

# WORK SHOULDN'T HURT!

By © Liz Harris, October 2000

Why put this paper together? I have a strong abhorrence of abuse in any guise. Bullying in the workplace, bullying in any place will only stop when people stop tolerating it. Nothing good ever comes from bullying and economic rationalism, corporate competitiveness and the drive for career advancement is **NO EXCUSE**.

"spreading knowledge...maybe then we can move beyond our frozen moments that keep us as deer caught in the headlights"

*This is for all my colleagues who I care about and know that together in strength and by using our smarts we can name what's happening to us and stop the abuse.*

'Bullies are inadequate, deficient and poorly developed people  
Their targets are empathic, just and fair people'

## How do you know you're a target of a workplace bully?

If you are experiencing any of the following as a result of going to work each day, it is highly likely that you are a target of a bully or bullies.

### Work Trauma<sup>1</sup>

Injures your:

- Emotional/psychological health
- Physical health
- Social relations
- Economic-Financial health
- Spiritual integrity and health

#### 1. Emotional-psychological health damage

- Poor concentration, forgetfulness
- Loss of sleep, fatigue
- Stress, irritability
- Mood swings, bursts of anger
- Spontaneous crying, lost sense of humour
- Indecisiveness
- Panic attacks, anxiety
- Clinical depression
- Feelings of insecurity, being out of control
- Nightmares about the bully
- Obsessive thinking about the bully
- Always anticipating the next attack (hyper-vigilance)
- Shattered faith in self-competence, feelings of worthlessness



<sup>1</sup> Most of this information and definitions has been downloaded from <http://www.bullybusters.org/> and <http://www.bullybusters.org/home/cawb.html> with additional information provided by the author.

- Shame, embarrassment, and guilt
- Self-destructive habits: Substance abuse, workaholism
- Altered personality, unrecognisable to family & friends
- PDS/PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders)
- Suicidal thoughts
- Violence: suicide or violence against others

Psychological pain should not be minimised or denied by Targets themselves or by others. The greater the severity of psychological pain, the more dangerous and the longer the effects seem to last. It is a fact that those exposed to domestic violence are hurt more by the verbal abuse rather than physical wounds – remembering that both are unacceptable.

**‘Bullying Can Be Hazardous To Your Health  
It Causes Psychological INJURY.  
Targets Are Not Mentally Ill!’**

## 2. Physical Health Damage

- Reduced immunity to infection: more colds, flu
- Menstrual difficulties
- Itching, skin disorders
- Stress headaches
- Increased allergies, asthma
- Indigestion, colitis, irritable bowel syndrome
- Rheumatoid arthritis, fibromyalgia
- Hair loss
- Weight swings
- Hyperthyroidism: overactive thyroid gland
- Migraine headaches
- Hypertension: high blood pressure
- Diabetes mellitus
- Peptic ulcers
- Heart palpitations
- Micro-shredding: weakened heart <sup>2</sup>
- Heart attack



## 3. Damage to Social Relations

- Co-worker isolation from personal fear
- Parents encourage compromise with bully
- Co-worker resentment, attempts to silence you
- Spouse questions your role in dispute with bully
- Children and friends outside work show strain
- Wavering support from family
- Abandonment/Betrayal by co-workers

<sup>2</sup> Micro-shredding was defined by Robert S. Elliot MD, a cardiologist hired by NASA to find out why many of their young engineers were dying mysteriously. It was determined that they had experienced Micro Shredding (stewing) of the heart muscle caused by stress. An old phrase in America is "Stewing in your own juices" meaning that the person was under such duress, stress, and anger that he is stewing his body. The symptoms are a sudden burning sensation of heartburn that is not due to gases in the stomach. What really happens is that the person is experiencing a special type of heart attack caused by excessive long term stress.

- Separation/Divorce by immediate family
- Abandonment by friends outside work

#### 4. Economic-Financial Damage

- Sympathetic medical provider's off-work for job stress
- Paid Time Off accounts begin to be used
- Sick leave exhausted, switch to short-term disability
- Employer encourages unpaid leave under Family Leave (not paid Sick Leave)
- Employer orders you to choose termination vs. Workers' Compensation (WC)
- PTO accounts exhausted, no days left
- Placed on long-term disability, income cut
- Personal savings tapped
- Creditors renegotiate payment structure
- File for WC, potentially lose right to sue
- Formally terminated in a way so employer can deny unemployment compensation
- Disability payments run out
- House and property sold
- Personal savings depleted

In a matter of a few months, it is possible that a vibrant, healthy, competent employee can be driven to ruin - economic, personal health and the loss of a support network. And this is all due to the unilateral decisions made by an incompetent, insecure, vicious individual backed by the power of an employer who did not want to get involved in a "personality conflict" between two people.

