently reported. To a lesser extent, bullying also occurs between co-workers (peers) and/or subordinate to supervisor. Mobbing, however, most frequently occurs between co-workers and/or subordinate to supervisor.

One reason not all cases are reported, could be that individuals may be less likely to report bullying and mobbing behaviours as they believe they should be able to handle to the situation (something must be wrong with me); the problem will go away if they ignore it; or they fear they will not be believed and seen as weak and inadequate (Erskine 1999).

***Supervisor to Employee***

- a) A supervisor sets an unrealistic deadline causing an employee to work throughout the night and/or weekend. At the deadline time, if the work is done, the supervisor finds trivial fault with the work; or if the work isn't done, berates the employee.
- b) Supervisor dismisses the ideas of an employee and then "sells" the idea to senior management as his/her own.

***Co-worker to co-worker***

- a) A co-worker requests information from the bully, who provides the minimal amount requested. When questioned, the bully's answer is that he/she provided the information that was requested.
- b) The bully waits until a co-worker is away from the office to either have crucial decisions made or to ensure the co-worker is kept out of the information loop.
- c) The bully arranges a social gathering with the other co-workers but excludes the targeted co-worker.
- d) Co-workers whisper behind the back of another co-worker, conversations stop when the co-worker walks by, or in meetings they sit as far away as possible from the targeted co-worker.

***Employee to Supervisor***

- a) Jokes, cartoons, etc are distributed, which make fun of the supervisor.
- b) Employee(s) spreads rumours about the supervisor or his/her family or friends.

**Effects of Bullying**

***On People***

Bullying and mobbing lower a person's self-esteem. Many people blame themselves, thinking "There must be something wrong with me". People talk about feeling helpless and powerless when they have been bullied (Peyton, 2003).

People can feel isolated. Rayner (1997) found bullying to be one of the major stressors in organizations.

People suffer the ill-health effects of stress from being bullied physiologically and psychologically. The physiological effects

includes headaches, migraine, nausea, skin rashes, irritable bowel syndrome, increased blood pressure. The psychological symptoms include anxiety, panic attacks, tearfulness and depression (Peyton, 2003).

A 2003 survey of bullying victims by the Workplace Bullying and Trauma Institute found:

- victims suffered stress effects such as severe anxiety (76%), disrupted sleep (71%), and post-traumatic stress disorder (39%)
- in 70% of the cases, the bullying only stopped when the victim quit or was let go. In only 17% of the cases was the victim able to transfer to another area of the organization
- the bully suffered consequences in only 13% of cases

### *On Organizations*

The Canada Safety Council reports that bullied employees waste between 10% to 52% of their work time defending themselves and networking for support, thinking about the situation, being demotivated and stressed, not to mention taking sick leave due to stress-related illnesses.

Bullies poison their working environment with low morale, fear, anger and depression. The employer pays for this in lost efficiency, absenteeism, high staff turnover, severance packages and lawsuits. In other words, workplace bullies cause a tremendous liability for the employer. Dr. Gary Namie states that his research shows that bullying is three times more prevalent than sexual harassment. At Toronto's Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, management and two unions concluded that 60% of the cases coming forward were not covered by the Ontario Human Rights Code.

The document "Preventing Workplace Bullying: A Practical Guide for Employers", developed by representatives of government, business and unions in South Australia, listed the following points for employers' consideration:

- reduced efficiency, productivity and profitability;
- increased absenteeism, sick leave and staff turnover;
- poor morale, erosion of employee loyalty and commitment;
- increased costs associated with recruitment and training;
- increased workers' compensation claims;

- increased indirect costs such as management time, engaging mediators or counsellors;
- adverse publicity and poor public image;
- an unsafe work environment and potential fines for breaches of the occupational health and safety legislation;
- costs resulting for failure to meet legislative provisions including civil and criminal actions;
- legal costs incurred defending a claim of workplace bullying;
- vicarious liability and other associated employer liabilities;
- potential increase to insurance and workers' compensation premiums.

It might be argued that not all the above points are applicable in Ontario, as there is not specific legislation addressing workplace bullying. While this is true, it appears the courts are willingly to hold employers responsible for providing a safe and respectful workplace for employees. In 2003, the Ontario Superior Court decision (*Stamos v Annuity Research & Marketing Service Ltd.*) clearly stated that bullying in the workplace is unacceptable.

