Eight Ways Corporations Must Address Bullying

by
Allan L. Beane, Ph.D.
www.bullyfree.com

The rash of suicides, criminal cases, lawsuits, workplace violence, and lack of corporate cost-effective productivity because of bullying have highlighted the seriousness of bullying and the struggles corporations have experienced in addressing the problem. Evident in these cases is the realization that inaction and inappropriate action can have severe consequences. I have served as an expert consultant in ten bullying cases and would like to share the following tips for preventing and stopping bullying in your corporation.

1. Admit that bullying exists in your corporation and develop a corporate anti-bullying policy.

Unfortunately, too many corporations are denying that bullying is a problem in their company. Therefore, they do not have policies that prohibit bullying. The consequences have been disastrous. The truth is, a significant percentage of employees are bullied. Since most of it occurs in secret, it is often underestimated by corporate leaders.

2. Provide training for personnel *in all of the appropriate areas*. Don't just provide an awareness workshop.

Personnel must understand the nature of the problem, the destructiveness of bullying, the impact of bullying on the corporation's effectiveness, and how bullying can lead to workplace violence. Supervisors must be trained to provide quality supervision and how to respond to bullying.

3. Implement a corporate-wide anti-bullying program. An anti-bullying policy is not enough. The program must include all of the necessary components.

Bullying in the workplace is a complex problem that requires a comprehensive approach. Just having a policy is not enough.

4. Empower employees to take a stand against bullying.

The vast majority of employees aren't involved in bullying, but they know it is happening and don't assist victims by taking a safe stand against their abuse. Unfortunately, too many employees reinforce it and encourage it. Just encouraging employees to take a stand is not enough. They need to be taught how to collectively and safely respond to bullying they see and hear. For them to do this, they must feel that the corporation is serious about preventing and stopping bullying and the corporate leaders know how to deal with it in a way that will not make it worse for the victim. That means, the corporation's culture may need to be changed. That takes time.

5. Encourage victims and bystanders to report bullying and provide an anonymous reporting procedure.

Only a small percentage of workplace bullying is reported. Victims of bullying keep quiet because they are embarrassed, they are fearful they will be blamed, they are afraid the bully retaliate, they feel shame because they can't stand up for themselves, and they feel defective. Some have witnessed adults being told and nothing was done, so why bother to report it.

6. Provide adequate monitoring and supervision of high-risk areas (hallways, locker rooms, bathrooms, etc.).

Bully often happens where there is a lack of supervision, not enough supervision, and poor supervision. Quality supervision has been an issue in almost every lawsuit I've been involved in. Identify these areas and develop a supervision plan and teach supervisors how to supervise effectively.

7. Promptly and thoroughly investigate reports of bullying.

A lack of response from the corporation's leadership has been a major issue in lawsuits. All reports of bullying must be taken seriously and investigated in a timely manner. Don't make light of it or blame the victim. Don't try to be funny. Even rumors should be promptly investigated.

8. Be careful who you hire and don't promote bullies.

Thoroughly investigate a potential employee. Just because someone "gets the job done" doesn't mean they are good employees. Seek out information regarding their ability to take direction, to work as a team member, and to support and encourage others. Try to discover if they treat others the way they want to be treated. If they don't treat others right, they will cost the corporation decrease productivity in others.