

BULLYING AND OTHER DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR: FOR MANAGERS AND SUPERVISORS

COURSE OUTLINE

- **The words "bullying" and "disruptive behavior" naturally make us think of how children sometimes act.**
 - Like a "tough" kid pushing schoolmates around on the playground.
 - Or a classroom nuisance who's always creating a disturbance.
- **While playground bullies and classroom troublemakers eventually grow up, their behavior may not.**
 - When they join the workforce they can continue to bother people.
- **"Grown-ups" who bully and engage in other forms of disruptive behavior on the job can:**
 - Interfere with the functioning of the workplace.
 - Disturb and threaten coworkers.
 - Even affect other employees' health.
- **"Workplace bullying" and "disruptive behavior" can also increase business costs, decrease productivity, and make it harder for a company to succeed.**
 - As a manager, you need to understand these problems so you can effectively prevent or eliminate them.
- **Have you ever worked with a bully? More than 35% of the employees in the U.S. say they have.**
 - That means almost 65 million people have had to cope with workplace bullying at some point in their lives.
- **A bully degrades, humiliates, undermines or intimidates another person by making repeated attacks on them.**
 - It's not simply somebody having a bad day, losing their cool and barking at a colleague.
 - It's an ongoing pattern of abusive behavior.

- **Bullies often start out by verbally abusing their victims, shouting and swearing at them. They may also:**
 - Exclude their target from interacting with the rest of their group.
 - Play "practical jokes" on them.
 - "Pick on" them indirectly by spreading rumors behind their back.
- **A bully in a supervisory position may overload their victim with work, then excessively monitor and micro-manage them.**
- **Bullying in the workplace can also include physical intimidation, escalating into attacks involving pushing, shoving and even slaps and punches.**
- **What types of people can be bullies?**
 - Basically anyone in and around your organization, man or woman, employee or "outsider", could turn out to be a bully.
 - While they may not look different from anyone else, the problems that bullies cause can be serious and far-reaching.
- **The stress and anxiety that bullies cause in their victims and the people who witness the bullying can lead to health problems such as high blood pressure, digestive trouble and ulcers.**
 - For almost three quarters of the victims, these symptoms are so serious that they require treatment by a doctor.
 - Nearly two thirds of bullying victims seek professional help for conditions such as low self-esteem, insomnia and depression.
- **Workplace bullying isn't only bad for people... it's bad for business too.**
 - It poisons the workplace environment.
 - It undermines the trust workers should feel for your company.
 - It destroys the "teamwork" that you've worked so hard to develop.
- **As a result, morale declines and absenteeism rises.**
 - Bullying victims and witnesses often end up quitting their jobs, so turnover increases.
 - Your company then has to pay to recruit and train replacements.
 - It may also develop a reputation for being a "bad" place to work.
- **Workers compensation claims can increase, and legal expenses can mount up as well.**

- **But even with all the damage bullying can cause, it's not illegal in the United States.**
- **You shouldn't assume you will automatically notice any bullying that goes on in your department.**
 - Workplace bullies know how to hide what they do.
 - They can be clever, and difficult to catch.
- **But bullying is actually part of a larger problem called "disruptive behavior".**
 - This is when people act in ways that disturb normal workplace activities and interfere with coworkers' ability to get their jobs done.
- **You recognize disruptive behavior when you see and hear it. It typically involves someone:**
 - Yelling or swearing.
 - Waving their arms or shaking their fists.
 - Refusing reasonable requests to "calm down" or "be quiet".
- **Like bullying, these other forms of disruptive behavior are normally not one-time events.**
 - They're an ongoing pattern in the way a person acts.
- **The behavior distracts and disturbs bystanders, and may cause them to feel frightened or threatened as well.**
 - No one should be made to feel like this in any environment.
 - For that reason alone disruptive behavior has no place in the workplace.
- **When disruptive behavior does occur, it can have the same effects that bullying has.**
 - It is bad for people and bad for business.
- **But there's an even more important reason that you should take steps to address any type of disruptive behavior immediately.**
 - When nothing is done to intervene and shut down disruptive behavior, it typically gets worse, until it eventually results in physical violence.
- **We've seen how workplace bullying can include physical intimidation.**
 - The stakes can be just as high with other forms of disruptive behavior.
 - Its potential for serious violence can make it a tragedy waiting to happen.

