

Bullies at Work: Are you a Target? WHY?

Are you the Target for the bully in your workplace? If so you have experienced cruel acts, deliberate humiliation, ostracism, and the withholding of resources and support. Bullying, driven by your bully's desire for power and control, deliberately keeps you from succeeding at work. However, the effects of bullying damage your health, self-esteem, relations with family and friends, your economic situation – or a combination of all of these.

A survey on workplace bullying shows that anyone can be a target. Education and place of work don't matter. Institutions with Mission Statements reflecting "Courtesy and dignity for all" are often places where bullying runs rampant. Targets who work in school systems, health care facilities, churches, nonprofits, and volunteer groups are particularly vulnerable to the system's "ethics gap." Bullying happens in the "best" companies as well as in the most overtly competitive industries.

The number one reason for being bullied is the Target's reluctance to go along with the bully's attempts to control him/her. These bright, creative, and self-assured people have a low tolerance for the bully's "games" and are by nature oblivious to office politics.

Bullies work hard to undermine these folks using a rumor mill of misinformation to sabotage their Target. They misrepresent the accomplishments of the Target. If the bully is the boss of a Target, she keeps the lid on her Target's creativity by giving her the "impossible" jobs or stealing credit. The bully also steals the spotlight whenever she can by always being the one to speak at meetings and never allowing the Target access to high profile tasks or clients.

Bully-Friendly Workplaces: You may be working in a bully-friendly culture if the bullying problem is ignored, minimized, or denied. “Good companies purge bullies while bad companies promote them.” (*The Addictive Organization*, Schaeff & Faesel)

Survival Tip #1: If you’re a Target, get support from your family and friends. Many people will wait weeks or months before sharing what’s going on at work with intimate friends. Do not keep it a secret or blame yourself!

Mary Travis, Ph.D., has a private practice in Winter Park. This series of articles about bullies in the workplace are springboard chapters for her book Living with Linda: Blocking Your Workplace Bully. Copies of the “Top 10 Bully Tactics” and the quiz “Are You Being Bullied?” are available upon request.