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How to Confront a Bully?

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How to Confront a Bully?

In a work environment where persistent workplace aggression is happening, confronting the aggressor is always part of the conversation. Confrontation can be difficult and often done in a manner that is not productive. This is because being part of an aggressive work culture tends to have increased tension and emotions run high. Targets feel victimized and are frequently kept on the defensive which makes them vulnerable to being reactionary. Witnesses may also be on the defensive but they are more likely to fall underneath the radar. They are emotionally involved, but are not as likely to get as emotionally charged in response to the aggressor.

No matter if you are a witness or a target, identifying and calling out bad behavior is part of coping and dealing with persistent workplace aggression. It is a necessary step in changing the overall culture and most likely, will be the first step a target has to take to in order to move through the hierarchical chain of command.

For a target, it is vital that all emotion is taken out of any conversation with the aggressor, especially when you are identifying aggressive behavior. For an aggressor, emotion is a sign of vulnerability and can be used to manipulate any situation against the witness or target. Use “I” statements and stick to the facts.

For example, “I received an email from you on May 1, 2015. The email stated that I had not completed my work and it was carbon copied to the entire department. On April 29, 2015, I submitted the paperwork you mentioned to you as well as to your supervisor. I have a dated copy of the paperwork if you need it. In the future, please note that our email policy strongly discourages carbon copying the entire department. I will be available for a face-to-face conversation if follow up is needed. Thank you.”

This response is clear, factual, and void of emotions. The response also identifies the behavior that is unacceptable, the reason the email was in appropriate, and also allows for face-to-face follow up if needed.

Aggressors will almost always respond back to any sort of confrontation with more aggression. This should be expected. Witnesses and targets should develop neutral responses in an effort to continue to try to defuse the situation. Neutral responses can include statements, such as restating what the aggressor said, or “I hear what you are saying,” or “I will take that into consideration.”

For more information, go to www.jankircher.com or contact jankircher@jankircher.com