

Girl on girl in the workplace



With two-thirds of workplace bullying complaints being made by women of other women, Christina Warner looks at how schoolgirl tactics equals bullying in the workplace.

Let's face it, some ladies (used in the most tenuous of contexts) are just plain mean. Despite media focus through high-profile cases, on examining the trend of bullying in the workplace it was found that this form of girl-on-girl intimidation is still very much on the radar.

Although men are still the main culprits when complaints are made by women of being bullied in the workplace, a trend has emerged. Increasing numbers of complaints are being made by women of being bullied by other women. This occurrence has been coined as the 'DIY Bootstrap' theory or 'mean girl' syndrome, meaning that some women feel an entitlement to make the lives of younger, less experienced female staff difficult.

This stems from the ideals that as the more senior, female member of staff feel that she was not helped in her achievements and had once felt bullied and she had to "pull herself up" alone, and that this should also be the case for the more junior member of staff.

For many, the current uncertain job market has led to a fear of redundancy and unemployment and many women are afraid to speak out.

However, according to the anti-workplace bullying charity, The Andrea Adams Trust, their helpline receives approximately seventy calls and fifty e-mails a day from people wanting help and advice. Bullying in the workplace is estimated to cost businesses £2 billion a year in recruiting and

training replacement staff of those who have quit due to bullying.

With 71% of workplace conflict being of women making complaints against other women, this frightening trend has shown a breakdown of the once common sense of solidarity and has culminated in many women workers becoming predatory in their roles.

David Thomas, Professor of Business Administration and Chairman of the Organizational Behavior department at Harvard Business School, is not at all surprised by the findings. "If you think about the kind of bullying that goes on between [women], which is often more psychological, more subtle, more in the form of social putdowns, that's the kind of bullying that happens in the workplace."

Although the symptoms of workplace bullying are wide-ranging and can vary from constantly being picked on or humiliated to being blamed for problems caused by others, many aren't aware of what is meant by 'workplace bullying'.

Lyn Witheridge, Chief Executive of The Andrea Adams Trust, says that "bullying between women is more complex and can be anything as subtle as a passing comment. In other circumstances, it may be evident when overlooked for promotions or pay rises."

By Christina Warner
Pics: Posed by models.

EXAMPLES OF BULLYING BEHAVIOUR

Bullying includes abuse, physical or verbal violence, humiliation and undermining someone's confidence. You are probably being bullied if, for example, you're:

- Constantly picked on;
- Humiliated in front of colleagues;
- Regularly unfairly treated;
- Physically or verbally abused;
- Blamed for problems caused by others;
- Always given too much to do so that you regularly fail in your work;
- Regularly threatened with the sack;
- Unfairly passed over for promotion or denied training opportunities.

Bullying can be face-to-face, in writing, over the phone or by fax or e-mail.

Talk to the bully: the bullying may not be deliberate. Talk to the person in question - she may not realise how their behaviour has been affecting you.

Keep a written record or diary: write down details of every incident and keep copies of any relevant documents.

If the bully is your manager: make the complaint in writing and ask that it's passed on to another manager to look into. If that doesn't happen or isn't possible, make the complaint to your boss's manager, or the human resources' department.

The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) offers free, confidential and impartial advice on all employment rights' issues. Call from 8am-6pm Mon to Fri on 08457 474 747. The Andrea Adams Trust can be reached from 10am-4pm on 01273 704 900.