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THE ROLE OF LEADERS

Beat bullying in the workplace

Information for
chairs, non-executive
and executive board
members and
directors, on tackling
workplace bullying
and harassment


at WORK
DIGNITY

The Dignity at Work Partnership is a project set up in 2004 by Amicus the Union (now part of Unite) to raise awareness of workplace bullying and harassment, and the damaging effect they have on employees and organisational development.

Funded by Amicus and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), the project aims to identify the most effective ways of dealing with bullying and harassment, and to encourage employers to adopt best practices in tackling the problem.

Organisations are invited to join the partnership and to sign a voluntary charter expressing commitment to pursuing dignity at work values. In return they receive a package of support to help them deal with bullying and harassment.

For details of the partnership contact Mandy Telford, Coordinator, on 020 7420 8900 or visit www.dignityatwork.org

Partnership steering group members include: ACAS, British Airways, BAE Systems, BT, Connect: the Union for Professionals in Communications, Legal and General, Remploy, Royal Mail, The Chemical Industries Association and the TUC.

➤➤ Our aim is to encourage employee representatives and employers to build a culture in which respect for all individuals is seen as an essential part of conduct for everyone in the workplace ◀◀

Baroness Anne Gibson
Chair, Dignity at Work Partnership

This leaflet has been produced by the Dignity at Work Partnership to provide leaders of organisations with information, guidance and examples of good practice in tackling bullying and harassment at work.

Statistics show that bullying is worryingly wide spread. One fifth of all UK employees have experienced some form of bullying or harassment, according to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). A TUC survey says two million workers claim they had been bullied at work in a six month period.

What is bullying?

Bullying can take many forms. It is generally accepted as unwanted behaviour that offends, persecutes or excludes someone. It includes treating individuals in a demeaning and unacceptable way and can be intimidating, malicious or insulting, or a misuse of power to undermine, humiliate, threaten or cause injury. Harassment is usually seen as constant interference or intimidation that violates people's dignity or creates a hostile or degrading environment.

➤➤ Two million workers claim they had been bullied at work in a six month period ◀◀

Facts about bullying

Anyone can be the target of bullying and it can occur at all levels of work. It damages individuals, the performance of organisations and profitability. The cost and consequences of this are:

- ❖ time and money spent investigating and resolving complaints
- ❖ money lost through absenteeism
- ❖ loss of employees – targets of bullying and employees who witness it are more likely to leave than complain or challenge bad behaviour
- ❖ recruitment costs resulting from high employee turnover rates
- ❖ expenditure on tribunals and financial settlement.

Certain groups including black and Asian employees, women and disabled people, are more likely to be targeted – nearly one third of Asian employees, or those from other ethnic communities, report they have experienced some form of bullying or harassment, compared with 18 per cent of white employees.

Disabled employees are at least twice as likely to report having experienced one or more forms of bullying and harassment compared to non-disabled employees (CIPD).

Often employees who are bullied state others in their workplace are subjected to the same treatment. This indicates the organisation, rather than the individual, has a bullying culture.

➤➤ Communicating to all employees the organisation's commitment to dignity at work
...shows management takes it seriously
and is prepared to act ⚡⚡



WORKPLACE BULLYING – WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT IT?

In 2006 The Dignity at Work Partnership published findings from research conducted on its behalf by the University of Portsmouth on the effects of bullying and harassment in the workplace and the most effective ways of dealing with it.