**Bullying in the workplace is nothing to do with personality conflicts – it is a deliberate act of one or more persons to cause harm or injury to another by the misuse of power and control. This includes subtle language and behaviour such as ‘pulling employees into line, referring to employees as subordinates etc’.**

#### Spiritual Abuse

Most information on workplace bullying does not spend much attention on the spiritual erosion that one may endure as a result of being a target of bullying. The impact on a person's spiritual wellbeing causes:

- mistrust where there was once trust
  - the erosion of one's belief system that people are inherently good
  - doubt in one's personal values and ethical standards
  - doubt and/or loss of spiritual integrity
  - doubt and/or loss of personal self-worth
  - hindrance of spiritual advancement and growth
  - deep feelings of inadequacy, guilt, humiliation and shame (in other words behaviour which is soul-destroying)
- to name a few.

*A **CONSULTANT** is someone who takes the watch off your wrist and tells you the time.*

## Stages of Stress

The Bully is the source of stress, the Stressor. It's the body and mind's response to stressors that determines the extent of damage inflicted. The sequence of biological stress is well known. There are three stages (Hans Selye):

1. Alarm - the turning on of the body's defence systems, that is designed to be brief for it is truly widespread in its effects throughout the body--it enables the "flight or fight" response in the face of danger - physical or psychological. The body reacts the same to fright from the impending pounce of a tiger as it does to an insult from the bully. Alarm triggers the sympathetic nervous system that releases adrenaline, in addition to many other functions.
2. Resistance - the maintenance of an alert stage that the body expected, and needs, to be turned off. Resistance to the bully and all that that requires depletes the body's defences. If you stay in the resistance stage too long, the body will rebound then it's finally turned off, the body rebounds and the actual damage occurs when the stressor is gone. The parasympathetic nervous system restores normalcy; it turns off the sympathetic.
3. Exhaustion - which can lead to death if the stressor never disappears and the body and mind must fight indefinitely. Exhaustion is a full system breakdown, mentally and physically. It demands that the stressor be removed or it will claim your life. To get to exhaustion, you have to ignore all the warning signs that your body gives you (see above psychological and physical effects).

**A cautionary word about stress "management." It is usually the wrongdoer's prescribed solution for the Target. No amount of cognitive distortion or discounting will stop life-jeopardising stress caused by a bully and her accomplices. The only long-term solution to stress is to REMOVE THE STRESSOR.**

**Separation from the bully is an imperative first step. To argue otherwise prolongs the Target's misery.**

## Definition of Bullying

### Workplace Bullying is:

‘the deliberate repeated, hurtful verbal mistreatment of a person (the target) by a cruel perpetrator (the bully). Regardless of the choice of tactics, the intimidation is driven by the bully's insatiable need to control others.

### Emotional Slaughter

Many victims of bully bosses say the emotional wounds last long after the work day is over, and can even affect marriages and children. Employees of bully bosses described the experience as "an emotional slaughter"... "he makes us feel like naughty children"... "she lies right to your face." In video of bully bosses in action, they resembled verbally abusive spouses: spouting four-letter words, calling names, sometimes threatening others with physical violence. When confronted, they were arrogant, smug and contemptuous.

Targethood hinges on two characteristics: an ability to cooperate and a non-confrontative interpersonal style. Bullying poses a serious health hazard to those targets by compromising their psychological and physical health, disassembling their social network and risking economic devastation through the loss of their jobs because "employment at will" encourages the bully's whimsical misuse of power. Bullies terrorise with impunity. Targets who are most surprised by the baseless cruelty inflicted on them suffer the most severe effects (PTSD) and take the longest time to heal afterwards. Silent, frozen co-workers worsen the problem often by choosing to cut off support, to tacitly or directly join the bully's personal vendetta against the target. Eventually, the workplace is paralysed by fear, incapable of productive work, and susceptible to costly downtime with an unhealthy workforce and an increased liability for destructive employment practices.

