

WORKPLACE BULLYING...

Bullying is common in too many Taranaki work-places. It is one of the biggest hidden causes of stress-related illnesses. It can ruin careers and destroy confidence and self esteem. It can stop people from applying for jobs – but it needn't.

It needs to be acknowledged as a genuine issue, recognised when it happens, and stopped in its tracks.

Everyone has the right to a safe workplace.



So what is workplace bullying?

It is the intimidation and undermining of a person with the intention of making their lives as miserable as possible.

Targets are often popular, intelligent and, most importantly, good at their jobs. They have qualities that the bully, often subconsciously, envies and sees as a threat to him/herself. Or the target may simply be seen as being vulnerable to attack and therefore an easy target.

Bullies tend to have two faces, the charming, *'aren't I great'*, that bosses and fellow workers see, and the sadistic one they turn on their targets.

Their real power lies in the psychological damage they can cause. They will do whatever it takes to humiliate and undermine the target's confidence and belief in themselves and their abilities. It may force them to a point where they feel leaving their job is the only way to preserve their sanity.

However leaving is not always possible and victims can become trapped in a miserable work environment.

Bullies usually work alone, although they will encourage others to join in the persecution if they can. They will try to separate their targets from friends and support to make them feel isolated with nowhere to turn for help.

Workplace bullies are always repeat offenders, never satisfied with a triumph for long. They are the 'scum' of the workforce.

It is to the benefit of everyone if workplace bullying is dealt with before the damage spreads. A hard line approach needs to be adopted against it.

What to do if you are the victim of workplace bullying.

If you are a target, recognise that you are being bullied and that it is NOT your fault.

Workplace bullying usually leads to stress-related illnesses and stress is now covered under the Health and Safety Employment Act. The law at least is on your side.

Keep a written record of all incidents no matter how trivial they seem. It is the number, regularity and pattern of behaviour that reveals bullying, not the incidents themselves.

Keep any memos, letters or emails the bully sends you, and ask that any complaints about your work be made in writing. Keep all records at home.

Look after your health. If you see your doctor, make sure your symptoms are documented, along with your concerns about your work situation.

Never confront the bully alone. A confrontation is just another opportunity to feed off you. Make a formal complaint to someone at senior level, as high as you have to go.

Get as much support as you can, from colleagues, friends