- **So it's your responsibility to do everything possible to prevent it, and there are effective ways to do that.**
- **The people who work for you are your "eyes and ears" regarding what happens in your department.**
 - They can be powerful allies in your effort to prevent bullying and disruptive behavior.
 - To help, they need to understand these problems.
- **Your first step should be to get the subject out on the table.**
 - Start raising awareness of bullying and other disruptive behavior, in team meetings and training sessions.
 - Explain what these behaviors include, and emphasize that there is no excuse for them.
 - If your company has a "code of conduct", use it to clarify what is acceptable and unacceptable on the job.
- **Make sure that your people know that if they ever feel physically threatened, they should call Security or 911 immediately.**
- **Getting these issues out in the open will put any bullies or other disruptive members of your department on notice that their behavior is not welcome, and that it will not be tolerated.**
- **Your next step is to explain what your people can do themselves to prevent these behaviors, so that their workplace will be safe, healthy and productive.**
 - Your initial focus should be on shutting down bullies.
- **One option you can discuss is called "Self-Management".**
 - This is where the victim takes the initiative, and explains to the bully that they've noticed a disturbing pattern in the way the bully acts towards them.
 - They should let the bully know that they think the bully's actions are unprofessional, it makes them uncomfortable, and they want it to stop.
- **If this doesn't resolve the issue, or if the victim is apprehensive about trying it, they should report the bullying to you.**

While you should encourage "reporting", you also need to explain that the most effective reports always include documentation and supporting evidence.

- Employees should collect facts about the bullying, including what happened, when, where and who was there, in a "diary" or "log".
 - They should also collect any harassing notes or printouts of bullying emails, as well as any other evidence of what has happened.
- **Let them know that solid documentation can make it easier for you to deal with a bully promptly and effectively.**
- **Handling other forms of disruptive behavior is different, because you often have the opportunity to shut it down before it escalates and becomes dangerous.**
 - It's important that people report any instances of disruptive behavior to you immediately, even if they think it "will pass" and the perpetrator will soon "get back to normal".
- **Once you're apprised of instances of bullying or other disruptive behavior, there are several ways you can handle the situation.**
- **As a manager, you represent the company. So when one of your people comes to you with a report about bullying or a disruptive person in the department, how you respond is very important.**
 - You need to show concern, and you need to proceed systematically.
 - If you try to "wing it", your mistakes could come back to haunt you and your organization.
- **To start, you need to be professional and impartial.**
 - Take care to be fair to both sides in the situation, even if it seems "obvious" who's "at fault".
- **Take the report seriously and keep it confidential.**
 - Be sure to speak in private with the person who makes it.
 - It's important to treat them with sensitivity and respect, so they don't feel penalized in any way for coming forward.
- **Listen carefully and ask questions. Examine any documentation or physical evidence that they have.**
 - Start your own "paper trail" by writing up a summary based on the report and the notes you take during your conversation.

- **Make a habit of keeping good records.**
 - Don't rely on your memory.
 - Document everything.
 - Note the specifics regarding "who", "what", "where", "when" and "why".
 - Keep your file up-to-date and organized.
- **Make sure everything is legible!**
 - Rewrite your handwritten notes neatly, if necessary.
 - Even better, type them up.
 - Remember to keep the originals.
- **The next step is to take prompt and effective measures to deal with the situation.**
 - Once you've done all your "homework", you need to move quickly.
- **Let's look at a couple of approaches you can take to handling a disruptive situation.**
- **Imagine you've received a complaint about one of the people in your department.**
 - Their on-the-job behavior has raised some concerns, but no one's ever complained about them before, and their misbehavior isn't really that serious.
 - It could be just a one-time thing.
 - What should you do?
- **Sometimes an "informal response" is best.**
 - A quiet word with the problem employee may be all it takes to resolve the situation.
- **The setting you choose for the conversation can be very important.**
 - It should be private enough so you both can talk openly, but still feel relaxed.
 - You might want to talk over coffee in the cafeteria, if it's not crowded.
 - Other options could be talking while driving to the worksite, at the shop counter when things are slow or in the breakroom before the start of the workday.
- **Let the employee know you want to give them a "heads up" because you have gotten wind of some behavior of theirs that concerns you.**

- **Explain what it is that you've heard, then listen to their side of the story.**
 - Be supportive, but make sure that the employee understands there are behaviors that just aren't acceptable on the job.
- **If it looks like stress is part of the problem, you might suggest some ways they could handle high-pressured work situations more effectively.**
- **This informal approach minimizes the risk of putting the employee on the defensive, so they're better able to relate to what you say and respond constructively to it.**
 - Sometimes you can get good results by keeping things simple.
- **There are times, though, that you may need to be supportive of the employee without being too friendly.**
- **It's easy to make your approach a shade more serious.**
 - Just have your meeting in your office with the door closed, during normal business hours.
 - Be sure to have the complaint file on your desk, where the employee can see it.
- **This level of response is sometimes called an "Awareness Intervention".**
 - Depending on the circumstances surrounding the situation, it may be more appropriate than an informal conversation.
- **Whatever type of meeting you have, you need to allow some time for the employee to make changes, while keeping your eyes and ears open.**
- **You should also check with the person who originally made the complaint, and ask them if they've noticed an improvement.**
 - If the answer is "yes", you can file your notes on the situation and get back to business.
 - But if the answer is "no", you may have to conduct a formal investigation regarding the complaint.
- **There are several types of situations that call for a formal investigation:**
 - If the reported misbehavior is serious.
 - If multiple reports are made about the same problem.
 - If the offending employee is uncooperative when you approach them informally.
 - If the employee shows no improvement after an initial conversation.