Interpersonal (1:1) bullying escalates when the institution either denies complaints about the bully's misconduct or responds inappropriately by marshalling internal resources to retaliate against the Target. Several external institutions - disability benefits and workers' compensation systems, the courts, health and mental health practitioners unaware of Work Trauma - then cooperate with the bullying employer in an economic and psychological assault against the victimised employee-target. Unlike cases involving violations of federally protected Civil Rights, bullied individuals in the U.S. today have few, mostly unsuccessful, avenues for legal redress. The Campaign will play a central role in the years to come to expand the legal options for Targets of "status-blind" hostile workplaces.<sup>3</sup>

### **Bullying is Abuse**

Abusers have victims. Battered spouses and children deserve to have the terms abuse and victim reserved for them because they suffer physical violence. Other forms of violence, such as emotional, financial, et cetera are slowly being addressed, but are not commonplace discussion among the workplace environment. This is now the case with Targets of bullying.

**Workplace bullying involves the abuse of power and control. We can no longer shy away from using the term abuse whenever possible. Only by naming what is happening to us, can we start to take action against it.**



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<sup>3</sup> The Drs. Namie

## **Bullying Studies**

Note: The following material is excerpted from *The Bully At Work*, © 2000 by Gary and Ruth Namie.

### **Where Do Bullies Come From?**

They are bullies for different reasons, but they all share the act of hurting others. Two exploit others. One can be turned back easily.

#### **(1) CHRONIC Bullies**

The Chronic bully tries to dominate people in nearly every encounter--at work and away from work. S/he bullies waitresses at restaurants as well as workplace Targets. S/he says "I can't help it. It's just who I am. Don't like it? Leave" always believing that s/he does not have to change. Who could argue with his or her "success?"

The Chronic bully's motivation is his or her own failure to confront their deepest feelings of personal inadequacy, their self-loathing. Unfortunately s/he was not raised to analyse him or herself, with the goal of improving. The self-control required to admit and overcome his or her shortcomings is applied painfully to those s/he seeks to dominate. S/he invents flaws in others (which are mirror images of themselves), then irrationally attacks them to feel good about him or herself.

#### **“Bullies Are Inadequate, Defective & Poorly Developed People Targets Are Empathic, Just & Fair People”**

S/he probably was probably a brash, bratty kid at school. Schoolyard bullies who were never stopped in childhood grow up to be workplace bullies. Because people react to him or her either with fear or indifference, they are used to getting their way. It's a self-reinforcing cycle. S/he dominates, others submit or turn away in silence, so s/he dominates more. In companies that promote cutthroat competition, Chronic bullies are over-represented. They are seen as "leaders."

Chronic bullies are trapped by their personality honed over a lifetime. They couldn't change even if they wanted. It is true that some Chronic bullies have certifiable character disorders - either as an Antisocial or Narcissistic Personality Disorder. In the general population, these types of people are statistically rare, hovering around 2-3%, according to the DSM-IV, the classification guide to mental disorders published by the American Psychiatric Association.

These are the most malevolent, mean-spirited and nasty people at work. They manipulate everyone on some level. They inflict harm on others. Chronic bully's end careers and shatter the emotional lives of their targets. And Targets tell us frequently that staring into the face of their bully, they swear they are looking at the devil personified. Some bullies delight in humbling other people into subservience. Their cruelty is so satisfying, they cannot stop their evil smirk when they sense public victory. A small number of bullies are undeniably sadistic. They love torturing others.

Targets should know that simply labelling the bully a sociopath or psychopath does not change the situation or excuse the bully. Most important, dwelling on the bully's relatively permanent personality distracts Targets and those who want to help them from changing the work environment.

**Except for the rare personality disordered types, all bullies can be made to respond to workplace rewards and punishment.**

**As a Target, you need to be less concerned with why bullies do what they do and most concerned with how to stop the hurt they inflict (BullyProofing yourself) or how to bring them down (BullyBusting).**

## **(2) OPPORTUNIST Bullies**

The Opportunist bully is the one you're most likely to encounter at work. S/he is master at reading cues from the workplace. If competition is encouraged, s/he knows that beating up other people will lead to winning. Only "wimps" would stand in a competitor's path and have him or her slow down to pay attention to how people might be injured. Opportunists are the "climbers." The Opportunist differs from the Chronic bully in that when s/he is away from work, he or she is able to suspend his or her competitiveness. S/he's capable of being friendly, charming, supportive, s/he might even host a youth group meeting in their own home, S/he's a great mother, father, churchgoer, neighbourhood activist and good citizen.

