



# Coping with Bully Bosses

## **Coping with Bully Bosses**

By Carol Fehner

### **What Does a Bullied Workplace Look and Feel Like?**

In a bullied workplace employees will talk one on one confidentially to a Union rep about their bad experiences with bullying, but they will not normally talk among themselves. When the Union representative suggests action such as a grievance or EEO complaint, the employees make excuses and will not cooperate. They retract what they initially told the representative about their experience, or simply refuse to take any action. Naturally, that is difficult for an assertive representative to understand and deal with. It leaves the union holding the bag without any way to remedy the problem.

Why does this happen? A bullied workgroup is much like a group of abused children. They see the bullying but think that by helping the abuser and not the bullied person they will avoid getting that treatment themselves. They tattle and are encouraged to tattle on the bullied target. Employees know who is the current target of the bully. In a workplace with a bully manager, dissent is never voiced publicly. The bully responds to any dissent with overwhelming attacks in order to discourage further dissent. He or she is unable to cope with any disagreement.

Another indicator of a bullied workplace is a lack of cohesion and cooperation among workers. Since they are competing to keep himself or herself out of the bully's target center, they do not want to risk attaching themselves to others who may be the subject of attack. If such employees are asked to stand together and take concerted action by a Union rep, they will not do so. Some of the employees, even targets, will publicly endorse and support the bully. All of these responses frustrate the Union rep trying to deal with the real problems in the workplace.

According to Drs. Ruth and Gary Namie, internationally recognized experts in the field of bullying in the workplace, over eighty percent of workplace bullies are bosses, some are co-workers and a few are individuals who bully employees of higher rank. Half of bullies are male, half female. When a target is female, forty-six of the time her bully is also female. A recent reliable study estimates that in the past year approximately one in five American workers has experienced destructive bullying in the workplace.

Once the initial traumatizing action is complete by the bully, later attacks on the target can appear to outsiders as not of much consequence. The target has been so traumatized by the initial incident that he or she is hypersensitive to further attacks. The bully keeps up with small attacks, like dripping water torture. Frequently outsiders ask the target why the incident in question is so terrible. What outsiders fail to understand is that the target and many of the target's co-workers are hypersensitive to the bully's attacks. Their seeming overreactions can be compared to those of veterans with post traumatic stress disorder.

Bully bosses like to portray themselves as tough but fair, and their targets are often so demoralized that they think that the fault is their own. The Brutal Boss Questionnaire—included below—is a useful tool to distinguish a bully boss from one who is merely demanding.



- 23. My boss is dishonest with me. \_\_\_
- 24. My boss shows no regard for my opinions. \_\_\_
- 25. My boss is deliberately rude to me. \_\_\_
- 26. My boss lies to me. \_\_\_
- 27. My boss misleads me for her/his own benefit. \_\_\_
- 28. My boss insists that I work hard. \_\_\_
- 29. My boss displaces blame for her/his own failures onto me. \_\_\_
- 30. My boss openly degrades and/or personally attacks me. \_\_\_
- 31. My boss mistreats me because of my lifestyle. \_\_\_
- 32. My boss demands that I constantly do high-quality work. \_\_\_
- 33. My boss reprimands me in front of others. \_\_\_
- 34. My boss deliberately makes me feel inferior. \_\_\_
- 35. My boss is not honest with the people who rank beneath her/him. \_\_\_
- 36. My boss threatens me in order to get what s/he wants. \_\_\_

### Scoring

Total your responses to the following questions:

5 \_\_\_

10 \_\_\_

14 \_\_\_

20 \_\_\_

28 \_\_\_

32 \_\_\_

Tough boss total \_\_\_\_\_

Now total your responses to the remaining thirty questions:

### KEY

<i>Tough boss total + bad boss total</i>		= <i>Assessment of boss</i>
36 to 48	less than 90	= Tough, but not abusive.
Under 36	less than 90	= Not particularly tough.
36 to 48	90 to 195	= Tough, with instances of abuse Adverse effects on work and well being may very well occur.
Any	Over 195	= Abusive. Deteriorating mental and physical health and lowered productivity are associated with this level of mistreatment.