- **When you conduct a formal investigation into a complaint about bullying or other disruptive behavior, you're not trying to just figure out "what's going on".**
 - You're establishing the facts "for the record", so you have solid support for any decisions you make based on what you learn.
- **Throughout your enquiry, it's crucial for you to remain objective and impartial.**
 - Any show of bias could be disastrous.
- **Begin with the fundamentals.**
 - Have the person who made the original report review your summary of the complaint.
 - They should then sign it to indicate that they feel it's accurate.
- **The next step is to provide a copy of the report to the "accused".**
 - Give them time to read and consider it before you go over it with them.
- **Once they've had some "think time", sit down and review the complaint with them.**
 - Get their side of the story.
 - Address each point thoroughly.
- **After you talk with them, create a written summary of their responses, then have them read and sign it.**
 - This summary, along with the original report, will help you to identify other people in the workplace you can interview to gather more information.
- **Next, contact any people who have been identified as witnesses, to get their "take" on the situation.**
 - Explain the investigation and interview process to them.
 - Make sure everyone understands that they need to be truthful, and that the investigation must be kept confidential.
 - Explain that no retaliation will be tolerated for their talking with you, and that if any occurs, they should inform you immediately.
- **Your goal during these interviews is to get clear and accurate information.**
 - Keep your mind open. Don't be judgmental.
 - Don't ask your questions "off-the-cuff".
 - You'll get better results if you write questions out ahead of time.

- **Get the facts about what people saw and heard... not their opinions or "impressions".**
 - Avoid "leading" questions that suggest the answer you're looking for.
 - Listen carefully and take notes.
- **Don't jump to any conclusions while you're still gathering information.**
 - Wait until you complete your enquiry, then consider what you've learned.
- **Be prepared to find that there's no "clear" result.**
 - Even the best investigation can be inconclusive.
 - You may find that no "wrongdoing" actually occurred.
- **Situations where there's no "guilty party" show why it's so important to approach every situation with an open mind, and to treat everyone fairly and with respect.**
 - Prejudging the "accused" before all the facts are in is not only unjust.
 - It could also result in them filing a grievance against you and the company.
- **Whatever the results of the investigation, you should always consult company policies to see how they apply to the case, if at all.**
 - Then present your findings to the complainant and accused with the same objectivity and sensitivity you have used with them throughout.
- **If you do determine that a case of bullying or other disruptive behavior exists, your next step should be to shut it down.**
 - You normally have a couple of options for how to proceed.
- **The first of these is called an "Authority Intervention".**
 - While this approach is still supportive of the offending employee, you use your "authority" as a manager to provide them with more guidance in resolving their behavioral problem.
- **Part of this process includes developing an "Improvement and Evaluation Plan". The plan will:**
 - Specify the behaviors that need to be corrected.
 - Establish a timeline for improvement.
 - Specify where the employee can get additional help if they need it.
 - Discuss what will happen if the goals of the plan aren't met.

- **Hopefully, a structured approach like this will get the employee "back on track".**
 - If the goals that are set up during an Authority Intervention are not met, what usually happens next is called a "Disciplinary Intervention".
 - The name speaks for itself.
- **A "Disciplinary Intervention" can typically include:**
 - A loss of privileges.
 - A demotion.
 - Reduced pay.
 - Probation.
- **In a worst-case scenario, the employee could be terminated.**
- **Keep in mind that any type of workplace intervention may be unable to help with some behavior problems, such as those resulting from substance abuse or a psychological condition.**
- **While all the procedures we've discussed have built-in opportunities for an employee to cooperate and shape up, sometimes they just don't work.**
 - In these cases you may have no option other than to remove an employee who is unable or unwilling to behave professionally from the workplace.
 - No one wants things to go this far, but a "zero tolerance" policy is the only sensible approach towards bullying and other disruptive behavior.

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- **Workplace bullying and other disruptive behavior is unhealthy for employees and bad for business.**
- **The first step in dealing with disruptive behavior is to raise awareness of it, and show your people how they can help bring these behaviors to an end.**
- **When you receive a report about bullying or other disruptive behavior, you must act quickly to address the issue.**
 - Your response must demonstrate fairness and concern as well.
- **Sometimes an informal response or an "Awareness Intervention" will be all it takes solve the problem.**
- **More serious cases of disruption may require a "formal" investigation.**
 - During the investigation it's crucial that you remain impartial and are fair to both sides.
- **If an investigation shows that intervention is necessary, different levels of response are open to you, depending on how cooperative the offending employee is.**
- **Workplace bullying and other disruptive behavior are serious problems, but if you recognize them and take steps to prevent them, you can protect the health, safety and productivity of everyone in your department!**