## Legislative Framework

### *In Ontario*

Bill 131 - Occupational Health and Safety Amendment Act (Workplace Violence and Workplace Harassment) 2004, received first reading on October 20, 2004.

This Bill amends the Act to impose duties on employers and employees with respect to acts of workplace violence and workplace harassment, which are defined to be acts of physical or psychological violence or coercion, psychological harassment or misuse of power that persons commit in a workplace.

In conjunction with workers and supervisors, employers must develop a written code of conduct with respect to workplace violence and workplace harassment that is reflective of a commitment to maintain a workplace free from violence and harassment.

Employers must establish formalized policies, including a complaints procedure, a reporting procedure and an investigative procedure, and establish remedies and disciplinary measures to deal with workplace violence and workplace harassment.

As part of the formalized policies and procedures, an employer must establish a team of specialists (in the areas of management, human

resources, security, labour relations, health, law and risk management) who identify and assess potential situations acts of workplace violence or workplace harassment and make recommendations to the employer on dealing with these.

Supervisors and workers must report to their employer all acts of workplace violence or workplace harassment of which they know. An employer must keep accurate records of all reports received. If an employer receives a report of an act of workplace violence that involves physical assault or sexual assault, the employer must report it to the police.

Employers must also ensure appropriate training is in place so that all are aware of their rights and obligations as well as the various forms of workplace violence and workplace harassment and the negative effect such conduct has on the workplace.

### *Other Jurisdictions*

Many European and Scandinavian countries, including Germany, Italy, Sweden, The Netherlands, Denmark, Finland and Norway have introduced laws to deal with psychological aggression. Belgium and France introduced legislation against moral harassment (bullying) at work covering a range of behaviours such as verbal abuse, bullying, mobbing and sexual harassment. The French law makes "moral harassment" a criminal offence with penalties of imprisonment and fines.

In the United Kingdom, Ireland and Australia, psychological violence has been incorporated under existing workplace safety legislation. The United States has not recognized workplace bullying within its legal system.

### *Quebec*

Introduced in 2004, this anti-bullying law was the first of its kind in North America.

Anyone who believes he/she is being bullied at work can file a complaint with the Labour Standards Commission, which can lead to a hearing with the Labour Relations Board.

There has been no increase in false complaints under the new system. Bullying represents approximately 6% of the complaints received annually. About 20% of the complaints could have been

settled within the organization if there had been a mechanism, either informal or formal, in place (Soares, 2006).

*South Australia*

Effective August 15, 2005, the new WorkSafe South Australia law, an amendment to the Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Act, allows investigators to refer bullying and occupational violence incidents to the SA Industrial Relations Commission for resolution. Under this legislation, employers have the obligation to either eliminate the risk to employees or reduce that risk as far as is reasonably practical.

**Eliminating  
Bullying and  
Mobbing**

Researchers seem to disagree about whether legislation is needed to eliminate bullying or psychological harassment from the workplace. What is clear is - if employees and employers want to prevent and eliminate bullying and mobbing, they need to be convinced that interpersonal relationships at work have a huge impact on the health, well-being and effectiveness of the employees and the organization.

*Identifying if Bullying  
Exists*

First is to ascertain whether bullying and/or mobbing already exists, or whether there is a potential for it to occur. Bullying is often subtle, so although there may not be obvious signs this does not mean that it doesn't exist. A "checklist" developed by a consortium of businesses, unions and government in South Australia, is included in Appendix D.

Other recommended steps include:

- surveying employees on issues relating to a "healthy organization"
- monitoring absenteeism, sick leave, turnover, grievances, etc to determine any patterns or unexplained changes
- monitoring feedback from exit interviews
- monitoring feedback or comments from manager and/or employees about other internal or external individuals.

*Assessing  
Likelihood of  
Bullying Occurring*

The next step would be to determine if there are circumstances that could result in bullying and assessing the likelihood of these incidents occurring. Circumstances could include:

- unjustified criticism that is targeted at an individual(s) rather than work performance;
- denying opportunities for training, promotion or new assignments;

- spreading gossip or false rumours about a person;
- deliberate withholding of information necessary for person to be able to perform his/her work;
- excluding a person from workplace social events;
- humiliating a person through criticism, sarcasm and/or insults, especially in front of other staff or clients.

