

# The Wellness Report— Summer 2014 Report



## WORKPLACE WELLNESS: ARE YOUR EMPLOYEES BEING BULLIED?

Around 40% of the Canadian workforce experiences bullying every week.



Workplace bullying is a growing concern in many Canadian workplaces. Employers have a duty to ensure the health and safety of their workers, and this means having policies and procedures in place to address these issues in case of a complaint.

It is extremely important to create awareness of these issues, especially with super-

visors and managers who may deal with them on the front line. Not addressing workplace bullying may lead to legal implications, increased absenteeism, lowered productivity, and damaged morale, even for those employees not directly involved.

Workplace bullying can be subtle and difficult to detect. Anywhere from taking credit for someone else's work to intimidating or belittling a co-worker, there are a range of behaviors that may be used to marginalize someone. There is usually a pattern of behavior, and it is important that those on the receiving end of complaints know what to do with them. Early intervention can find early solutions, such as sensitivity training, to help make the workplace bully aware of the impact his/her behavior is having on others.

Workplace culture plays a very important role in fostering the types of behavior you do or do not want to see.



### What is workplace bullying?

- ◆ Abusive, insulting or offensive language or comments
- ◆ Unjustified criticisms or complaints
- ◆ Deliberately excluding someone from workplace activities
- ◆ Withholding information that is vital for effective work performance
- ◆ Setting unreasonable timelines or constantly changing deadlines
- ◆ Setting tasks that are unreasonably below or beyond a person's skill level
- ◆ Denying access to information, supervision, consultation or resources to the detriment of the worker
- ◆ Spreading misinformation or malicious rumors
- ◆ Changing work arrangements, such as schedules and leave, to deliberately inconvenience a particular worker or workers

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In the recent Ontario Human Rights Tribunal case, *Lombardi v Walton Enterprises*, applicant Paul Lombardi was awarded damages of \$20,000 on the grounds of harassment and discrimination based partly on “perceived” traits including disability and homosexuality.

Lombardi admitted that he had also spoken of co-workers, including his boss, in negative terms implying homosexuality. If such behavior is happening throughout the company, who is responsible for ensuring no one feels harassed or unsafe? Employment lawyer Casey Docken-dorff from Filion Wakely Thorup Angeletti said regardless of company culture, its management’s duty to protect its employees.

Ignoring or not addressing negative behavior allows it to become part of the culture, and from there it can easily escalate into situations of bullying. Executives and managers who are respectful and positive are models for good behavior that employees will follow. Sometimes, it all comes down to the tone; it isn’t bullying when a manager tells an employee they should be at work on time, but it is bullying if they berate them.

The presence of a bully in your office may bring on flashbacks of high school, but don’t give in to peer pressure and the group mentality. If you see someone being picked on, do something about it. With the judiciary system recognizing bullying as an offence, you and your company could be in trouble if you turn a blind eye.



### What is not workplace bullying?

- ◆ Setting reasonable performance goals, standards and deadlines
- ◆ Allocating working hours where the requirements are reasonable
- ◆ Transferring a worker for operational reasons
- ◆ Deciding not to select a worker for promotion where a reasonable process is followed
- ◆ Informing a worker of their unsatisfactory work performance
- ◆ Informing a worker of their unreasonable or inappropriate behavior in an objective and confidential way
- ◆ Implementing organizational changes or restructuring
- ◆ Taking disciplinary action including suspension or termination of employment



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