## What Are the Effects of Bullying?

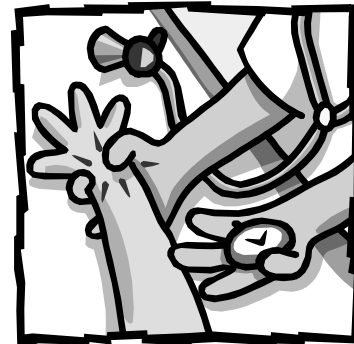
### Emotional and Psychological Effects



- Poor concentration, forgetfulness
- Stress, anxiety, irritability
- Mood swings, bursts of anger
- Spontaneous crying, lost sense of humor
- Indecisiveness
- Social withdrawal from co-workers, friends and family
- Panic attacks, depression
- Feelings of insecurity, being out of control
- Nightmares about the bully
- Obsessive thinking about the bully
- Always anticipating the next attack (on-alert status, vigilance)
- Loss of sleep, fatigue (Number one factor in workplace accidents)
- Shattered faith in self-competence and feelings of worthlessness
- Shame, embarrassment, and guilt (which preserves the silence bullies require to thrive)
- Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Violence resulting in death. If PTSD or prolonged clinical depression go untreated, the results are suicide, severe retaliation against the bully, or violent rage against anyone unfortunate enough to be nearby.

### Physical Illnesses

- Reduced immunity to infection: more colds, flu
- Menstrual difficulties
- Itching, skin disorders
- Stress headaches
- Increased allergies, asthma
- Indigestion, colitis, irritable bowel syndrome
- Rheumatoid arthritis
- Hair loss
- Hyperthyroidism: overactive thyroid gland
- Migraine headaches
- Hypertension Diabetes mellitus
- Peptic ulcers
- Heart palpitations
- Heart attacks from long-term stress



## Why Do the Usual Tools Not Work in a Bully Workplace?

You may ask, “I use tools like grievances, ULP’s and EEO complaints to stop management abuses. Why should I use other techniques with bullying?”

- Bullies harass and intimidate the entire group of employees, selecting one at a time for particular “attention.” This makes EEO charges virtually impossible to sustain. Bullies do not pick on a single protected class; they go after the entire group, one person at a time.
- Union contracts rarely identify generalized harassment, bullying and inhumane vilification of employees as grievable behaviors.
- Bullied workers suffer such a loss of their sense of self worth that they *will not file a grievance and will not even act as a witness for the union if we file one*. This causes many of us to say; “If they won’t help, we can’t help them.” Unfortunately, the reality is that *these employees cannot act to fight the bully*. They are too ill and too damaged to do anything but try to survive by hanging on with the tips of their fingers. Any remedy we bring to the situation has to take this into account.
- Bullies are very canny about how they attack their targets. They often take pride in behaving in such a way that they are not violating any specific workplace rules but still are intimidating and attacking workers.
- Bullies, and the organizations that support them, boast about winning litigation against workers and their representatives. When they lose litigation, they blame the third party decision-makers, not the organizational dysfunction. The result of this is that the litigation effects no change in the bully’s behavior.
- Often the initial workplace trauma is such a shock that there is a sense of unreality engendered in the workers. “I just couldn’t believe what happened” is a frequent response. Workers defer taking aggressive action to stop the attacks because they simply deny that such behavior happens in the workplace. They think the initial attack is just an aberration. Only much later, when serious damage has been done, do the workers see that there is a pattern in the behavior. At that time, because of the hypersensitivity that is also part of the individual response to such continuing attacks, very small incidents create significant responses. Those outside the situation who do not understand the bullied workplace cannot understand why such a “little” incident gives rise to such a significant traumatic response in the workers.
- Unfortunately, because this pattern of behavior is not familiar to us as union representatives, we try many techniques to deal with the problems. This uses time and permits the bully to exacerbate the impact on the workers.
- Arbitrators often favor management in issues of workplace discretion, and certainly play “follow the leader”. They are hired by both parties and seldom want to take professional risks by making precedential decisions in new areas. They do not want to risk their decisions being reversed by a third party.

## **What Does Work?**

### **Satisfaction Questionnaires**

Use Employee Satisfaction questionnaires. These seemingly innocuous instruments are extremely powerful. They permit employees to give the union information anonymously, and safely. As a result, employees are free to express their real feelings and opinions in a way guaranteed not to hurt them further. Management may even agree to use of these questionnaires because bullies really do not see themselves as others do. In one facility the manager was so sure that the problems were caused by “a few disgruntled employees” that he even wrote up a simple satisfaction survey! He was amazed by the results.

The questionnaires permit employees to express their collective voice in a safe and secure way. The results permit comparison between different groups of employees at different locations or workgroups made up of similar type workers. They also permit comparison over time by repeating the questionnaires periodically and examining the results. If you make changes in the workplace, the questionnaire permits you to measure the impact of the changes on the employees in a way that is reliable. Often management officials accuse union folks of relying on selected anecdotes that cannot be proven. Questionnaires are different.