***Implementing Plans to Reduce the Risk***

This stage includes developing plans to minimize, if not eliminate, bullying and establishing appropriate data to assist in assessing the success of such plans. Some crucial elements of these plans are:

- policy development (anti-bullying and respectful conduct);
- education and training awareness to staff;
- developing a complaint handling and investigation process.

***Warning***

A model anti-bullying policy ([www.freedomtocare.org/page155.htm](http://www.freedomtocare.org/page155.htm)) contains the following warning:

*"No policy or procedure is a substitute for a workplace culture of trust and openness. However a good policy or procedure may initiate or enhance such a culture if it is deployed judiciously. Used wrongly policies, procedures and committees may have the opposite effect to the one desired - most importantly, they may disempower by giving employees the impression that responsibilities lies elsewhere and not with them. Policies may also be abused, distorted and neglected by managers who think that such policies apply to everyone except themselves. An anti-bullying policy can also, unless the right conditions are provided, wrongly be used by an employee or other person to cover their incompetence, negligence or harassment of others. People who bully sometimes make counter-claims of bullying against the complainant, or even get their 'complaint' in first."*

## Appendix A Differences between Harassment and Workplace Bullying

The UK National Workplace Bullying Advice Line has provided the following chart outlining the essential differences:

Harassment	Workplace Bullying
- strong physical component (eg. contact and touch in all forms, intrusion into personal space and possessions, damage to possessions including a person's work, etc)	- almost exclusively psychological (eg. criticism), may become physical later, especially with male bullies, almost never with female bullies
- focus on the target because of what they are (eg. female, disabled, colour, etc)	- anyone especially if the target is competent, popular and vulnerable
- linked to sex, race, prejudice, discrimination, etc	- usually discrimination on the basis of competence
- may consist of just a single to many incidents	- rarely a single incident and tends to be an accumulation of many small incidents, each of which, when taken in isolation and out of context, seems trivial
- target being harassed tends to know they are being harassed right away	- target may not realize they are being bullied for weeks or months
- can be easily recognition, especially if there's an assault (indecent or sexual)	- few people recognize
- harassment often reveals itself through the use of recognized offensive vocabulary	- tends to fixate on trivial criticisms and false allegations of under performance; offensive words are rarely used except when there are no witnesses
- often an element of possession (eg. stalking)	- phase 1 is about control and subjugation; when this fails, phase 2 is elimination of the target
- strong clear focus (eg. sex, race, disability)	- focus is on competence (envy) and popularity (jealousy)
- often done for peer approval, bravado, image, etc	- tends to be behind closed doors with no witnesses
- occurs both in and out of work	- take place mostly at work
- perceives target as easy, albeit sometimes a challenge	- target is seen as a threat who must be controlled and subjugated or eliminated

Harassment	Workplace Bullying
- often domination for superiority	- for control of threat (exposure of bully's own inadequacy)
- lacks self-discipline	- driven by envy (of abilities) and jealousy (of relationships)
- usual has specific inadequacies (eg. sexual)	- is inadequate in all areas of interpersonal and behavioural skills

## Appendix B Facts about Bullying

This survey was conducted by The Workplace Bullying and Trauma Institute (WBTI) in 2003 with a sampling of 1,000 respondents.

- 58% of bullies are female; 42% are males
- Female bullies choose females as targets - 87%; males as targets 13%
- Male bullies choose females as targets - 71%; males as targets - 29%
- Female-on-female bullying represents 50% of all workplace bullying
- Male-on-female - 30%
- Male-on-male - 12%
- Female-on-male - 8%
- Bully is higher in organization than target - 71%
- Bully is co-worker, peer, colleague - 17%
- Bully is lower in organization - 12%
- Female bullies more likely than male bullies to:
  - silent treatment, freezing out target - 76% vs 68% by male
  - encourage colleagues to turn against the target - 67% vs 59% by male
- Major reason male bully selected target - target's asserted independence (eg. refusing to be controlled or subservient) - 75%
- Major reason female bully selected target - threat posed by target's competence and reputation - 68%

Among the most prevalent reasons reported by targets for being bullied was that they were seen by bully to be threatening, either because of their superior skills (2nd) or social skills (4th).

