

Workplace bullying  
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We all like to think that there is no bullying in our workplace however recent research conducted by Auckland, Massey and Waikato University of 1728 workers found nearly one in five had been bullied at work. Further research funded by the Department of Labour and Health Research Council found that employers did not understand, or know how to address the problem of workplace bullying.

So how can you identify bullying behaviours in your business and what can you do to prevent bullying in the workplace.

Identifying the bullying behaviours can be difficult. Generally bullies use covert behaviours – verbal, indirect, passive, subtle and hard to describe. Take an interest in your managers and their management style, listen to the words they use about their staff, keep your eye on the shop floor and talk to staff. Exit interviews can also be a good source of identifying issues. If issues are raised as people leave you can start asking questions to identify and isolate problems

Preventing bullying is a bit easier. Call bullying by its proper name. Ensure you have a comprehensive policy in place stating that bullying in the workplace is unacceptable and will be dealt with. Place the policy in your staff handbook so everyone can see that you have identified bullying as something you don't tolerate as a business owner.

You can also be open with staff and talk to them at team meetings about bullying behaviours, what bullying looks like and what they can do if they believe they are the victim of bullying. You don't need to have a complicated process in place. Just letting your staff know that they can come to you and that you will take their concerns seriously is sufficient. If you want to ramp it up a bit you could undertake climate surveys and perhaps implement a 360 degree performance management system. And if you get feedback from staff that raises concerns then deal with it.

So what else can you do to ensure bullying in the workplace is communicated as unacceptable in your business?

- Take all complaints seriously and fully investigate them
- Don't punish the messenger and try to keep them safe in the investigation process
- Don't make excuses or look the other way. Just because someone is having a hard time outside of work doesn't mean they can take it out on people at work
- Don't transfer the problem. If someone has talked to you about bullying own the issue and get to the bottom of it yourself.
- Remember that while an issue has been raised you cannot assume that what you are being told is the full story. Gather your facts before you make a decision.
- Ensure that your managers are well trained in conflict management, interpersonal skills and stress management. Research suggests that today's

bullies are overloaded and unable to cope with workload and difficult staff so they use bullying as a management style reflecting their inability to cope with the demands of their jobs.

Remember that every time a bully 'gets away' with the behaviour it is a signal to him or her that the business thinks it is acceptable.