There are many questionnaires available. Northwestern National Life Insurance Company has a great survey ready to share. It has complete data supporting it, and benchmarks to large populations of workers. Other organizations with surveys in the Federal Sector include OPM, and the US Post Office. One questionnaire is included in this chapter. Any one of them will provide valuable data for purposes of bullybusting and identifying problem workplaces or units.

Are these questionnaires hard to use? Absolutely not! You can give them to a small group of employees and make a simple stroke sheet to tally up the responses to each item. You can have them professionally printed for machine scoring if you have a large number of people you want to survey. You can group similar or related items and create a composite score for items related to similar issues: communication, training, etc. You can weight the scores and normalize the answers from the entire population and compare localized unit data to the larger population – which helps you find “hot spots.” You can administer the surveys repeatedly over time and compare scores. This lets you see if the workplace has improved or gotten worse. That is why you stick to one survey and do not change it much at all. The measurement over time with the same instrument provides valuable data about what is happening in the specific workplace. Having a means to measure what many management types think don’t exist will assist credibility and provide a common basis for problem solving.

### **Partnership with Employers**

You can collaborate with higher ranked management to seek out and remedy problems. This requires that the agency’s leaders recognize bullying as a problem. Many are not willing to recognize the problems that bullying causes both them and the workers. In some organizations, the overall culture allows bullies to breed and succeed. Secondly,

successful partnership requires that the employer has a desire to change. Often only a tragedy will motivate an employer to change. You and your management officials can–

1. Jointly administer the satisfaction questionnaires to the entire workforce identifying functional units and
2. Jointly establish a policy and process to remove bullies from positions of authority over others. Zero tolerance must be applied.

### **A Union Peer Counseling Program**

You can establish a union-based peer-counseling program. Train all union representatives in the specifics of bullied workplaces, so that they recognize them. Establish a cadre of peer counselors specially trained to assist members who have been bullied on the job. These employees need a different kind of support than others. The bully's targets need significant validation, confirmation and encouragement.

### **Bargaining of Contract Provisions**

Negotiate terms in your contracts to make bullying grievable. Use clauses permitting the union to bring such grievances without requiring the injured worker to bring the grievance.

### **Referrals to Therapists**

Targets benefit from referral to qualified therapists for ongoing support. The problem is that the therapeutic community is not necessarily knowledgeable about bullying at work and what is required to assist injured workers. Some therapists will respond to the target by saying: "That's just the way work is. If you don't like it, find another job," or "You seem to have a personality conflict and need to change yourself." Such blaming behavior from therapists further injures a targeted worker. For that reason, you should meet with the therapists first to check their understanding of bullying and how to interact with targets. What they should hear is: "You're not crazy, you are in a crazy-making situation that is not your fault!" The therapist should also encourage concerted behaviors in the workplace once a large enough group of the workers have established communication and trust between themselves.

### **How Can We Give Supportive Assistance to Targets?\***

1. Listen without judging or evaluating. Affirm, be positive and avoid asking "why" – because there is no reason to bully behavior.
2. Reassure the target that they did nothing to cause their own victimization. They are blameless and did nothing to bring on the bullying. Validate the target – they did nothing to cause this.
3. Put a name on what is happening to them – *Bullying*. Bullying happens to millions of people at work – 20 to 85% of the workforce has been bullied in their workplaces.
4. Reassure the targets that they are *injured*, not a mentally ill. They are sane, normal, competent people caught in a sick and harmful situation.



5. Shame and guilt are what fuels the bully: they are natural but not helpful in recovering from the bully's attack.
6. Explain that the reality is that the bully's behavior is unwarranted, irrational and *makes no sense*. The bully's worldview is warped, not the target's.
7. Share personal experiences you have had with bullies. We've all touched it.
8. Remind targets that others in their workplace may also be targets; they are not alone.
9. Encourage the targets to contact friends, avoid fighting recurring thoughts (they are normal), eat well balanced and regular meals, stay physically active, talk and write about what has happened in a journal, avoid stimulants, hug loved ones, play music, practice their faith, take hot baths – in general treat themselves well.
10. Encourage the target's family and friends to listen patiently and carefully, to spend time with the person, to offer help with daily tasks, to reassure the person about being safe, not to take expressed anger personally, and to say they are sorry that the bullying happened and that they want to understand and help.
11. Try to help the target avoid “worst case thinking” – because that amplifies the impact the bully has on them. Frequently the targets become their own worst enemies by staying wounded and freezing up in response to a bully.
12. Look for witnesses to the bullying who, with help, may be able to assist in fighting the bully.

