

SHOW BULLYING THE DOOR

CREATING A HEALTHY WORKPLACE KNOCKS DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOUR ON THE HEAD

● BY RAY MCLEAN

BULLYING in the workplace is a highly destructive behaviour that can cause significant emotional distress and create a culture that is detrimental to achieving success. The nature of some industries can create a competitive work environment rather than a collaborative one, where staff feel in order to get ahead they need to undermine others or belittle them in front of other staff.

In organisations where people don't have reasonably strong, open, professional relationships, they're much more reluctant to challenge poor behaviour. If a counter-productive behaviour such as bullying goes unchallenged, then that workplace is deeming that behaviour to be an accepted part of its culture.

I was previously engaged to work with a finance company and was stunned to learn that its staff accepted bullying behaviour if another staff member failed to land a deal. No one in the company had connected the acceptance of bullying to contributing to a lower level of performance and staff had grown accustomed to being abused in a reasonably public way if they made an error. The leaders and workers were largely focused on the bottom-line return, however the possibility that a change in this culture could lead to an increase in their return hadn't occurred to them. When this behaviour was finally acknowledged as not being acceptable and challenged, they were able to make a change to their culture.

Creating a workplace culture that encourages open, honest

conversations between staff will prevent bullying behaviours from becoming an accepted part of their environment.

Culture is all about behaviour and until you are clear about what behaviour you accept and what you don't, you run the risk of building many other flaws into your organisation. If an organisation is unsure about the behavioural standards required within its culture, it prevents people from being able to show proactive leadership.

Proactive leadership means that if someone sees something that's inappropriate, they know they are allowed to challenge it. Or, conversely, if they see something good, they can reward someone.

Managers need to empower their staff so they feel comfortable challenging unacceptable behaviours. A successful team is one where its individual members have been empowered to take full responsibility for their role, rather than seeing the need to criticise others to get ahead.

On the one hand a healthy organisation needs to have strong policies and procedures in relation to bullying or other unacceptable workplace practices, and on the other, enough investment in time, training and support to enable people to manage workplace relationships with a commitment to resolution.

The second phase is to allow team members some time to develop professional relationships to the point where they can handle conflict and are able to manage this respectfully. By establishing

professional relationships staff are able to have uncomfortable conversations with each other in order to improve performance.

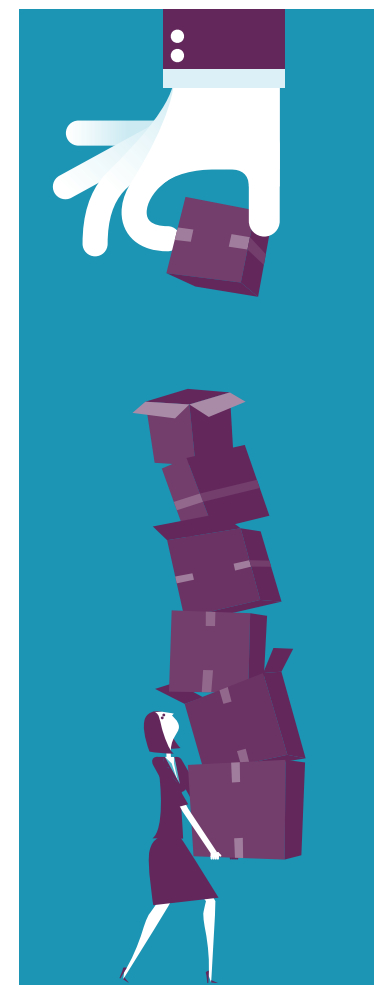
Performance reviews are critical in providing a safe environment for staff to express concerns or raise issues. When assessing performance, it's important to not just review the numbers but also the behaviours that have been agreed for the team. Teams that can review honestly usually nip behavioural problems in the bud.

Strong teams have a commitment to resolution where weaker or more fragile teams seem to go back to a fight-or-flight response. This can actually create an environment where bullying thrives. It also creates an environment that encourages third party conversations without resolution.

Strong leadership is required to drive the proactive environment we are talking about. Leaders must be prepared to model the behaviour that has been agreed and then create the environment where others feel safe enough to challenge behaviour which is below the line, and openly encourage and support behaviour seen as positive.

As a leader, if you can help your team create an agreed behavioural framework and then assist those on the team to develop and maintain strong professional relationships, you have a much greater chance of creating a functional team with strong resilience. ●

Ray McLean is a founding director of Leading Teams Australia.



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GETTY IMAGES