Hospital Workplace Bully

Shifting 'Goal Posts', False accusations, and Mobbing



Photo by Martin Walls

Author: S Carroll, Nov 2013

ntroduction

The topic to be discussed is in relation to the important issue of workplace bullying. This topic is significant because if affects many people across the working spectrum. So much so, that the law in relation to workplace health & safety has been replaced by a new law: Work Health & Safety Act (2011). Workplace bullying encompasses many aspects, but most importantly, it impacts psychologically on people who are/have been subjected to such atrocious acts of the human nature. In order to approach the issue of workplace bullying, meanings and definitions are required, as are statistics, and also the unfortunate, personal experience of this type of bullying. This is going to be dealt with in the sections that follow.

Statistics of Workplace Bullying

Surveys have been conducted to determine the rates and types of bullying that occur in the workplace. Workplace bullying is an ongoing issue that needs to be monitored. Know Bull! Australia (2010), asserts that their key findings include: "workplace bullies are predominantly female; workplace bullies don't always act alone; (and) workplace bullies exhibit a 'pattern' of identifiable behaviours' such as "83.3% ... (represented) 'intimidating behaviour', 'decisions constantly undermined' (61.1%), (and) 'threatening behaviour' (55.5%)". There seems to be a wide range of behaviours that workplace bullies use in order to attack colleague(s).

Workplace bullying and its statistics have been documented by other people and organisations. The rates of bullying within the workforce needs to be recorded by various sources. Jensen (2005) concludes that "one in four Australian employees have been bullied at work, 75% of targets had to leave work to make the bullying go away, (and) 80% of bullies are in a position of authority." It is unfortunate that workplace bullying occurs so frequently and that people have to leave in order to get away from their bullies. It is distasteful that bosses are so often bullies. My experience that is documented, in the My Diary section, is of a former, bully boss.

What is Workplace Bullying?

In order to discuss workplace bullying it is important to review the new Work Health & Safety Act, including what definitions are parts of this law. According to the Work Health and Safety Act (2011), "the main object of this Act is to provide for a balanced and nationally consistent framework to secure the health and safety of workers and workplaces by": "protecting workers and other persons against harm to their health, safety and welfare through the elimination or minimisation of risks arising from work"; where "health means (both) physical and psychological health". This new act means that workplace bullying, of any means, from the physical to psychological, must now be taken into consideration within workplaces. It is not appropriate to simply have a code of conduct, where employees are to complete yearly questionnaires to be deemed competent. This is a law that needs to be enforced within workplaces, including bosses on every level within organisations.

Workplace bullying is an ongoing issue that is seen as important by the Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland. In particular, there is an article within their website that is called "Bullying and the Anti-Discrimination Act". The author, McCormack (2002), asserts that "bullying behaviour includes yelling or abuse, constant criticism of work, isolation of a person from normal work situations, overwork or underwork, impossible deadlines, undermining work performance, giving tasks which are meaningless or beyond the skill of the person, tampering with personal effects or equipment, or teasing".

These types of behaviours demonstrate what bullying is about. It not only includes behaviours, that need to be acted on, but also behaviours that are psychological in nature. There needs to be more done in workplaces in order to successfully deal with all types of bullying behaviours.

The issue of workplace bullying is something that needs to be dealt with appropriately. Bullying is something that needs to be stamped out in workplaces due to the insidious nature of the culture it breeds within the workforce. The Australian Human Rights Commission (2011), takes the view that "workplace bullying is verbal, physical, social or psychological abuse by your employer (or manager)" where bullying can look like "repeated hurtful remarks or attacks; playing mind games, ganging up on you, or other types of psychological harassment; (and) intimidation (making you feel less important and undervalued)". The results of workplace bullying are also mentioned, where "you might: be less active or successful; be less confident in your work; feel scared, stressed, anxious; want to stay away from work; (and) feel like you can't trust your employer or the people you work with" (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2011). Workplace bullying is unfortunately a part of workplaces within Queensland. I have experienced workplace bullying from a former boss. I have detailed my experiences in the format of a diary, where I detail the atrocious acts that I experienced at the hands of an incompetent boss.