\*Concepts courtesy of the Campaign Against Workplace Bullying –[ww.bullybusters.org](http://www.bullybusters.org).

## **What Else Can Union Folks Do**

### **Advocate for Worker's Comp Coverage.**

Push to establish PTSD as a result of bullying at work covered under Workman's Compensation, Disability Compensation and other similar programs.

### **Help Establish an Anti-Bully Law.**

The Campaign Against Workplace Bullying has a legal component. The UK and other countries have and are working to outlaw bullying in the workplace by passing laws that prohibit and punish such behavior. (Australia already has such laws.) The statutes make the employers liable along with the bully if they fail to act to correct the problem. The March 2000 edition of The Georgetown Law Journal contains the case for such a statute in the U.S. The campaign will be working to establish legislation to make bullying illegal in the workforce, just as discrimination against protected classes is. You can assist in the efforts to sponsor and establish such legislation in your community and state. The Campaign has sample language available.

### **Inform yourself about Bullying and Bullybusting.**

The Campaign Against Workplace Bullying has an active web presence the web address is <http://www.bullybusters.org>. Check out the materials and the campaign. The

campaign represents an interdisciplinary, international group of people working together to eliminate bullying in the workplace. Join the Campaign. The Campaign is beginning to host international symposiums to bring us all together to share information and work towards more effective solutions. Details are on the campaign web site.

**Read about the topic.**

Some suggested publications are:

*BullyProof Yourself At Work*; Double Doc Press, by Gary Namie, Phd. and Ruth Namie, Phd.

*The Bully at Work*: Source Books, by Gary Namie Phd., and Ruth Namie, Phd. (a new and expanded version of the above reference)

*The Violence Prone Workplace*; Cornell University Press, by Richard Dennenberg and Mark Braverman

*Bully Bosses: and their Prey*; Riverhead Press ,by Harvey Hornstein, PHD.

*Work Abuse: How to Recognize and Survive It*; Schenkman Books, by Judith Wyatt and Chauncey Hare

*The Workplace and Cardiovascular Disease*; Hanley and Belfus, Edited by Peter Schnall, MD, MPH (See the web sit at <http://www.workhealth.org>.)

“ The Phenomenon of ‘Workplace Bullying’ and the Need for Status-Blind Hostile Work Environment Protection”, Georgetown Law Journal March 2000, by David Yamada.

The Namies plan more publications in the bullybusting series.

**Sample Letter to Employees**

**National Council of SSA Field Operations Locals  
American Federation of Government Employees AFL-CIO**

Nov. 24, 2000

Dear Teleservice Rep:

AFGE is committed to creating the best and most supportive work environment for our members. We would like to find out about how you feel about your workplace and your job in order to identify ways we can improve them.

To help us, we would like you to fill out the enclosed questionnaire by Dec. 1st. It will take about ten minutes to complete.

Return it to your union rep who will have a container labeled "SURVEYS". Confidentiality is guaranteed. Do not sign your name on the questionnaire.

Thank you for your cooperation. We value your opinion and will share the results of this survey with you as well as publish it in the TSC News and Views.

In Unity,

(Union Representative's Name)

## Employee Satisfaction Survey

### **Instructions**

Thinking about your work site, how strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements? For each statement, check the response (using the Key below) that best describes your worksite.

### **PART I -**

#### **Key**

1. Strongly Agree    2. Agree Somewhat    3. Neutral    4. Disagree Somewhat    5. Disagree Strongly

<b>Inventory Item</b>	1	2	3	4	5
1. I can tell my supervisor what I think.					
2. My supervisor helps me do my job better.					
3. My supervisor listens to me and considers my input.					
4. My supervisor tells me when I do a good job.					
5. My supervisor treats me with respect.					
6. My supervisor keeps me informed.					
7. My supervisor's boss gives me the support that I need.					
8. I have confidence in the fairness of management.					
9. Senior management works well as a team.					
10. Management bases decisions on long term as well as short-term considerations.					
11. Agency policies have been clearly communicated to me.					
12. An open door policy is practiced in my worksite.					
13. I like the way this organization's culture is changing.					
14. My work is leading to the career path opportunities I want.					
15. My supervisor tells me what is expected.					
16. I am paid fairly for this kind of work.					
17. My work is challenging.					
18. My job is assisted by adequate staffing.					
19. My job is assisted by adequate staffing in other parts of the agency.					
20. I have adequate resources to do my job.					

