



Preventing Workplace Bullying

A recent court case about workplace bullying that brought great distress and ill health to the bullied employee is a graphic example of what can go wrong when existing policy and procedures are not implemented.

The case concerned a supervisor bullying an employee who had just returned from maternity leave. The bullied employee complained to the State Manager who by procedure should have involved the HR Manager to investigate and resolve the situation.

However the State Manager did not inform the HR Manager, was not supportive of the bullied employee and actually contributed to the employee feeling abandoned.

The bullying continued, the employee became unwell, and had medical and psychiatric treatment. The court awarded the employee over \$237,000 in damages.

Analysis of this case indicates that at least parts of the following key preventing bullying steps were not implemented;

Set the standard of workplace behaviour

This involves developing workplace policy or a code of conduct that outlines what is and isn't acceptable in the workplace. Bullying cannot exist in a workplace where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

Identify the Risk

Identifying the potential for bullying to occur is an important step in determining what actions need to be taken. The Safe Work Australia Guide gives a list of methods to identify bullying risks, some of these are

- regular consultation with workers
- Seeking feedback from workers
- Monitoring incident reports and absenteeism
- Characteristics of workers that can make them more vulnerable to bullying, such as new workers

Provide training and information

Managers and Supervisors should be trained in:

- how to respond to workplace bullying allegations
- how to develop productive and respectful workplace relationships

Implement reporting and response procedures

It is important for those who experience or witness workplace bullying to know who they can talk to in the business, that a report will be taken seriously and confidentiality will be maintained. Implementing effective response procedures will help the organisation to respond to reports of bullying in a consistent and reasonable way.

Details of all the Steps to Prevent Workplace Bullying are covered in Courtenell's face to face training course *Preventing Bullying in the Workplace*.