



EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE OF THE PACIFIC, LLC

EAP Newsletter

4th Quarter 2016

Handling Bullies in the Workplace

By Vali Hawkins Mitchell, Ph.D., LMHC, REAT, CEAP

Bullies can range from a person who is an arrogant jerk to someone dangerously violent. They are mean, intentionally dangerous, unconscionable people. And for those of us in the workplace, the problem is that many of them have day jobs.

Freedom from Bullying in the Workplace Week is October 16-22, 2016. Bullying isn't a topic I enjoy writing about, but I do care about it. I care about freedom from being a victim. Victims have no choices, but I do and you do!

How do you recognize a bully?

A *bully* is a person who mistreats and is habitually overbearing, especially to weaker people. Bullying is a form of conscious abuse that attempts to create power over another group or person to create an imbalance of power through verbal or non-verbal threats, work interference, physical violence, social, physical, emotional, verbal coercion or manipulation: In other words, bullies are *emotional terrorists*. Emotional terrorism is a domestic terrorism that uses human feelings for ammunition.



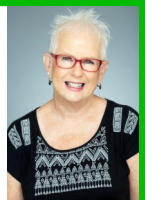
How do you survive a bully?

- **Go Neutral:** Do not try to “fix” or save a bully unless you are a mental health professional. You can wish them well, pray for them, work with them, go to their birthday luncheon, look at photos of their dog, and be courteous and pleasant when opportunity allows – but stay awake.
- **Don't confront a bully.** Sometimes it is more important to survival to just walk away as if nothing was going on. Think of it like not looking a wild animal directly in the eye, which tends to make them more dangerous.
- **Step away:** If they come into your personal space (think of the area as your “hula-hoop”), go elsewhere. Acknowledge them with a nod or a neutral comment and then claim you can't stay and have to go to the restroom, call your babysitter, check your mailbox, or deliver an important memo to your manager. Go neutral and make an exit to get away from the risk.
- **Seek Allies:** Never deal with a bully alone. Get support, talk to someone, call a friend, talk to your manager/HR/security, call your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provider, whatever! Don't go it alone. The appropriate bottom line is you can call 911.
- **Don't be a hostage:** Bullies like to take hostages from 9-5 in the workplace. Your company probably has policies to protect you from bullying, so follow your policies for your protection. Ultimately, if you are not safe, you may need to seek your freedom by re-deciding if you want to change jobs or ask to be reassigned to a different branch of your company.
- **Name it:** Bullies are “emotional terrorists.” Bullies hope you are too “nice” to know what they are, make excuses for them, or deny their presence. That gives them the edge. In other words, they are just bullies!
- **Document everything:** Follow policies and help make better ones. You absolutely need to document, keep notes, or make a report of some kind in case your encounters with the bully escalate to the point of violence.
- **Study:** Become an expert in the topic of bullies so you can't be tricked by the variety of their behaviors.
- **Self-care:** Trust your intuition. If you think something is going on, you might be right – so stay alert. Rest when you are able and practice good self-care for surviving the long haul.

Bottom Line

Thus, freedom from bullies is the freedom to know they are what they are, the freedom to get help, the freedom to walk away, the freedom to act and document, and the freedom to eliminate bullies from your workplace.

Vali J. Hawkins Mitchell, Ph.D., LMHC, REAT, CEAP is a General Partner at Employee Assistance of the Pacific. She has a Doctorate in Health Education and Masters degrees in Applied Psychology and Expressive Arts Therapy and is a highly regarded public speaker, trainer, author, consultant, and educator. Dr. Vali is the author of [*The Manager's Guide to Bullies in the Workplace: Coping with Emotional Terrorists*](#) (Brookfield, CT: Rothstein Publishing, 2016), and [*The Cost of Emotions in the Workplace: The Bottom Line Value of Emotional Continuity Management*](#) (Brookfield, CT: Rothstein Publishing, 2013). For more about Dr. Vali's books, go to www.rothsteinpublishing.com or www.improvizion.com.



Developing Resiliency: Recovering from life's setbacks

Imagine the last upsetting event that you experienced. What was your reaction to it? Were you able to quickly recover from it and get back on your (metaphorical or literal) surfboard, or do bad experiences throw you into emotional tailspins that affect your quality of life long after they've occurred?

How quickly you are able to bounce back from setbacks is a trait called resiliency. People who are highly resilient tend to be happier and more successful both in their careers and in their personal lives.

Rewriting Negative Scripts

Things like dealing with an unreasonable boss, a tight deadline, or a car breakdown can be a challenge for anyone, but the resulting stress is caused by our reaction to these problems, not the problems themselves.

By paying careful attention to your emotional reactions to upsetting events, you'll be able to spot unwanted and habitually negative scripts that play themselves out in your head, and gradually replace them with positive ones.

Negative scripts:

"This is going to be a disaster."
"These delays are killing me."
"It's impossible."

Positive scripts:

"I'll do the best I can with what I have."
"I'll use this extra time to get organized."
"Success might not come immediately."

Negating the Negative

Dwelling on a negative emotion, such as anger at being treated unfairly, sucks away our time, energy, and creativity and prevents us from moving forward constructively. Highly resilient people have the ability to diminish or postpone indulging on negative emotion. They aren't in denial. Instead, they refocus their attention on problem solving.

This begins by tuning out everything that falls outside of your sphere of control and influence and asking yourself, "What can I do right now to improve this situation?" Perhaps the most you can do is take a few deep breaths, calm down and organize your thoughts, but even this small action is a positive step. The idea is not to stifle negative emotion, but rather to prevent its paralyzing feedback loop.

Planning for Success

Resilient people view obstacles and setbacks as "outcomes," "challenges," and "opportunities to learn" rather than disasters. More importantly, they anticipate success, but expect setbacks as a natural part of any goal-oriented process. Here are the best practices for building resiliency:

Know yourself: Be realistic about what you are able to accomplish, and be honest about your limitations. Set your goals accordingly, but don't be afraid to stretch to the higher rung, and then build on your successes.

Know your partners: Focus on the strengths, not the weaknesses of those around you. Always be looking for ways that their unique talents can complement yours or help you to accomplish your goals.

Think strategy, planning, and action: You are in control of how you deal with a problem to produce a result. You can't predict a result, but you can act again on the result to produce a different outcome, and so on. Unexpected variables show up as we reach for our goals. So measure success by

incremental advancements toward your goals.

Treat life as a classroom: A helpful question to ask yourself in any challenging situation is, "What can I learn from this." Temporary failures almost always precede future success.

Internal Focus

By relentlessly seeking to improve how you react to obstacles, you train yourself and create a new habit to act upon your environment rather than allowing yourself to be mugged by external forces beyond your control.

Develop and practice resiliency, and you'll discover a life skill the pros in any profession have mastered in order to achieve more.



EAP is a short-term confidential counseling and work/life service, provided to you by your employer, that can assist in identifying and resolving issues that may be interfering with your job or personal life. Access to our experienced counselors and work/life services is available across the Islands and can be contacted by phoning or emailing our Honolulu office.



EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE OF THE PACIFIC, LLC

1221 Kapiolani Blvd., Ste. 730
Honolulu, HI 96814

www.EAPacific.com (808) 597-8222 Toll-Free (877) 597-8222 info@eapacific.com