Characteristics of a bully (rated by targets who answered the survey)

- less integrity
- less ethical
- better organizational/workplace politics
- more committed to personal career advancement
- inferior emotional control
- identity defined by the job
- less physically attractive
- greater physical size (height and/or weight)

The purpose of bullying was to hide inadequacy and to divert attention away from his/her incompetence. Bullies were unable to distinguish between "assertiveness" and "aggressiveness" and when challenged claimed to be "assertive" (Note: assertive was seen to recognize and respect people's boundaries and values; requests are polite and no negative consequences result if the person asked says no).

## Appendix C

### Checklist of Mobbing Indicators

Professor Kenneth Westhues of the University of Waterloo has developed the following checklist of 16 indicators or measures that he has used in his research:

1. By standard criteria of job performance, the target is at least average, probably above average.
2. Rumours and gossip circulate about the target's misdeeds: "Did you hear what she did last week?"
3. The target is not invited to meetings or voted onto committees, is excluded or excludes self.
4. Collective focus on a critical incident that "shows what kind of man he really is."
5. Shared conviction that the target needs some kind of formal punishment, "to be taught a lesson."
6. Unusual timing of the decision to punish, eg. apart from the annual performance review.
7. Emotion-laden, defamatory rhetoric about the target in oral and written communications.
8. Formal expressions of collective negative sentiment towards the target (eg. a vote of censure, signatures on a petition, meeting to discuss what to do about the target).
9. High value on secrecy, confidentiality, and collegial solidarity among the mobbers.
10. Loss of diversity of argument, so that it becomes dangerous to "speak up for" or defend the target.
11. The adding up of the target's real or imagined venial sins to make a mortal sin that cries for action.
12. The target is seen as personally abhorrent, with no redeeming qualities; stigmatizing, exclusionary labels are applied. For example, a real or imagined misdeed is enlarged to smear the target's whole identity.
13. Disregard of established procedures, as mobbers take matters into their own hands.
14. Resistance to independent, outside review of sanctions imposed on the target.

15. Outraged response to any appeals for outside help the target may make.
16. Mobbers' fear of violence from target, target's fear of violence from mobbers, or both.

## Appendix D Identification Checklist

Do you have workplace procedures and reporting procedures in place relating to workplace bullying?  Yes  No

Have you established and promoted expectations for appropriate behaviour?  Yes  No

Are employees made aware of workplace bullying procedures, their specific roles and responsibilities and appropriate behaviours concerning workplace bullying?  Yes  No

Is there a clear process or procedure for dealing with and resolving conflict and aggression within the workplace?  Yes  No

Are your employees aware of [legislation] in which acts of discrimination or harassment are unlawful and will not be condoned in the workplace?  Yes  No

**If you have answered "No" to any of the above checkpoints, you may need to conduct a risk assessment of your workplace and develop the appropriate policies and procedures.**

Have grievances or complaints previously been raised by employees concerning workplace bullying?  Yes  No

Do absenteeism or sickness rates or patterns suggest that workplace bullying may be an issue in the workplace?  Yes  No

Are there blatant incidents or acts of workplace bullying that are condoned or accepted in the workplace, such as the initiation of new employees, offensive literature, pictures or behaviours, etc, that a reasonable person would consider inappropriate?  Yes  No

Are there unusual levels of staff turnover or requests for transfer that may be attributed to incidents or acts of workplace bullying?  Yes  No

**If you have answered "Yes" to any of the above checkpoints you may need to conduct a risk assessment of your workplace.**

## Appendix E

### Guidelines for Developing a Policy and Procedure

Ideally, a policy dealing with the prevention of the workplace bullying should be developed with consultation with all staff. This includes management, worker representatives, health and safety experts, etc. It should be in writing, made available to all employees and reviewed periodically.

The policy should contain:

- a statement that the workplace is committed to preventing workplace bullying;
- a definition of workplace bullying and examples of what is deemed to be unacceptable;
- what constitutes appropriate behaviour;
- a statement that frivolous allegations of workplace bullying that are unfounded, will constitute a disciplinary offence, including dismissal;
- a "no-tolerance" statement and the action that will be taken should the allegation be found to be true, such as it will be treated as a disciplinary offence that could lead to dismissal;
- a list of people (internal) who can be contacted for advice or to receive complaints;
- an outline of the complaint process. Most literature recommend a two-tier procedure (informal and formal) outside of any existing grievance procedures;
- a statement regarding the type of investigation that will be used into all allegations of bullying;
- training requirements that all employees are expected to undertake
- a list of external agencies that can provide additional support, such as the provider of the "Employee Assistance Program".

