

Workplace Bullying – the Manager’s Responsibilities.

Bullying is repeated unreasonable behaviour directed towards a worker or group of workers that creates a risk to health and safety. In most cases this behaviour is persistent and happens over a period of time.

It can take many forms:

- It may consist of overcontrol, threats, public humiliation, condescension, overreaction, aggressive language, hostile humour, and/or favouritism and discrimination.
- It can be verbal, written (including online), or physiological.
- It can be directed downwards, sideways or upwards within an organisation.
- It is not gender-specific.

In assessing whether behaviour is unreasonable, you should consider if an impartial person observing the situation would think it’s acceptable to behave in that way.

In New Zealand, Employers are currently obligated to address bullying behaviour (psychological or physiological harassment) within the workplace under *The Health & Safety in Employment Act 1992*: amended in 2003, the definition of “hazard” now includes “*a situation where a person’s behaviour may be an actual or potential cause or source of harm to the person or another person*”.

The first step a manager can take when bullying-type behaviours have been observed is to talk to both the instigator and the target(s) directly, to find out the stimulus for the behaviour (action or words that triggered it), the cause (the needs that were not being met at that time), and the reactions (emotions).

The second step may be to talk further with the instigator, detailing:

- The specific behaviours which do not add value to the organisation
- The company values that the behaviours do not match (eg respect for others)
- Expected behaviours within the organisation (targets to aim for, and support available)
- Date by which expect to see these changes in behaviour (follow-up meeting to discuss progress)
- Consequences if changes not observed.

The third step is to follow through and, if required, to call in outside support (not aligned with the organisation) to assist both the instigator and target(s) to reflect on their behaviour, and to look at ways of transforming their conflict communication in the future.

By Fiona White



Fiona White has the ideal manner for a conflict resolution practitioner – calm, patient, and a very good listener. She asks just the right questions to empower her clients to find their own solutions.

With over 20 years professional experience in education, management, commerce, industry, recruitment and customer care in the UK, France and New Zealand, Fiona has a great understanding of the costs and benefits of conflict. Her mission is to share her conflict resolution knowledge and skills as widely as possible. Fiona is based in Auckland (New Zealand), where she has her own Mediation and Conflict Coaching practice - *Mediation Matters* - and holds a 'Conflict Clinic' one day a week at the local Citizens Advice Bureau. She enjoys a balance of community and commercial work.

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