Workplace bullying is downright inappropriate and unacceptable within workplaces. Workplaces need to maintain standards of safety, for all employees, as well as for the general public. When workplace bullying is occurring and is not being dealt with appropriately or at all by management, then that workplace is not a safe one. Reach Out Australia (n.d.), asserts that "workplace bullying is any physical or mental intimidation by a person or group of people in your workplace" where "it can happen in any kind of workplace and the person or group ... can come from co-workers too" and "some types of workplace bullying include: making impossible demands; setting you up to fail; (and) withholding important info". These are some of the types of workplace bullying that I have experienced within a workplace. This is outlined in the next section, where I have



included numerous diary entries, from when I experienced workplace bullying.

The concept of workplace bullying involves many aspects. It is unfortunate that some of these aspects are more easily proven than other ones. The Department of the Premier and Cabinet in South Australia (n.d.), strongly argues that "workplace bullying means any behaviour that is repeated, systematic and directed towards an employee ... that a reasonable person, having regard to the circumstances, would expect to victimise, humiliate, undermine or threaten and which creates a risk to health and safety". Definitions are also provided: "repeated refers to the persistent or ongoing nature of the behaviour and can refer to a range of different types of behaviour over time; systematic refers to having, showing or involving a method or plan; (and) risk to health and safety includes the risk to the emotional, mental or physical health of the person(s) in the workplace" (The Department of the Premier and Cabinet in South Australia n.d.). Bullying involves repeated behaviours that can have an impact

on emotional and also mental health. It is unfortunate that the result of these behaviours is ultimately to risk health and safety of all persons within any workplace. My experience of workplace bullying, as recorded in the next section, occurred when I worked within the hospital setting.

Workplace bullying involves a number of categories in regards to comments and behaviours. It is important to be able to recognise what these categories are and mean. Jensen (2005), proposes that "there are five well reported categories of bullying that occurs in workplaces" including: "1. Threat to professional status (such as) humiliation in front of colleagues or others; 2. Threat to personal standing (such as) unreasonable job demands and overloading; 3. Isolation (such as) withholding information required to do the job; 4. Overwork (such as) impossible deadlines; (and) 5. Destabilisation (such as) shifting goal posts." I would agree with the five categories mentioned as being the combined behaviours of bullies. My experience that is documented in the next section is of a former, bully boss.



1st Week



DAY ONE

Dear Diary,

I feel afraid and anxious about going back to work. My boss says that he/she doesn't understand me because I change my mind about my life's decisions. This is in regards to the decisions I've made and others that are out of my control: I'm living with my parents, I'm in my 30's, I'm single, and I'm doing further study. This comes from my boss who has different values and beliefs than what I do, and chooses to disregard mine. It appears to me that I am not the sort of person who fits into his/her way of thinking.

What does my boss expect? I'm unsure of his/her expectations. I'd prefer it if he/she left me alone. I guess that is part of my unrealistic expectations. I'm not sure how well that he/she runs the workplace, especially since bullying people appear to be his/her way of dealing with people who are different in some ways to him/her.

Day Two

Dear Diary,

I am going back to work tomorrow after having some time off. Tomorrow, I will work with staff, who suck-up to the boss, and then the following day as well. It seems that at this workplace, boss seems to act inappropriately on a continual basis through the comments and actions that he/she makes. I can only guess that since my boss lied about his/her comments and actions, directed towards me, to his/her own boss, then my boss acts like a suck-up towards his/her own boss. It seems to be a shame that he/she acts like this in regards to his/her own boss and in general.

DAY THREE

Dear Diary,

I am writing at the dining room table. I have learnt that one of my boss' favourites is only working part-time: two days a week. It is interesting to me, that I work part-time and that then becomes a problem for my



boss. Also, I think that my boss does not like me because I have dyed my hair blonde. My boss seems to think that it is part of my job to put up with her unwelcomed comments and behaviours.

