Don’t Let Bullying Poison Your Workplace

WHAT’S AT STAKE

Bullying is defined as repeated aggressive behavior against another person in an effort to hurt that person, either emotionally or physically. And it happens more often than you’d think. In fact, an estimated 35 to 37 percent of North American workers report being bullied on the job by a co-worker or person in a position of authority.

WHAT’S THE DANGER

Someone who is being bullied may experience severe stress and anxiety, sleeplessness, inability to concentrate at work, forgetfulness and an obsession regarding being victimized. If they are in safety-sensitive jobs, this lack of concentration can put victims at far greater risk for being injured, or unintentionally injuring co-workers or others.

Also, while many victims reach a point where they cannot carry on and quit their jobs, others may reach their breaking point and decide to take revenge on bullies.

EXAMPLE

Ronald Davis, a 50-year-old worker at a North Carolina lumber company, shot to death three co-workers and critically wounded a fourth person before shooting himself. Davis, who died in hospital after being taken off life support, had told family members that he was being harassed and made fun of at work.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Bullies operate by socially isolating others, spreading malicious rumors and attacking another worker’s appearance, religion, sexuality or other traits.

If you are being bullied at work, the worst thing you can do is to

try to ignore the problem. It won’t go away unless the person who is tormenting you leaves.

You should discuss the problem with someone you trust, whether it’s a friend, partner, relative, co-worker or an Employee Assistance Program counselor. The support you will receive will help you to take the next step, which is to confront the person who is bullying you.

Tell the bully that his or her behavior to you is unacceptable and that it must stop. Many bullies will back down when they are confronted. If that doesn’t happen, you will need to report what’s happening to a supervisor or someone in management.

Keep detailed notes on bullying incidents, including dates and times, any witnesses who were present, what was said or done and any threats that were made. Hang on to any malicious emails that were sent to you and print them as evidence to support your complaint.

When someone feels wronged, it can be greatly tempting to retaliate, but this is wrong. Doing so may make you, not the bully, look like the bad person and doing so could also cause a situation to escalate and become physical, with tragic consequences.

FINAL WORD

Many of us can remember being bullied on the playground. Sadly, such behavior doesn’t disappear in adulthood and more than one in three workers experience it. If you don’t stand up to a bully, you may have to endure months or years of needless suffering.