At work, when the opportunity presents itself to compete to move ahead, s/he steps over a Target who s/he thinks might be a contender for the same prize or a person blocking his or her success. S/he justifies to him or herself their behaviour as survival instinct kicking in. S/he says "it's all part of the game." To this bully, games are serious business. Careers are built with political gamesmanship. (Unfortunately the business world has for too long reinforced this!).

S/he is likely to be well connected up the chain of command, to have allies willing to shield him or her from punishment for his or her malicious behaviour. S/he is not forced to accept responsibility for his or her actions. Their supporters think s/he can do no wrong. Targets have a hard time having their case heard against her. Accusations are written off as "sour grapes" by "wimps" or "losers." After all, this bully is the personification of the Corporate dream. (See!)

Though companies preach cooperation and teamwork, the Opportunist knows what is actually rewarded. Like the Chronic bully, his or her behaviour is governed by reinforcement. Unlike the Chronic bully, s/he will stop hassling others if the organisation began to punish mistreatment of others. The Opportunist is a keen reader of signals in his or her environment.

**By changing the workplace culture, Opportunist bullies can be stopped.**

When companies lay-off 10,000 employees to maintain their profit margins to satisfy Wall Street investors (a deliberate act of malice) how do they justify it? "It's just business, nothing personal." Those moments of seizing market opportunities without regard to consequences for humans make organisations just like Opportunist bullies.

## **(3) ACCIDENTAL Bullies**

Bullies by accident are benign. The benign Accidental bully is simply a social fool. The Accidental bully is truly unaware of the effect of his or her actions on other people. S/he operates as if the rest of the world does not exist. S/he's awkward and child-like.

S/he hurts others with inappropriate comments or actions. S/he insults with sexist or personal affronts. S/he starts to show you how to do something new, then does the job himself because s/he lacks the patience to wait. S/he never learned the subtlety of social interactions.

**The remarkable thing about the benign Accidental bully is that when confronted, s/he retreats immediately and apologises. S/he never does it again. He or she can learn social skills.**

#### **(4) SUBSTANCE ABUSING Bullies**

The Substance Abusing bully is very dangerous and threatening because s/he may not be in control of his or her decisions at all. According to experts, 74% of substance abusing Americans are employed. They do not live on sewer grates or in homeless shelters. They go to cubicles, stores and factory floors just like you do.

When drugs enter the picture, all assumptions about rationality and logic are tossed out the window. The bully who snorts powder up his or her nose as routinely as s/he puts on lipstick is a potentially crazed animal. Most substances that hook people are disinhibiting. That means the control mechanism that monitors social politeness and decorum is shut off. Anything goes for the person under the influence. Unpredictable mood swings become commonplace. Marijuana and alcohol are depressing and induce lethargy and paranoia. Has your bully been a bit too morose, too bug-eyed? Stimulants like methamphetamines ("meth", "crank", "crystal") create psychotic-like episodes, true craziness, with a healthy dose of paranoia. Cocaine habits are costly. It's not the rank-in-file Suzy six pack that drives from the 'burbs into the downtown ghetto in Beamers and Mercedes to buy their supplies. Rank, which begets higher salaries, enables higher ups to maintain a life of using. (Do not rule out medication and alcohol).

We know that 89% of bullies are bosses. Drug testing is ordered by bosses for their 'subordinates'. Therefore, most drug-using bosses whose altered states may account for much of the chaos and madness Targets endure remain undetected, free from the privacy-robbing experience of peeing in a cup.

### **Bully Types & Tactics**

Bullies can be categorised, as is done in this section. But individuals who choose to bully can adopt any tactic at any time to accomplish their goal. They are not restricted to neat categories. They become one or more of the types as needed.

A short list of illustrative tactics accompanies each type of bully. The list is not meant to be exhaustive. You can probably think of many more tricks each type plays. And we'll give you the chance to submit some of the most memorable acts of cruelty you've observed at the end of our list.

#### **Constant Critic**

Here is how Mark Hughes, From Campaign Against Workplace Bullying defines the constant critic.

Extremely negative. Nitpicker. Perfectionist. Whiner. Complainer. Fault finder. Lies. Masks personal insecurity with public bravado. Loved by senior management because of his or her ability to "get those people to produce." Plays Parent to your Child (as s/he sees it). Aims to destroy confidence, encourages self-doubt.

