How to Cope with Bullying at Work

Bullying in the workplace involves repeated, unreasonable behavior that is directed toward an employee or group of employees with the intent to intimidate, degrade, offend, and/or humiliate them. It may involve overt behaviors, such as verbal abuse and physical violence, or covert behaviors, such as subtle intimidation. Workplace bullying can take place between workers and their peers, managers or supervisors, customers, clients, students, contractors, or visitors. Bullying behavior at work not only creates a risk to the health and safety of the person targeted, but it also takes a serious emotional and financial toll on an entire department, agency, or organization.

If you find that you are the target of bullying in your workplace, there are several steps you can take to help deal with the situation. The following are some suggestions of ways that you can cope with and professionally confront the issue of workplace bullying:

- **Understand that you are not at fault.** Bullying is all about having power and control over another person, therefore bullies select targets who they believe pose a professional threat to them. Nothing you did caused the bullying and chances are there was nothing you could have done to prevent the bully from targeting you.

- **Document the bullying incidents.** Keep detailed notes outlining the nature of the bullying as well as factual information (dates, times, places, what was said or done, and who was present).

- **Don’t openly share information with your colleagues.** Many bullies like to use “divide and conquer” strategies to turn other employees against the target. Until someone has proven that they are trustworthy, do not share any documentation and/or information about the bullying with them.

- **Learn the policies/procedures in your workplace.** Contact the Human Resources or Ethics and Compliance Department at your workplace and ask about the procedure on filing a formal complaint against workplace bullying.

- **Weigh the risks and benefits of confronting the bully.** Sometimes confronting a workplace bully about his or her behavior can send the message that you refuse to allow them to treat you with disrespect. Since bullies tend to select targets who they believe are conflict-avoidant, this may help to communicate to the bully that they were mistaken when they believed that you would be an easy target. Sometimes, however, confronting the bully directly can cause the bullying to escalate. It is important that you evaluate your own situation before you decide whether confronting the bully would help or hurt you.

- **Be prepared for retaliation.** If you do decide to confront or report the bullying behavior, be prepared for the bully to retaliate against you for doing so. Hold on to copies of documents that contradict any false accusations that the bully might make against you (i.e. timesheets, audit reports, etc.).

- **Get help.** Workplace bullying can take a physical and emotional toll on the person targeted. It is important that you take care of yourself and that you seek out assistance from people you trust. Utilize your Employee Assistance Program or other counseling service to help you cope with the negative effects of the bullying behavior.