Yesterday at work I finished late. I feel self-conscious because of my boss' comments. I feel so exhausted, but I am aware that I need time to wind down after working. My boss seems to have other issues going on. It appears to me that perhaps his/her issue with me is not necessarily about how well I do my job, but he/ she wants to find any means necessary to destabilise my work like through: focussing on the colour of my hair.

DAY FOUR

Dear Diary,

I hope that I am improving when working. However, I don't know if I'm improving enough, to meet my boss' work standards. These standards seen to be changing, and this makes me feel nervous.

It seems to me that my boss has something against me, at the moment, because I have blonde hair. The exception here is her favourite. There is a part of me that wonders why my boss has a problem with me and the colour of my hair. But, on some occasions, I don't want to know. I don't understand why my boss feels the need to bully me, in regards to my hair colour, or at all. This doesn't make sense to me.

My boss' favourite has a new haircut. I decided to have a new haircut recently, which wasn't that different from my usual one, and I am also now more blonde. But, my boss had an issue with it. What does my hair colour have to do with my job? What does it have anything to do with? Am I any different because I wanted to have different haircut? It is convenient for my boss to bully me, in regards to my hair. He/she does this in private and then denies it later.

My boss appears to discriminate against me, in the following areas: my relationship status, as I'm in my 30's and I'm not married; parental status, as I have no children; I'm doing study and so I don't work full-time, so he/she has a problem with anything that may stop me from working full-time; and I now currently live at home with my parents. My boss has stated repeatedly, what he/she considers to be the failings within my life and lifestyle. It seems to me, that my boss does not think that I am someone who deserves to be treated with respect. He/she uses sarcasm as well as intimidation in order to belittle my opinion as his/her way of dealing with me. This has been done in private and also out on the ward. But, as the saying goes, if there are no witnesses, then there is no evidence to prove that any bullying has actually occurred.

I am trying to do the best that I can in this situation. I am attempting to improve my communication skills for my boss. However, I don't know that I can ever meet what appear to be the most unrealistic expectations that my boss expects me to meet.

2ND WEEK

DAY ONE

Dear Diary,

I am writing to you about the behaviours and comments made by my boss, her favourite, and another staff member. Their behaviours have now deliberately changed towards me. They speak to me in better ways at work. It seems to me that I needed to make a complaint to the boss of my boss to get changes in their behaviours towards me. It's almost at the point where it is too late for them to change. I'm not willing to put up with them anymore. I am over their bullying, where they direct their vile comments towards me.

These work colleagues are mostly, married with children. I don't understand how it is that these people give the impression that they function as adults. I would prefer not to deal with bullies, in a workplace where bullying seems to be rampant. In this workplace, it seems like I have nowhere to turn for help.

3RD WEEK



DAY ONE

Dear Diary,

I have been at work today, to complete a course that has to do with improving my communication skills, as per my boss. While it is interesting to learn about communication skills in relation to team work, the place where I work is very much about the individual. It seems to me, from the communication skills course, that there is no "I" in teamwork. There also seems to be a lack of leadership skills in the place where I work. Both of these behaviours are called barriers to encouraging effective teams. I do not understand how any effective team can exist, where anyone who "seems to be different", is made a target by any number of the workplace bullies.

I currently work in a place where the boss seems to have limited experience in regards to team work. It seems to me, that the bottom line is most important, as nothing is being done about maintaining a safe, work environment. The boss appears to show limited leadership skills, as he/she resorts to bullying in order to perform his/her job. It also appears to me that my boss has no self-control in the manner he/she conducts his/herself. In regards to the communication skills course I am doing, I am surprised to learn that he/she seems to be unaware of how he/she needs to be an effective team leader. I had no idea about the impact of a poorly run workplace, as I haven't experienced this before.