- uses put-downs, insults, belittling comments, name-calling
- constant haranguing about Target's "incompetence"
- makes aggressive eye contact, glaring at Target; demands eye contact when she speaks but deliberately avoids eye contact when Target speaks
- negatively reacts to contribution of target [sighs, frowns, peering over top of eyeglasses to condescend, sour face (the "just sucked a lemon" look)]
- accuses Target of wrongdoing, blamed for errors made up by bully (doctored documents, compromised databases, fake witness accounts)

- makes unreasonable demands for work with impossible deadlines, applies disproportionate pressure, expects perfectionism
- sends signals of disrespect through hyper-confident body language--sitting at desk with feet up, showing target bottom of shoes and talking to target through feet, bully grooms self (hair, nails) while ignoring the Target; making target sit while bully stands, hovering over, staying above
- over-use of memos, e-mails, messages to bury Target in correspondence requiring replies
- personally criticises aspects of the Target's life that are irrelevant to work--appearance, family, friends
- excessively or harshly criticises Target's work or abilities
- engages Target in intense cross-examination to belittle and confuse

## **Two-Headed Snake**

### The picture that came to our minds.

Passive-Aggressive indirect, dishonest style of dealing with people and issues. Jekyll-Hyde. Pretends to be nice while sabotaging you. "Friendliness" serves only to decrease resistance to giving information she may later use against you. Smile hides naked aggression. Assassinates reputation with higher ups. Plays favourites.

- ensures that the Target does not have the resources (time, supplies, help) to do work
- demands that co-workers provide damning "evidence" against Target, uses lies or half-truths, threatens non-cooperators (the "divide and conquer" technique)
- discriminates against smokers by requiring they gather trash from the parking lot while taking a smoke break
- assigns meaningless or "dirty" tasks as punishment
- makes nasty, rude, hostile remarks directly to Target while putting on a rational "face" for others
- breaches confidentiality; shares private information about the Target with co-workers or other bosses
- discriminates against non-smoking Target by permitting breaks only for smokers
- creates a special personnel file kept in bully's car or locked in her office full of defamatory information to sabotage Target's career inside or outside the organisation
- steals credit for work done by the Target

## **Gatekeeper**

Here's the control freak in all their glory.

Most transparent of the controllers. S/he needs to establish him or herself as "one up" on you, to order you around or to control your circumstances. To them, control of all resources (time, supplies, praise, approval, money, staffing, help) is the most important aspect of work. Approval must be solicited from him or her.

- ignores the Target; giving the "silent treatment," and modelling isolating the Target
- sets office clocks 15 minutes ahead of "real" time, then punishes Target for being "late" at start of day, while not allowing them to leave before quitting time according to "real" time
- deliberately cuts the Target out of the communication loop - stops mail, e-mail, memo distribution, doesn't return calls
- refuses to make "reasonable accommodation" for Target returning to work with a disability
- refuses to follow internal policies and government-mandated employee protection for Target

- denies privileges and rights to Targets who file complaints against the bully, either an internal complaint or a lawsuit or with the EEOC, DOL
- makes up new rules on a whim, Target expected to follow, but bully is exempt

### **Screaming Mimi**

Can't you just picture him or her now?

"Not happy Jan!" typifies the bully in the workplace...and we laugh at it! Or do we laugh against it?

Stereotypical bully. Controls through fear & intimidation. Emotionally out of control. Impulsive. Explosive. Threat of physical violence becomes issue. Wants to instil sense of dread. Overbearing. Self-centred, insensitive to needs of others. Very worried about being detected as imposter. Bombast masks incompetence.

- yells, screams, curses
- barks out loud often that "I AM YOUR BOSS" "FOLLOW MY COMMANDS"
- poisons workplace with angry outbursts, tantrums
- intimidates through gestures: finger pointing, slams things down, throws objects
- crowds the Target' s personal space, moves close to threaten or to make the Target anxious, hovers over, sneaks up from behind to startle
- constantly interrupts the Target during meetings and conversations
- discounts and denies Target' s thoughts or feelings
- threats of job loss or change
- traps Target by insisting that complaints go "up the chain of command," starting with him or her

An alternative way to categorise bullies is by the tactics they adopt. Remember, according to the Campaign' s definition, the actions qualify as bullying only if they harm the Target. Therefore, it' s safe to say that all bullying is cruelty inflicted on Targets.

Cruelty comes in one or more of the following family of tactics alone or combined in a toxic brew:

- deliberate actions to humiliate, intimidate, undermine or destroy the Target
- OR
- the withholding of resources (time, information, supplies, support, goals) necessary for the Target to succeed

In this way, all of the above tactics can be regrouped into two simple lists.

### **Why Some of Us are Targets**

Bullies don' t bully everyone. Some of us are more likely targets than others.

