



## Lasso the Workplace Bull-y

By Catherine Mattice, MA  
Workplace Bullying & Communication Consultant

Issue 1, 2009

Day in and day out, the bully Kate worked with attempted to micromanage her and turn the boss against her. He picked fights with her, harassed her, and yelled at her.

Kate's mental health declined under stress and anxiety increased almost daily. After five years of abuse, Kate placed a tattered piece of paper above her alarm clock with the words "Get up! Get up! Get up!" written in blue highlighter. It was her only source of inspiration; an ever failing attempt at motivating herself to actually get out of bed when the alarm went off. Depression increasing, so was the number of times she hit the snooze button each morning. Ultimately, she was fired. Her once booming work product and positive attitude had wilted away with her self-confidence.

Research indicates up to 90% of the workforce is bullied, and in fact are mostly women being bullied by men and other women.

Targets experience anxiety, depression, burnout and a multitude of other bad feelings as a result, and in extreme cases even Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Bullying is more damaging than sexual harassment because it occurs under the radar and therefore more frequently. Why? Because corporate policies cover more conspicuous harassment aimed at a protected class such as race, religion and sexual orientation but often do not cover bullying. Organizations are also much more likely to put a stop to sexual harassment, simply because the law says they have to. But no laws exist against workplace bullying.

On the day Kate finally quit her job she promised herself she would never be that unhappy again. In her next position work days were happy and even fun, until she made a mistake in her work. Her boss responded by sending a scathing email that he copied to the management team. He even heckled her as he walked by her desk, and in an office with no cubicle walls or privacy everyone could hear.

Kate had to make a choice. She could ignore the email or write an apology, but then she would be a victim again. Or she could stand up for herself. So Kate decided to deliver confidence up on a silver platter.

She clicked *Reply to All*, acknowledged (but did not apologize for) her mistake, provided several options for solution, and advised she was free to discuss them further in private. Within seconds of hitting *Send*, her boss' office door flew open; he marched straight over to her, and said, "Fantastic email Kate! Way to put the hammer down!"

Kate demonstrated faith in herself, despite the mistake, and this develops through repetitive affirmation. If you attend church, for example, there's a good chance your faith is nurtured each time you go. The more information you receive, the more your certainty is confirmed. If you stop going to church loss in faith may result. The same happens when we stop believing in ourselves.

So head to the *Church of You* each morning and stand in front of the mirror to shout your personal affirmations ("I am terrific! I am great at my job! I will overcome the bully! I am not a helpless victim!"). The more you say it, the more you feel it; the more you feel it, the more you believe it; the more you believe it, the greater your courage becomes; the greater your courage becomes, the closer you are to lassoing the bully.

As you become more confident, the ability to effectively communicate with others, including the bully, naturally follows. Confident speakers take risks and they do it with grace and passion that reflect in their communication style. The power exuded is a shield against people who may attempt to target them (and you) with childish behaviors. Think about the boldness you project when standing with your arms on your hips or down at the side, rather than folded across your chest (a signal of fear or shyness). These slick moves come with courage and belief in yourself, which will also allow you to continue to do your job and do it *well*.

Keep your productivity high and your work quality at 100%. Do not give the bully any information that could be used to take you down. If your situation is brought before management or Human Resources, be sure the bully cannot say you are lacking in work product and quality.

Human Resources can help, but there are a few things you should know before approaching them. Keep in mind they know exactly what you mean if you tell them you feel sexually harassed; but they will need more help from you to understand bullying. Keep a factual journal of behaviors, dates, times and names of witnesses. And while it may be hard at first, it is important to keep emotions out and save them for your personal journal at home. Create a file and keep memos, emails, and any other tangibles you collect from the bully to help prove your case. Tell your story with a beginning, middle and end, stick to the facts, and provide very specific details. Ultimately, if the situation does not resolve do not be afraid to quit to save your dignity.

As for Kate, on "game days" as she calls them (those days she knows extra bravery is required), she pulls her hair straight back, pins down the thick bangs that often cover her eyes, puts on one of her brightly colored shirts and slides into her favorite pair of power pumps. With nowhere to hide she has no choice but to be confident, bold and daring all day - and sometimes for weeks at a time.

You have the ability to change your negative situation. As Eleanor Roosevelt once said, "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent".

###

*Catherine Mattice earned both her Bachelors and Masters degrees in Organizational Communication from San Diego State University, where she wrote her Masters thesis on bullies in the workplace. Since then she has continued to research, publish and present both nationally and internationally, and has appeared on stations such as NBC, ABC and FOX over 30 times. Her most recent claim to fame is an appearance in Personal Development Magazine, where she can be seen alongside the likes of Howard Putnam, the former CEO of Southwest Airlines. Learn more about her workshops and consulting at [www.NoWorkplaceBullies.com](http://www.NoWorkplaceBullies.com).*