## Appendix F

### Questions and Answers and Bullying and Mobbing

The following questions and answers were posed to Kenneth Westhues, Professor of Sociology at the University of Waterloo, at a workshop on April 23, 2007 for the Union and Management representatives of the Support and Academic Employee/Employer Relations Committees and Joint Insurance Committees.

- Q1. What does research show is the most prevalent source of workplace bullying and mobbing: employee to employer, supervisor to employee?

*By far, most reported instances of bullying are from supervisor to subordinate. People formally entrusted with power by the organization are the ones most likely to abuse their power. But peer-to-peer bullying also occurs, and a supervisor can also be bullied by a subordinate. Mobbing usually involves both peers and supervisors.*

- Q2. Is the problem increasing?  
Q3. Is bullying on the rise in the workplace or is there just growing awareness of the problem?

*Evidence is mixed. Some researchers see an epidemic of bullying and mobbing in workplaces, due to increasing bureaucratization and a breakdown of trust.*

- Q4. What recourse do non-unionized employees have when they are being bullied or mobbed in the workplace?  
Q5. How might one address bullying by a supervisor to employees in a non-unionized, manufacturing atmosphere, which tends to bully and mob to weed out certain employees, i.e. females?

*Personal aggression occurs in both unionized and non-unionized workplaces, and even in a unionized workplace, the target may be a manager, and thus without union protection. For these reasons, it is important that any anti-bullying, anti-mobbing policy apply to the workplace as a whole.*

- Q6. Can an employee sue their employer if they are being bullied or mobbed?

*Every case is different, but in light of the Weber decision of the Supreme Court of Canada, an employee who belongs to a union is best advised to seek redress through grievance arbitration.*

- Q7. If it's all about a difficult person that no one wants to confront or deal with....

*Little is gained by identifying anybody as a "difficult person." The better alternative is to focus on the specific problem or issue and look for ways to resolve it.*

- Q8. How does a staff union bring an unwilling or insensitive management to the table for discussion of workplace bullying, toward the goal of developing policy to reduce or eliminate it?
- Q9. What are some practical actions that can be taken to bring an unwilling party to the table? How does union get management to jointly seek intervention?

*Really good question! Managers are sometimes reluctant even to talk about an anti-bullying policy, for fear of diminishing their own authority and encouraging a whining mentality among subordinates. The way to combat such reluctance is to acknowledge the legitimate exercise of power by management, while at the same time explaining that it is in everybody's interest to discourage the illegitimate exercise of power. The issue is where and how to draw the line. In a poisonous work environment, management fiercely resists any proposed limit on its power, while the union tries at every turn to tie management's hands.*

- Q10. How do you deal with a passive-aggressive individual without being labelled a bully? How would you go about getting such an individual to fall in line with company policies?

*Both "passive-aggressive individual" and "bully" are discrediting labels. So far as possible, it is best to avoid such labels altogether and keep collective attention on solving specific practical problems.*

- Q11. What practical things can be done in situations where someone constantly bullies people, but complaints never go anywhere because the complaint never falls under prohibited grounds?

*One reason for the increasing popularity of the bullying/mobbing perspective is that it shifts attention away from the grounds for aggression (like sexism, racism, homophobia, prejudice against people with disabilities, and so on) to the fact of aggression, away from motives for doing harm to the harm itself. The goal is to spare the workplace as a whole and individual employees the huge financial and personal costs of hostility, regardless of the mix of motives inside the people involved.*

- Q12. What advice would you give to a young adult suffering constant bullying?  
Q13. How can one who is being mobbed get relief?  
Q14. What techniques do you recommend to resolve a bullying situation?

*The experience of relentless hostility day after day grinds a person down psychologically and physically. The advice I give to the many targets of such hostility who write to me is to assess the situation as rationally and objectively as possible, compare the resources of aggressor and target, make a list of possible ways out of the mess, and choose the way out most likely to succeed. I know of many mobbing targets who have lost everything – job, health, family, friends – fighting battles they had little chance of winning.*

- Q15. What is terror vis-à-vis mobbing and bullying?

*Leymann, among others, used the word terror to describe the intense, debilitating fear that comes from being subjected to repeated acts of aggression in the workplace, feeling helpless to defend oneself, wondering when the next attack will come, waiting for the next shoe to drop. It's an unhappy condition to be in.*

- Q16. How do we get the staff to stand up for their rights and let the union help, when they are so afraid of the chairs?  
Q17. How do we assist staff to recognize they're being subjected to bullying?