### **Ethical, Just & Fair People**

Targets don' t have an integrity problem. Hypocrisy is a workplace and societal problem. Institutions fill their hallways with framed testaments spouting noble notions about "respect for individuals" and "courtesy and dignity for all." Yet most ring hollow when employees pass daily and can snicker under their breath "nice frame." People working in the culture can tell anyone who bothers to ask if there is a fit between what really happens and the glowing phrases crafted at an expensive off-site retreat for executives and consultants.

## **Employees know that integrity is about fit, of not having to falsify.**

Targets who work in schools, in medical centres, in research university labs, in churches and in nonprofit organisations dedicated to improving public health seem to expect their employers to both proclaim and act in accordance with higher, moral goals than an auto shop. Of course, they are routinely disappointed. The school district may be honoured with a presidential award for excellence, based on the work of a man who was chased away. The man's health was damaged and his career tossed to the rocks, but the tormenting district superintendent accepted the plaudits anyway.

## **Bullies have no shame.**

Nurses call the Campaign help line regularly. The same people tasked with saving lives of strangers turn on their own if they don't like someone's make-up or the car she drives. The ethics gap deserves a fancy name, but there is none. It is the primary malady from which Targets suffer. It is clear that no workplace is immune to bullying. It happens in the "best" and the ones where we might expect it for some stereotypical reason.

Targets have unethical, and therefore impractical, expectations about how organisations and people should treat each other with integrity. Whistleblowers take seriously the responsibility to see that schools funded to care for special kids not misuse the money. Tobacco industry insiders went public with information that belied the falsehoods the industry wanted the public to believe. Integrity is a very personal decision. Organisations get involved when someone in power wants to silence the one with integrity. The bullying starts small between two people. The entire organisation enlists its goon squad when the morally superior whistleblower refuses to back down. Character assassination begins; the Target loses his or her job, family, friends and their health. Was the Target's decision "worth it?"

## ***Whistleblowers would tell you they'd do it all again given a chance. Truth compels them.***

Targets also prize equity and justice. They believe that rewards should be proportional to talent. That's why it's so irksome that incompetent bullies steal ideas and get promoted. As you see below, Targets are almost always smarter than their bullies. It ain't fair.

Justice is a principle that causes Targets limitless pain. The entire complaint-response system disappoints the person hoping to see justice done. When bullies are confronted about their misconduct, they lie. This outrages the Target who may have taken great risks to have the bullying surface in public. Targets make difficult clients for attorneys. Though it is the law that does not provide protection, Targets hold attorneys accountable for not being able to do more to achieve justice in their case.

Targets driven by a strong sense of equity, justice and integrity do make life challenging for those who wish they would simply disappear. Maybe they make us uncomfortable because they remind us of how we should all be, of what we should aspire to become. It is that guilt that allows witnesses to the bullying to abandon the principled, passionate and driven Target. God bless 'em. They are the salt of the earth.

## **Independent, Skilled & Bright People**

Paradoxically, bullies also target strong people for assault. Remember that bullies are, by nature, creatures haunted by their own inadequacy. On one level, they realise this, but the public persona they present is a mask of bravado and superiority.

Rather than undertake an introspective analysis and personal re-socialisation plan (as if one could redo childhood later in life to get it right), bullies prefer to lash out at others who threaten their presumption of superiority. Into their work world come genuinely bright, creative, self-assured people. Since these people are a threat, bullies work hard to undermine them.

They sabotage them through a myriad of covert means. They spread rumours and misrepresent the accomplishments of this group of Targets. If the bully is a subordinate or co-worker, the rumour mill of disinformation is the only means by which the desperate bully can claw his or her way back into control.

If the bully is the boss of the independent and skilled Target, all s/he has to do is constrain his or her creativity, pile on impossible burdens, or steal credit for the Target's work. These Target types will leave the job or stay to outwit the bully because, thanks to their self-confidence, they have a low threshold for the lies bullies dish out.

If the bright Target chooses not to compete with the bully, s/he could be untracked and walk away from a job in disbelief about the banishment. All s/he wanted was "to be left alone to do the job I was hired to do, as best as I could do it." There is a naivete about these Targets. They are highly proficient in the work to be done, but oblivious to office politics (the sole reason to exist according to the bully's world view).

### **Cooperative, 'Nice' People**

Bullies eat "nice" people alive. Bullies are competitors and live for the opportunity to work with a bunch of cooperators. Imagine the glee of a sadistic supervisor who inherits a group of positive, non-confrontational people to manage.

