

Too many blighted by bullies

What a response there has been to my columns on workplace bullying.

Most calls were from women being bullied by women, often maliciously and often by younger women. As is typical, the same female bully is targeting several women.

But men too responded in force. They tended to be longer-term targets of bullying.

Many targets were “forced” into resigning. Too often, their traumas at work were compounded by a management system unaware of the problem or misunderstanding it.

Targets felt unsupported by their employers – many having to face further difficulties of attaining financial support or another position.

To some degree, this is understandable. Most people simply could not believe they were a target, yet alone understand why.

All the callers were mature workers with apparently excellent work records – until the bullying commenced.

There has been a plus side to these articles. Many targets are taking action and seeking medical, legal and collegial support, protecting themselves, documenting all incidents and preparing a strong case for a personal grievance against their workplace bully. Two employers, one large and one small, are now addressing the problem.

Unfortunately, the largest number of callers worked in the beleaguered caregiving industry, particularly in rest homes. As if these workers were not already underpaid and undervalued.

Targets at another major organisation have formed a support group, not only to help each other but also to develop strategies to encourage an unhelpful management to understand and take action. And this is a major industry with a critical skills shortage.

Another industry where workplace bullying seems to be over-represented is the education sector. A typical comment was “the students are fine – it is my team leader or the boss that creates my problems”.

Three other large companies continue to ignore their workplace bullying problems. Two have long-established reputations for condoning this unacceptable behavior.

One person who was not surprised at the reaction to these articles is Andrea Needham, author of Workplace Bullying – The Costly Business Secret. She has assisted many organisations to address this issue. But much more needs to be done.

Targets need to learn how to recognize what is happening to them and what they can need to do about it. Senior management needs to learn to recognize that the behavior of workplace bullies amounts to aggressive bullying rather than acceptable assertive behavior.

Organisations where bullying exists, may decide to take the matter seriously, recognize the damage it does to workplace morale and develop appropriate strategies to tackle this problem – and in the process promote safer, healthier, more productive workplaces.

Gordon Hudson, current Manager, Like Minds Taranaki

Published – Taranaki Midweek Newspaper