Beating the Workplace Bully

Lynne Curry, Ph.D., is the President of The Growth Company and author of Beating the Workplace Bully (AMACOM 2016). In this interview, she shares her insights on workplace bullying, its prevalence and strategies and steps to eliminate it.

JATHAN JANOVE: What is your definition of workplace bullying?

DR. CURRY: Bullying is psychological violence and aggressive manipulation. It shows up in one of three forms: verbal bullying (ridiculing, insulting or slandering); physical bullying (shoving, kicking, tripping or making obscene gestures) or situational bullying (sabotage and deliberate interference).

JANOVE: How prevalent is bullying?

DR. CURRY: Bullying is epidemic. The Workplace Bullying Institute’s 2014 Survey documents that 36,890,982 U.S. workers face abusive conduct during their workday.

JANOVE: What is the impact of workplace bullying?

DR. CURRY: Bullies demoralize employees, reducing employee productivity. Abusive work environments have other serious bottom-line consequences for employers, including higher turnover and absenteeism rates and increases in medical and workers’ compensation rates.

JANOVE: What steps do you recommend employers take to eradicate bullying?

DR. CURRY: There’s a great deal that employers can do. First, they can create a policy banning workplace bullying. This can be either a standalone policy or one that can be added to the organization’s harassment policy. More than 56% of all organizations already have an anti-bullying policy. They can couple this with an effective grievance channel.

Next, they can provide managers and supervisors with the training they need to prevent and address bullying. They can also provide employees at all levels with the skills they need to handle bullying.

JANOVE: What about at the individual level, for example, someone who experiences or witnesses workplace bullying?

DR. CURRY: That question took me 230 pages in Beating the Workplace Bully to address. Steps include learning how not to fall into the classic bully traps such as denial, stooping to the bully’s level, expecting the bully to change on his or her own or allowing the bully to isolate you. They also include learning how to professionally stand your ground, how to turn the tables on the bully and to not let the bully gain an outpost in your mind.

Witnesses play a huge role. They need to speak up. If they don’t, they signal that they tolerate bullying.

JANOVE: Any other observations or suggestions you’d like to share?
**DR. CURRY:** Bullying is a two-way interaction. If you don’t allow someone else to bully you, you and others simply witness a failed bullying attempt.