In light of all the talk about "team-ness" being central to successful work performance in most contemporary American workplaces, it is ironic that the people with a more advanced stage of human development (the ability to cooperate) fall prey to the primitive, Neanderthal bullies.

Research shows that when everyone cooperates, groups maximise benefits to each person. They get more goodies, whatever goodies there are. But the human tendency to grab the most for oneself prevails in studies with groups that have chances to build a collective cash pool. The rules typically call for a doubling of the amount of cash in a bowl if no one person withdraws money from the bowl during a round of a game.

Unfortunately, groups in U.S. psychological studies break the bank and rarely play more than one round. This happens because greedy individuals (from a random group of people sitting around the table) snatch the money bowl for themselves, ruining the game for others. They do this despite being free to talk out loud, to formulate a strategy, to agree to keep doubling money that could be split later.

The reality of the workplace is no different. The formal, written rules call for teamwork, dangling the biggest prizes to groups that cooperate. Operating rules, however, undermine cooperation. Bullies, as strong competitors, know that if they grab "goodies" at the expense of Targets, they win. The cooperators are left to watch the competitor dictate the outcomes (gains or losses) they will experience.

It is clear in the competitive workplace populated with bullies, cooperators are second-class citizens. Americans hate being second. In the face of a winner-take-all world, cooperators don't stand a chance without a concerted institutional effort to wrest control of the rules away from greedy bullies.

**Cooperators are not weak; they are simply over-optimistic that goodwill will naturally and automatically prevail. Bullies interpret “nice” as the unlikeliness to confront or to stop them.**

### **Vulnerable People**

Bullies scan groups for the weakest. Maybe it is an evolutionary remnant of our place in the animal kingdom. All predatory species select and attack the weakest prey. It's done for food. Barely human, bullies only symbolically eat their prey. They are gratified by the fear they instill in Targets.

Bullies test the field, especially with new employees. They look for the Targets who put up no resistance to attacks. Approximately 75% of the workforce do not tolerate being controlled by another person. The bully backs off when resisted. Behavioural researchers speak of an aggressor's mental calculation of his or her effort/benefit ratio. The people who require more effort to aggress against than is considered worth it to the aggressor are no longer seen as Targets. That is, bullies are lazy. They want an easy mark.

Many of us hate conflict and confrontation. We want peace and quiet. Being non-confrontational when provoked makes Targets look and sound non-threatening. This is done with both words and nonverbal messages communicated to the bully.

### ***Vulnerability Through Words***

Self-effacing statements can be a sign of humility or civility. In those instances, we hear lots of praise heaped on others, a genuine desire to deflect credit that s/he herself deserves. "I could not have done this alone. There are many others to thank." "My co-workers made it impossible for anyone to fail." The person may simply be choosing to not draw attention to him or herself. However, self-denigrating, self-defeating statements are tell-tale signs of a deeper insecurity.

There is evidence that the seed of self-doubt was planted long ago, in one's childhood, and has reared its ugly head through conflict with a bully. All of us have doubts at one time or another, but most believe that we are inherently capable of overcoming obstacles. Those with historical doubts are always more susceptible to spiralling into despair whenever confronted by powerful people who only criticise and demean them.

It's one thing for the horrific bully to put down the Target, but when s/he does it to him or herself, it's painful to witness. For instance, it hurts to hear someone say:

"I only slow the others down."

"I never was good at this sort of thing, not good at anything really."

"You all should go on, I can't help. I'd only make it worse for you all."

"I never learned how to do computers. My kids are much smarter than me. I'm such a dolt."

"You may be right that I screw up a lot, but I'll try harder next time."

In addition, there are aspects of speech that provide nonverbal clues to a hovering predator. Relevant paralinguistic cues (all aspects of speech except the words themselves) include tone of voice ("mousy," timid), rate of speech (either slow enough to be interrupted or too fast and flurried to mask a fear of being detected as less than competent), and showing a tolerance for interruptions by the bully, all combine to convey a general lack of confidence.

## ***Vulnerability Through Action***

The way the Target walks, carries him or herself, sits, stands, uses hands, and uses interpersonal space is scrutinised by the bully, perhaps without the Target's awareness. Fear or intimidation can be signalled by a hesitant walking pace, short stride or actually walking backwards to attend to what the more powerful person is saying. Confident people typically gesture with their hands to punctuate speech. The absence of gestures does not necessarily indicate poor confidence. It does, however, convey a reticence either learned in a family that discouraged free expression or a deliberate delay in taking action. In either case, the bully pounces on the quiet, non-expressive person, assuming that she will not fight back when attacked.