21. I intend to continue working at this company.					
22. In general I look forward to coming to work.					
23. I am satisfied with the information and/or help I have received from human resources (personnel).					
24. My performance reviews have been timely.					
25. My performance reviews represent a fair appraisal of my performance.					
26. Performance reviews provide sufficient feedback.					
27. My human resource needs are met.					
28. I have received adequate training to do my job.					
29. I feel a shared responsibility for customer satisfaction.					
30. This company provides high quality services.					

**Part 2 -**

Again, please check the response closest to your assessment of your worksite using the Key below.

**KEY**

1. Very Good                      2. Good                      3. OK                      4. Poor                      5. Bad

Inventory Item	1	2	3	4	5
31. My supervisor's technical skills are:					
32. My supervisor's managerial skills are:					
33. My supervisor's interpersonal skills are:					
34. Senior management's understanding of technical issues is:					
35. Senior management's managerial skills are:					
36. Senior management's interpersonal skills are:					
37. The communication within my unit is:					
38. The communication between my unit and other units or sites is:					
39. The content and quality of unit meetings are:					
40. My personal morale is:					
41. My unit's morale is:					

**Part 3 -**

Again, please check the response closest to your assessment using the Key below.

**Key**

1. Greatly Improved Declined      2. Improved      3. Stayed the Same      4. Declined      5. Greatly Declined

<b>Inventory Item</b>	1	2	3	4	5
42. Over the last 6 months my morale has:					
43. Over the last 6 months the morale of my unit has:					
44. Over the last 6 months the morale in this organization has:					
45. Work quality has:					
46. Responsiveness to customers has:					

**Part 4 -**

Again, please check the response closest to your assessment using the Key below.  
How important are the items to increasing your job satisfaction?

**Key**

1. Very Important    2. Important    3. Some Importance    4. Little Importance    5. No Importance

<b>Inventory Item</b>	1	2	3	4	5
47. Interesting work.					
48. Pleasant work environment.					
49. Job Security.					
50. Socially responsible work.					
51. Successful agency.					
52. Compensation (including Benefits).					
53. The people here.					
54. Job Autonomy.					
55. Being trusted to do my best.					

**What changes are needed in your office to make it a better place to work?**

**What changes are needed in your unit to make it easier for you to do a good job?**

**Are there any questions that should be added to this survey?**

***Thanks for taking your time to complete this survey.***

## Employee Satisfaction Survey Scoring Instructions

1. Count the number of responses and put the number here: \_\_\_\_\_.
2. From each response, do a tally of which score the employee chose for each item on a scratch copy of this score sheet - then record the total on your final total.
3. Add up the aggregate score for the questions 1 to 47 divided by the number of respondents for your location - the lower, the better satisfied the employees are.

***From here down, scoring is optional, Send me your completed final tallies with the number in each block and I will crunch the numbers and send the subsets back to you in a worksheet format so you can look at your location and compare it to others.***

4. Subtotal scores for questions 1 to 6, 15, 24 to 26, 31 to 33, and 39 and divide by 14 and again by the number of respondents to provide a score for first line supervisory satisfaction.
5. Subtotal scores for questions 7 to 10 and 34 to 36; divide by 7 and again by the number of respondents to provide a score for second level management satisfaction.
6. Subtotal scores for questions 11, 12, 37, and 38; divide by 4 and again by the number of respondents to provide a score for communication.
7. Subtotal scores for questions 13, 17, 21, 22, and 40 to 44; divide by 9 and again by the number of respondents to provide a score for morale.
8. Subtotal scores for questions 28 and 39; divide by 2 and again by the number of respondents to provide a score for adequacy of training.
9. Subtotal scores for questions 18 to 20, 23 and 27; divide by 5 and again by the number of respondents to provide a score for adequacy of organizational support.
10. Subtotal scores for questions 45 and 46; divide by 2 and again by the number of respondents to provide a score for perceived quality.

### **PART I -**

	1 point	2 points	3 points	4 points	5 points
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					
6.					
7.					
8.					
9.					
10.					
11.					
12.					
13.					



14.					
15.					
16.					
17.					
18.					
19.					
20.					
21.					
22.					
23.					
24.					
25.					
26.					
27.					
28.					
29.					
30.					

**Part 2 -**

	1 points	2 points	3 points	4 points	5 points
31.					
32.					
33:					
34					
35					
36					
37.					
38					

39.					
40					
41					

**Part 3 -**

	1 points	2 points	3 points	4 points	5 points
42					
43					
44					
45					
46					

**Part 4 -**

	1 points	2 points	3 points	4 points	5 points
47					
48					
49					
50					
51					
52					
53					
54					
55					

**What would you like to change to make your office a better place to work?**

**What changes are needed in your unit to make it easier for you to do a good job?**

**Are there any questions that should be added to this survey?**

