

No One Can Make You Feel Inferior

Faith, courage, and persistence will beat a bully every time

By Catherine Mattice

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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 showed up in her office once in awhile to yell at her.

Over the course of Kate's employment in that position, her 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.

Life is too short to live in fear of a co-worker, manager, or peer, yet several research studies have found that over half of the workforce has felt bullied at some point during their careers, and that they often feel anxiety, depression, burn out, humiliation, and a multitude of other bad feelings as a result.

Bullies bully everyone. Kate's bullied the company President! Yet some people are able to "fight" them off while others, like Kate, find it more

difficult. People consent to bullying by not defending themselves – an act which takes courage, faith, self belief, and knowledge of how to communicate with the enemy.

On the drive home the day Kate finally quit, she swore she would never be that unhappy again. She learned later that the desire to follow through with that promise to herself was immensely powerful. One day in her next position, where work days were normally happy and even fun, her boss sent her a scathing email in response to a mistake she'd made, an email he'd copied to half the company and all of the management team. He also heckled Kate a few times as he walked by her desk. In an office with no cubicle walls or privacy, everyone could hear. Now, upon receipt of the email, Kate had to make a choice.

She could ignore the email, or write a timid apology claiming she would never let it happen again. But that would have led her down the path of becoming yet another victim of yet another office jerk. The other option was to stand up for herself and compose a polite and firm response.

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!"

The moral: He respected Kate's ability to stand up for herself. He knew he'd bullied her, and he also knew now that she would not allow it. In that instance, she demonstrated courage and leadership. It earned her his respect.

So how do you overcome a bully? Steven R. Covey, author of *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, says we should "Begin with the end in mind," and we can do that by following former Congressman Ed Forman's advice and saying out loud and in the mirror every morning before work, "I am happy, I am healthy, I am terrific!" Heck, even while you're at work, close your office door or step outside a few times and say it. With a little faith those words can turn your life around.

Faith develops and increases 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 reaching your goal of overcoming a bully.

It’s not easy to overcome challenges and obstacles, but there would be nothing to celebrate if overcoming them was easy. They would not create a stronger you. Challenges take courage; you find that courage through persistence in your positive thinking. You have the determination and doggedness to fight the bully; you find it within yourself by consistently reaffirming it in your head.

Now “fight” does not mean a punch in the nose, but as you become more confident, the ability to effectively communicate with others naturally follows (as will your ability to “fend” bullies off). Your inner strength will actually become apparent to others as you walk through a room or have conversations with peers, because your body language will demonstrate it. As you ask a question during staff meetings, for example, your speech rate will speed up and your posture will improve (standing straight, not slouching) – two signals you are a confident person.

Effective communicators are articulate, communicate vision, share opinions, adjust communication style to the audience, openly address conflict, take accountability, and champion the success of others. Simply put, confident speakers are well liked because they are no-holds-barred kind of people. They take risks and they do it with grace, passion and fervor that are reflected in their communication style. The power exuded then becomes a shield against people who may initially attempt to target them (and you) with childish behaviors.

Granville Toogood, author of *The Articulate Executive in Action*, encourages the use of words such as “cut” instead of “reduce,” and “strike” instead of “delete,” for example, because they are short, sharp, and unambiguous. In another example, 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!

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 are not a helpless victim, and you are not an inactive passerby in your own life. Make an investment in yourself and follow your dreams, hopes, desires and goals, including overcoming the bully at work. You have the ability to change your negative situation. As Eleanor Roosevelt once said, “No one can make you feel inferior without your consent”.

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Catherine Mattice received 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 and publish both nationally and internationally, and has appeared on the likes of NBC, ABC and FOX over 30 times. Her most recent claim to fame is an article in Personal Development Magazine, where she appears right alongside the likes of Tony Robbins; Howard Putnam, the former CEO of Southwest Airlines; and former Congressman Ed Foreman.



Catherine Mattice, MA
Communication Consultant
www.NoWorkplaceBullies.com
Contact@CatherineMattice.com
619-454-4489