Finally, bullies exploit personal space to their advantage. They stand too close, hover over your shoulder in your cubicle when your back is turned, and touch you to signify control rather than compassion. Whenever a Target fails to back the bully off, to re-establish a comfortable distance, she risks having the invasion of her personal space wreak havoc over her own sense of control. Cowering or tolerance of invasion often indicates submission to the bully.

## ***A Private Vulnerability***

Some Targets carry a private burden inside. Somehow and by someone they have been previously traumatised. Though years may have passed, the memory never dies. S/he may have been a child of divorce that caused deep feelings of resentment, abandonment or loss. S/he may have been sexually abused as a child and told to keep secrets about embezzlement by a bank manager. S/he may have seen his or her young daughter killed as a pedestrian and spent years healing only to have his or her gay male boss demand that s/he "make a beautiful baby" for him and his partner. A woman who was shamed into tears daily as a child by a domineering father jumps from one demeaning dentist to another.

We have learned that the previously traumatised Targets:

- are more reluctant to tell others about their torment by a bully
- lack confidence that s/he is not the reason for the bullying
- tolerate much more craziness and instability at work because s/he is accustomed to chaos in his or her Family-of-Origin
- experience so much shame that it is especially hard to ask for help or to talk about it, even to spouses
- appear angry to co-workers and management when finally complaining about the bullying because of the delay, and a personal pool of experience with mistreatment that they are reminded of by the bullying that it comes spewing out angrily and unfiltered
- are more susceptible to the uninvited assaults by a bully because of the re-traumatisation effect
- experience an emotional setback from the re-living of deep memories at each step of the fighting back process--with each re-telling of the story to a bureaucrat, a psychologist, a lawyer

This knowledge about previously traumatised Targets is offered to help them and their families understand why the healing process takes so long. Healing cannot begin until there is separation from the bully and his or her supporters. If a lawsuit is begun, it postpones indefinitely the end of the bullying situation. It can take years.

Sometimes, well-intentioned family members get frustrated that the Target doesn't simply "let it go." It is not that easy. Spouses may not know about the Target's early-life experiences. The bullying episode provides a chance for starting that intimate, private discussion.

**People who have experienced trauma or pain and grief in their Family of Origin cannot afford to continue to be bullied. The healing process cannot begin until there is separation from the bully and his or her supporters.**

In no way, does an increased susceptibility excuse the bully's unconscionable, despicable behaviour. Prior traumas are none of the bully's or employer's business. Unfortunately, if they learn about prior trauma, they will use that information against the Target. S/he will need the unconditional support of his or her family more than ever.

Have you read enough? Are you sickened? Do you believe that you are a Target of a Bully? Does this information on bullying in the workplace make you angry? Is your silence allowing bullying to take place? Join me in my campaign to combat bullying in the workplace. Name the behaviour. Make the bully or bullies accountable for their actions. You and me (we, together) can stop this debilitating abuse. There are some things we can do.

1. Read up and inform yourself about bullying in the workplace and anti-bullying strategies.
2. Name the bully or bullies and inform them that their intimidating, controlling behaviour will no longer be tolerated.
3. Inform others that you are being bullied or harassed and who the perpetrator is. (Let's get the language right).
4. Write down on paper every bullying incident noting times, dates, people involved, witnesses, if any and what took place (in your own words).
5. Seek peer and professional support. If your supervisor is the bully – insist on a more appropriate supervisor. You have the right to appropriate supervision.
6. Don't accept the role of victim. You have the power as an individual to stop bullying in the workplace.
7. Don't be afraid to question or disagree. These are our innate rights not only as employees but as human beings.
8. Don't ignore it. By accepting bullying behaviour you are only allowing the abuse to continue.
9. Under no circumstances accept inappropriate behaviour from anyone.
10. Write up a policy or mission statement against bullying in the workplace.
11. Join a Union and keep them informed of any bullying taking place at work. They are campaigning against bullying in the workforce right now.
12. Advise the Media and Public about what is happening.
13. Join together in close union with your colleagues. They are experiencing bullying too. (Remember, one of the bully's strategies is to divide and conquer.)
14. Sign the following petition to fight against bullying in the workplace.
15. Read more!!!! Inform yourself fully – there is some valuable information out there.

**Bullying Is  
Hazardous**



**To Your  
Health**

