



## THE CO-WORKER FROM HELL

Many of us will have come across a person at work that we cannot fathom or just can't get along with, no matter what you do. You are walking on egg-shells and can't win. It can even turn into a nightmare. This is the co-worker from hell.

Many a time the person who is accused of intimidation or bullying has no idea that they have been a problem worker. These people have become this way because of increased stress in their own life and work and would normally not behave this way. There are also some aspects of the work environment that could be bringing this out in them. For example, do they have a new manager that is putting too much pressure on them, or have they not had enough training to do a tricky job?

In very small percentage of cases, it is due to childhood bullying, a stressful childhood or their own personality style. The definition of bullying is, "a repeated pattern of unprovoked, unwelcome, hostile behaviour that intentionally inflicts or attempts to inflict injury, hurt, unwelcome, humiliation or discomfort".

The stress at work statistics in the USA are impressive – 80% of people feel stress on the job, 42% say co-workers need help, 14% feel like striking a co-worker, 25% feel like screaming or shouting, 10% are concerned about potential worker violence, and 18% have experienced threat or intimidation. In Australia, the bullying statistics are similar. 46% have been abused verbally or physically at work, 50% have been verbally abused by the public, 70% have been abused by a manager.

The types of bullying can include physical touching, pushing or even worse. But it is usually psychological with an attack on work performance, belittling your movement, isolation, sabotage, threat of dismissal, being given too much work to do, having information withheld from you, or other forms of manipulation.

### There are also different types of bullies:

- the chronic or serial bully, which is the commonest,
- the opportunistic bully – they will bully someone when there is the opportunity but not constantly.
- the self preserving bully; the one that makes sure they don't get caught.
- the "sergeant major" type bully, often harmless.
- the organisational or corporate bully.
- a client can bully you.
- bullies can come in groups of gangs, or even in pairs.

People bully for a variety of reasons but it is usually for their own gain at work, which can include financial gain.

We have all heard of cyber bullying and text message bullying at work. Many of us have noticed some odd people at work. These could be the 1-3% of people who have a personality disorder. Personality disorders have been grouped into three groups but they can often overlap.

### Cluster A

Cluster A is the odd and eccentric group. This includes people who are a paranoid – they are a bit suspicious and will interpret any other people's motives negatively. Schizoid people avoid social contact and don't express their emotions. The schizoid type of person has distorted thinking, sensations and behaves oddly.

**Cluster B**

Cluster B is the dramatic, emotional and erratic person. The narcissistic personality believes everything should revolve around them at all times. The Histrionic person is very emotional and attention seeking. The Borderline Personality has unstable relationships, reckless behaviour and sees things as black and white – this is the most common form of personality disorder. The Anti Social Personality will disregard and violate other people's rights without remorse.

**Cluster C**

Cluster C is the anxious and fearful group, which includes the Obsessive Compulsive Personality Disorder – this is the need for order and perfection and control in their life. The Dependent Personality Disorder needs to be cared for and is very submissive and clinging. The Avoidant Personality Disorder is socially inhibited, feels inadequate and sensitive to criticism.

Remember that these personality disorders are only a tiny percentage of the sort of people that will submit co-workers to bullying. Most bullies know what they are doing or have an inkling.

So, the next time you think that you have tried hard and cannot understand why you can't get on with your co-worker, stop and think that it is not actually you – that it is them. Document their behaviour and what has happened, and get some support from a trusted colleague in your organisation. Bullying is not allowed in the workplace and is supported by the appropriate laws.