



THOUGHTS ON CYBERBULLYING IN THE WORKPLACE

Most people consider cyberbullying a teenage issue. Regretfully, the workplace is not immune to cyberbullying as the problem has expanded to adults. Cyberbullying at work, just like ordinary workplace bullying, can cause worker anxiety, stress and reduced productivity.

Cyberbullying is like traditional workplace bullying and harassment, but involving electronic devices and online communications. Examples include, but are not limited to, text messages, tweets, malicious or threatening emails or social media posts.

BULLYING BEHAVIOR DEFINED:

Workplace Bullying refers to repeated, unreasonable actions of individuals (or a group) directed towards an employee (or a group of employees), intended to intimidate, degrade, humiliate, undermine or create a risk to the health or safety of the employee(s) including physical and emotional stress. Bullying behavior creates feelings of defenselessness and discomfort in the target.

Workplace Bullying may involve abuse or misuse of power. Bullying is different from aggression. Aggression may involve a single act, but bullying involves an ongoing pattern of behavior against the target. "Demanding" bosses are not necessarily bullies if they are respectful, fair and their primary motivation is better employee performance through setting high-yet-reasonable workplace expectations.

CYBERBULLYING IN THE WORKPLACE DEFINED

Usually, it involves offensive emails or text messages containing jokes or inappropriate wording towards a specific individual race, gender, nationality, or sexual preference. The words have a direct effect on the bullying target. Another example is an intended personal email response forwarded without permission for the whole office to see.

With that said, knowing how to respond is essential. While every situation is different, here are 11 suggested ways to handle cyberbullying at work:

- Do not respond immediately. When a coworker or supervisor says something inflammatory, posts something un-

THOUGHTS ON CYBERBULLYING IN THE WORKPLACE

Continued from page 1

true or attacks you online, take a moment to gather your thoughts. No matter how much the words hurt you, do not respond in anger. Instead, take a deep breath and collect yourself. The goal is not to react but rather respond in a reasonable manner. Sometimes there is no need to respond.

- Keep your response calm and rational. Although it is usually best to ignore a cyberbully, sometimes work situations require you respond to an email or other form of communication. If you can respond in-person rather than in writing, do that. However, do not get into a shouting match. Your own angry words and accusations serve no purpose. An exchange between you and another coworker watched by the entire office will not help.
- Tell the cyberbully that you expect the behavior to end. Remember, your interpretation of the written word may be different than intended. So, communicate openly and honestly about what you found offensive. Do not resort to threats — instead, calmly indicate you were offended. Be sure the cyberbully knows you expect the comments to stop...now.



IF YOUR CO-WORKER'S BEHAVIOR DOESN'T CHANGE AND CYBERBULLYING CONTINUES, IT'S TIME TO MOVE UP THE MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHAIN OF COMMAND.

- Print and keep copies of all the harassment. Try to save all messages, comments and posts as evidence. This includes emails, blog posts, social media posts, tweets, text messages and so on. Your first reaction may be to delete everything, but without evidence you have no proof of cyberbullying.
- Report cyberbullying to your supervisor or Human Resources Department. Provide a copy of the harassment correspondence for their files. It is important you continue to report each incident that occurs. If your employer is unwilling to address the cyberbullying, consider contacting the police to file a report. While legally their response may be limited, having a report on file is important should the cyberbullying escalate.
- Report cyberbullying to your Internet Service Provider (ISP). When cyberbullying occurs on your personal accounts or happens at home, it's important that you report the incidents. Be sure to forward copies of the cyberbullying to your ISP. If bullying occurred on a social networking site, be sure to report it to them as well. Note: As a practice, it may be better not to share personal information with coworkers. Many people do not interact with coworkers on social media websites to avoid giving out too-much-information.



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CONTACT THE POLICE IMMEDIATELY IF THE CYBERBULLYING INCLUDES THREATS.

- Threats of death or physical violence or indications of stalking behavior are against the law and should be immediately reported. You should report any harassment that continues over an extended period, as well as any harassment correspondence based on race, religion or disability. The police will address these incidents as it is then a law matter.
- Find out if your company's email program has a filter that allows only those on your "safe" list to send you emails. If possible, limit your online communication at work too.
- Report anonymous cyberbullying. Many times, the police can track down who is sending the emails and messages as the cyberbully will leave a clear trail of evidence that, if reported to appropriate authorities, can go a long way towards putting it to an end.
- Take the high road. The goal is to remain calm and rational. No matter what the person says or does, try to maintain your composure at work. If you get upset, post negative things or say something you later regret, this could hurt your position at work. Remember, the cyberbully is hoping to get a reaction out of you. Do not allow this to happen. Be as professional as possible always.
- Find Support. Cyberbullying is a major issue that shouldn't be handled alone. Be sure to surround yourself with supportive friends, co-workers, supervisors and family. Look for people who can understand what you are going through.

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