Key findings and recommendations include:

- ❖ **Zero tolerance:** Organisations found to be most successful at dealing with bullying and harassment adopt a zero tolerance approach
- ❖ **Business case:** There are significant costs associated with the failure to deal with bullying and harassment at work and financial benefits to having a zero tolerance approach. This is best demonstrated through the development of a clear business case
- ❖ **Policies:** These set standards for acceptable behaviour and make it clear to individuals what their responsibilities are towards each other
- ❖ **Strong leadership:** Actions of leaders and senior managers are crucial. They must take the lead in tackling bullying and harassment to show employees they take the problem seriously
- ❖ **People focus:** UK workplaces are increasingly target driven environments with a shift away from people focused management towards command and control cultures
- ❖ **Intervention:** Early and informal action to resolve complaints and conflicts is core to effective intervention. The earlier an issue is resolved the better for all parties concerned
- ❖ **Training:** Awareness raising programmes and training are important in achieving change, but need to be mandatory and interactive to be effective
- ❖ **Trade Unions and HR:** Bullying at work is best tackled through a partnership of management, trade union representatives and human resource practitioners.

THE CHALLENGE FOR LEADERS

“Only two per cent of employers take a zero tolerance approach to bullying. Ninety seven per cent of organisations have never quantified the impact of bullying. Eighty per cent of organisations have an anti-bullying policy in place, but more than half of workers polled still think bullying is an issue within their organisation.” Amicus

Zero tolerance

The research findings show organisations most effective at dealing with bullying and harassment, and promoting dignity at work, take a zero tolerance approach.

This means employers accept bullying as the organisation's responsibility and not just an issue to be left to individuals to resolve. Underpinning this acceptance is recognition of the damaging effects bullying and harassment has on productivity and performance.

➤➤...employers accept bullying as the organisation's responsibility and not just an issue to be left to individuals to resolve◀◀

Zero tolerance organisations are characterised by having policies, procedures and strategies in place to challenge undesirable attitudes and behaviour, and encourage greater dignity for all employees.

Leaders can support this by:

❖ **Acknowledging bullying and harassment is bad for business:** the research demonstrates there is a strong business case for investing in measures to reduce levels of bullying and harassment and promoting dignity at work.

Allowing bullying and harassment to go unchecked exposes the organisation to risk and can result in:

- significant amounts of time and money spent investigating and resolving complaints

➤➤ **Allowing bullying and harassment to go unchecked exposes the organisation to risk** ◀◀

- additional recruitment costs for replacing targets of bullying and/or witnesses who are likely to resign, rather than stay and challenge negative behaviour
- expenditure on tribunals and financial settlements
- low morale, underperformance, insecurity, ill health and unstable workplace relationships; all of which impact on productivity and performance

In reverse, investment in anti-bullying and harassment initiatives can result in:

- a motivated and diverse workforce committed to delivering the organisation's goals
- lower absence and resignation rates
- fewer complaints and grievances
- lower levels of litigation and internal investigations
- enhanced reputation and easier recruitment

A good business case requires a wide range of data from all sections of the organisation which is thoroughly analysed to give a clear picture of the effects of bullying and harassment. Relevant data includes information on absence, sickness, resignations and complaints, along with profiles of employees based on for example, age, race and gender.

Leaders must determine who or which part of the organisation will be responsible for this task, for example HR, finance or line managers.

The real challenge is for leaders to show their commitment by resourcing fully the investment needed for dignity at work initiatives.

❖ **Persuading other leaders:** persuading board members, non-board directors and chief executives of the benefits of investing in dignity at work initiatives relies heavily on the presentation of a solid business case. Their support is imperative, not just to secure their consent to invest, but also to obtain their agreement to lead by example and to be seen to behave appropriately

❖ **Advocating change:** dignity at work needs to be championed from the top in order for it to be taken seriously and be accepted by the wider workforce

❖ **Communicating the need for cultural change:** specifically to senior management, team leaders and HR, who will be responsible for formulating policies and strategies and implementing any change programmes. They will be required to translate the leadership's vision and make it real. Failure to inspire them and secure their buy-in will jeopardise the chances of cultural change succeeding.