I have to say that I was really lucky, when I worked at other workplaces to have bosses who ran the workplaces. This is in distinct contrast with my current boss, who has an airy-fairy do-it-now-or-else attitude, regardless of what the other priorities might be at that point in time. But, I am only a worker who is being bullied by the boss. I feel afraid and anxious in regards to what is going to happen to me at work at the moment. I do not like being bullied because of the way I am. I would prefer to keep on working at this workplace, but there is no way that I am going to sacrifice my values or beliefs in order to keep a job at this dysfunctional workplace. I simply refuse to put up with bullying from my boss, as I see no other way out.

Day Two

Dear Diary,

I'm at work to finish modules, as per my boss' instructions. I have completed some more modules within the course about effective teams. I find it ironic that effective teams, in part relates to the leadership of any team. I also find it interesting about this course is that differences among team members are to be accepted. It seems to me that my boss only knows how to act like a bully. There seems to be minimal leadership skills demonstrated by my boss, as he/she flits around the workplace. There seems to be minimal team work here, as there appears to be the process of dropping everything for the boss, whenever the boss has demands to be met, unrealistic or not.

DAY TWO - CONT'D

Dear Diary,

I am sitting on my bedroom floor. I am crying because I feel upset as my boss has gained the upper hand. His/her boss has decided that I am not able to move to another area. There is no way that I can prove that my boss has been bullying me, as I am unable to provide any evidence at all.

Nothing I do is good enough for my boss, as he/she keeps changing the requirements that I need to meet. My best is not good enough. There is no other path for me to follow as I need to make a decision: to either resign or let them have the chance to fire me. I am so exhausted, as this has been an emotionally draining process. What I have been doing has not been working. I would probably fail my next performance appraisal because my boss would find a way for me not to pass. I will be providing my boss with a letter that states I will be resigning in two weeks. I do feel scared and anxious for being put on diminished performance by my boss.

At the end of the day, I cannot put up with being bullied by my boss. I refuse to put up with being bullied by my boss. I think that I have come to a set of crossroads. I need to stand up for myself, by resigning at work, as that is the only decision for me to make.



DAY THREE

Dear Diary,

I am on my way to speak with my confidant, to discuss with him/her in regards to being bullied by my boss. In particular, I'm going to discuss my decision to quit. I do wonder what his/her reaction will be as I'm worried that he/she won't agree with me. I need his/her support because he/she tends to give me feedback that is spot on with valuable encouragement. I feel like I can really trust him/her as part of my support network.

I have decided than I'm not able to put up with the bullying in this workplace any longer. I am not prepared to have to choose between myself and what my unscrupulous boss thinks and does. I am not doing that anymore as I cannot put up with the culture of bullying at this workplace anymore. My choice is to quit. This does hurt, but I have come to the point where I need to value myself.

DAY THREE - CONT'D

Dear Diary,

I've been to see my confidant today, and he/she agreed with my decision to quit my job. I do feel a sense of relief knowing that, someone who I trust, agrees with my future actions.

I feel like I am at the dawn of my life. I feel like I will now be able to take back some control of my life. I feel a sense of relief knowing that there is something wrong with my working life, and that I do have some power to do something about that. I would prefer to work in a workplace where bullying towards employees is not permitted. I think that the issue of bullying is uncalled for and is downright unprofessional.

DAY THREE-FURTHER ENTRY

Dear Diary,

I am back living at home now. I feel like a weight has been removed from my shoulders. With my confidant's support, I am going to resign from my position. I am unable to prove that I have experienced bullying at this workplace. It is unfortunate to experience bullying, but maybe something will come out of this.

DAY FOUR

Dear Diary,

I feel scared and anxious about going back to work tomorrow, as I don't know what will happen to me when I'm there. I do worry about the reactions of the staff at work and what will be reported back to my boss. I feel afraid that my conduct tomorrow will not be deemed good enough. I feel like the staff have knives out to get me, and this will occur when I least expect it.