*It's hard to state a blanket rule, because situations differ. One employee may humbly accept what another employee considers abuse and dehumanization. When management and union are squared off against one another, an employee can hardly be blamed for keeping his or her head down and trying not to get caught in the crossfire.*

- Q18. The college feels because it has a policy on bullying and verbal abuse in the workplace, no one is abused verbally or bullied because it is not allowed. What are your thoughts?  
Q19. How do we get the treatment of bullying to match the commitment shown in our policies to end it? We have some good policies, but this is not our reality.

*Policies that are mere window-dressing do more harm than good. I have seen horrible abuse of employees by managers who presented themselves as champions of ethics and integrity. The more attention is focused on the specifics of the situation, the better.*

- Q20. How to differentiate between bullying/mobbing and legitimate management functions?

*Really important question. Policy Alternative A, as presented in the workshop, is one example of such differentiation.*

Q21. What sort of processes/policies/procedures can be put into place to lessen bullying and mobbing?

Q22. Is it best to develop joint processes/policies/procedures?

*Plans to lessen bullying and mobbing that are jointly supported by management and union must always be preferred. When the two sides of workplace relations are at war with one another, productivity suffers and everybody is miserable.*

Q23. How should we support those people experiencing bullying?

Q24. How does/can a person stop a bully or mobber without management's help?

Q25. What can an individual employee do if they identify a situation of bullying, or to prevent bullying in the workplace?

*The short answer is: Be kind, be kind, be kind. Do not stand with aggressors, but with targets of unwarranted aggression.*

Q26. How to effectively deal with senior administrators who bully everyone from support staff, faculty, and administrators – corruption from the top?

*An important thing not to do is to provide such administrators with a well-intentioned but ill-written anti-bullying policy that they end up using as a weapon against the targets of their own aggression.*

Q27. How does one begin to address the subtle, veiled, hidden, destructive communication and or comments about co-workers that exist yet are difficult to quantify?

*Good question. One criticism that has been made against France's anti-mobbing law is that it has driven aggression underground, made it more subtle and sneaky. We humans are clever. That is one reason I favour policies that promote healthy workplace relations more than policies aimed at penalizing destructive behaviours. You can't outlaw malicious gossip, but you can create a workplace culture that discourages it.*

Q28. What are the key values or principles necessary to be accepted by all parties in developing a meaningful anti-bullying/mobbing policy?

*If there is any shared value that underlies a sound policy, it is a commitment to a continuing process of open, honest dialogue founded on respect for and allowance of differences of opinion. Keeping the conversation going is prerequisite to everything else.*

Q29. What is the best, most effective, accelerated way to have anti-bullying policies legislated in Ontario? What steps should be followed?

*Above all, broad, vigorous, well-informed discussion by management, unions, and everybody concerned with promoting healthy, productive workplace relations. The last thing we need is well-intentioned but half-baked legislation that ends up doing more harm than good.*

Q30. Is legislation the only way that action will be taken to restrict bullying activity?

*Obviously not. There have been no laws or formal policies against bullying anywhere until recent decades. Today as in the past, bullying is most commonly stopped by a person with courage, somebody with guts enough to say, "Stop it."*

Q31. In the case of individuals who are bullied in the workplace and subsequently end up on LTD, how might one assist them in a return to the same work environment, to ensure a successful transition – especially if there is no policy in place?

*If an employee has gotten sick as a result of personal aggression by one or more workmates, if the employee has been off work for some period as a result, and if the person is now strong and well enough to return to work, it is silly to place that employee back in the same work environment, with the same workmates, as before. Odds are that the personal aggression will, in one form or another, resume, and the employee is going to get sick again. Some other solution needs to be found.*

Q32. Have you ever worked in the food service or retail industry? Do you still think the private sector is less vulnerable to bullies? Why do people always believe public service workers have more security and feel less responsible to the bottom line or to customer service? Is this attitude part of the problem? Why are there fewer complaints in the private sector? Maybe that's the question.

*A fair response to my inadequate comment at the workshop itself. Complaints of bullying and mobbing arise mainly in workplaces where employees have some kind of job security. Where the target of aggression has an "at will" contract, he or she is more likely simply to quit or be fired. This happens every day in the food service and retail industries.*

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