Communicating to all employees the organisation's commitment to dignity at work, and the measures to deal with issues such as bullying and harassment shows management takes it seriously and is prepared to act

❖ **Keeping informed of progress:** by insisting on regular reports and updates from senior managers on anti-bullying and harassment initiatives

❖ **Setting an example:** leaders play a key role in defining acceptable behaviour through their own actions and reactions to the behaviour of others. Their behaviour is watched and followed by employees throughout the organisation

❖ **Supporting managers to promote dignity at work:** leaders have a role in creating an environment where managers are supported and allowed to get on with managing others. Leaders also create the conditions and provide resources to help managers make the leadership's vision a reality.

Further support can be given to managers by ensuring appropriate learning and development opportunities are provided. Researchers found managers are, on the whole, ill equipped to deal with incidents of bullying and harassment, and there is a need for them to be trained in conflict resolution and mediation skills.

➤➤ There is a strong business case for investing in measures to reduce levels of bullying and harassment and promote dignity at work ◀◀

CASE STUDY

The Royal Mail Group (RMG) is made up of Royal Mail Letters, Post Office Limited and ParcelForce Worldwide, and employs around 180,000 people.

RMG's leadership considers bullying and harassment to be bad for business and its reputation. The organisation's aim is to make diversity and inclusion part of its 'corporate DNA', in order to attract the best employees at all levels.

When chairman Alan Leighton was appointed in 2002, he was tasked with turning around the company from a position of heavy financial loss, and his main priority was to make RMG a great place to work. The HR department was renamed 'People and Organisational Development' and within it a separate Diversity and Inclusion team was formed.

The team began a review of the existing policy on bullying and harassment; and organised a huge programme of diversity and inclusion training for all employees. This included a video showing powerful first-hand accounts of bullying and harassment. Research had shown 80 per cent of bullying complaints at RMG related to banter. A key message in the video was that, although people don't openly appear to mind jokes and nicknames, privately they may be extremely offended by them.

On completion of the review, a new policy was introduced clearly explaining the different stages of the complaints procedure.

To raise awareness of the new policy, the chairman wrote to every employee at their home address, enclosing a leaflet called Time to Stop Bullying and Harassment. This defines RMG's policy, and states the organisation's aims, expectations and commitment to cultural change.

CONCLUSION

Creating a work environment where employees feel valued and respected encourages positive feelings about their employer and their jobs. Investing in dignity at work initiatives demonstrates the leadership is serious about cultural change. The returns may be seen in improved performance and productivity.

For leaders, the challenge is to keep dignity at work on the agenda so it becomes embedded in the organisation's culture.

➤➤ The real challenge is for leaders to show their commitment by resourcing fully the investment needed for dignity at work initiatives ◀◀

REFERENCES AND INFORMATION

Beat bullying in the workplace:

A report on research findings on tackling workplace bullying and harassment (2006). Published by and available from the Dignity at Work Partnership.
Telephone: 020 7420 8900

Managing conflict at work:

A CIPD survey of the UK and Ireland (2004), Chartered Institute of Personnel Development.
Telephone: 020 8612 6200,
www.cipd.co.uk

Harassment, bullying and violence at work: A. Ishmael, Spiro Press

Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS)

Telephone: 08457 474747
www.acas.org.uk

Amicus the Union (now part of Unite)

Telephone: 020 7420 8900
www.amicustheunion.org

The Andrea Adams Trust

Telephone Helpline: 01273 704900
www.andreadamstrust.org

Department of Trade and Industry

Telephone: 020 7215 5000
www.dti.gov.uk

Dignity at Work Partnership

Telephone: 020 7420 8900
www.dignityatwork.org

Employment Tribunals

Telephone: 0845 795 9775
www.employmenttribunals.gov.uk

Health and Safety Executive

Telephone: 0845 345 0055
www.hse.gov.uk

Trade Union Congress

Telephone: 020 7636 4030
www.tuc.org.uk

The UK National Stress Network

Telephone: 07966 196033
www.workstress.net

Other leaflets in the Beat Bullying in the Workplace series:

- ❖ The role of trade unions
- ❖ The role of human resources
- ❖ The business case