DAY FIVE

(TYPED IN RETROSPECT)

Dear Diary,

I am sitting down having my break. I feel like I've come back to work in a war zone. I feel like anything I say or do will get back to my boss, behind my back. I feel overwhelmed as it seems to be occurring more often. The staff, in general seem to act so fake towards me.

It would appear that since I am different then my boss will not accept me. It seems to me, that the only way my boss knows how to deal with different people, is to bully them. I don't know what to do as the bullying has occurred mostly in private. Due to this, it is my word against him/her, and no one believes what I say.



DAY SIX (Typed in retrospect)

Dear Diary,

I am at work and having my break. My boss' favourite is working now. He/she actually said hello to me, so I said hello back. This is somewhat strange as he/she doesn't usually speak to me.

I have made some decisions that will terminate my job. As of tomorrow, I'm going to work on a letter of resignation, in order to give the required two weeks' notice. I plan on resigning, in a few days so I will speak with my boss. I will come in person to work to notify him/her of my decision.

My boss has previously threatened me with dismissal. My boss also told me to resign if things weren't going to work out. The toxic atmosphere, at my workplace, is not something that I can put up with anymore. I have no ideas about what I can do in regards to my situation. Therefore, I would prefer to resign before my boss finds some way of firing me.

4TH WEEK

DAY ONE

Dear Diary,

This morning I typed up my resignation letter to my boss. I feel nervous about going in to work tomorrow. I am going to wear a black dress as it is the end of my job. This is the end as there is no going back from here. When I resign, I only need to give two weeks' notice, so that is what I'm giving to my boss.

Day Two

Dear Diary,

I have accomplished a number of things today: handing in my letter of resignation to my boss, with one of the other employee's present, as well as wearing a suitable black dress to end my job. The meeting with my boss mostly went well as I think that I handled myself well.

DAY THREE

Dear Diary,

I feel scared and anxious about going back to work on Monday. I feel quite nervous about going back to work especially now that I've officially resigned. I am concerned about the other staff members' reactions to my resignation. I am concerned about any possible negative remarks that may be made to me.

I feel guilty for resigning at this part of the year, but I've had enough of the bullying that I've been subjected to from my boss. I want to move forward in my life and this involves change.

5TH WEEK

DAY ONE

Dear Diary,

I feel angry at my boss as he/she acted "nice" towards me today. I felt infuriated. Other staff seemed "nice" to me today as well. I felt infuriated about that as well. Bullies don't change their stripes as far as I'm concerned. There are some things that I won't miss about this job.



Moving On

It seems to me that it is expected that whoever is bullied will move on. This is something that is difficult to do, but it helps to understand the bullies as well as the organisations themselves. Healey (ed. 2011), concludes that "managers who bully or condone it: lack assertive leadership skills; (are) incompetent; lack respect and empathy for staff; (are) under threat to protect their job; abuse or use people instead of guiding them; (are) expected to bully to achieve; (are) enabled by their organisation to bully; (and the) bully (is) to remain in control or enable others to bully, creating a pattern for everyone else". This quote demonstrates my experiences at the hand of a bully boss. The organisation involved helped to keep the bully where he/she was. My former, bully boss expected to be in control as well as created more bullies within the hospital setting that I worked in.

Conclusion

Although some years have passed, since I was bullied at work, it was not easy for me to move on. I found it quite difficult to cope with. I did keep a record of what happened during the time that I was bullied. Unfortunately, this has scarred my outlook on my working life. While writing "The Workplace Bully", I have found it interesting to find articles that clarified that I was being bullied at work. In summary, I felt compelled to write this in order to have a type of catharsis from my workplace bullying experience.



NOTE: The workplace bullying stories on this website have been pre-approved by their authors for use by news and other outlets. Since workplace bullying invariably causes a great deal of emotional stress and trauma to workplace bully 'targets' - Know Bull! requests and appreciates that information gleaned from submitted stories, for the purpose of publishing elsewhere, be treated with the utmost integrity, including retaining the original 'intent' and context of the information provided by the authors.

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