

## Bullying in Law Enforcement: End the Silence

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Throughout our lives we are faced with the heartbreaking presence of bullies. While in school, we think it will end with graduation, but we ultimately find that bullies cannot be escaped. If we aren't victims, we become bystanders as bullying is becoming more predominant in the workforce. I am very blessed to have close ties with other Law Enforcement officers throughout the United States and in my conversations with these officers I have become aware of an unsettling trend, workplace bullying. However, when mentioned in the open, many officers remain silent, due to being scared of what their peers might think of them, fear of reprisals within their agencies and the fact that they above all others should be able to handle these situations because of the nature of their jobs. The unfortunate presence of bullying in a law enforcement environment is not only costly, reckless, and foolish; it is dangerous and must be stopped.

Officers of the law are sworn to protect the innocent against deception, the weak against oppression or intimidation, and the peaceful against violence and disorder; and to respect the constitutional rights of all to liberty, equality and justice (as cited in Policy and Procedure Manual 2012). However, in the law enforcement community, officers partake in bullying coworkers and using tactics against subordinates, equals and supervisors to gain the upper hand at work. As of yet, workplace bullying in the United States is not illegal, but in 25 states, bills have been introduced pertaining to bullying in the work environment. There have been a multitude of lawsuits filed due to workplace bullying. These lawsuits have not only been financially detrimental to the employer, but costly to the staff and management as well, not to mention damage to the public's perception of the business. These types of lawsuits could potentially be ruinous for our Law Enforcement agencies.

Officers approach most calls, events, and daily activities with a thick skin due to the nature of the job, therefore law enforcement officers often tend to develop a cruel sense of humor

that is sometimes used towards other officers. I have seen this sense of humor cross personal boundaries and evolve into a form of bullying; possibly without the aggressor realizing it initially. A successful bully begins to feed on the fear and submission of the victims and the feeling of power perpetuates the behavior to not only continue but increase in scope and intensity.

I know bullying is not confined to peers and is in all levels of Law Enforcement. Sometimes officers become victims of supervisors who abuse their power and position. For example, an officer can receive unwarranted or invalid criticism, be singled out negatively, treated differently, or yelled at for minor or manufactured infractions. Bullied officers are often given erroneous evaluations that focus on allegations that are either distorted, fabricated or severely highlight an underperformance. This is unethical and one of the worst kinds of workplace bullying.

Problems created by bullying not only affect individual officers but entire departments in terms of morale, productivity, recruiting difficulties, and possible litigation. In order to prevent bullying, officers must first understand how to identify bullying. We must then take steps to stop the behavior and ensure that the bullying does not continue. As supervisors, if we do not address this issue, departments risk losing veteran workers, suffering costly litigations, and developing poor morale and attitude within Law Enforcement agencies. I will be discussing the following:

1. What is Workplace Bullying?
2. Why does Workplace Bullying happen?
3. Who are bullies targeting?
4. Other Types of Workplace Bullying
5. Recognizing a Bully in your Ranks.
6. Correct and Incorrect Perceptions about Workplace Bullying.
7. Workplace Bullying is not the same as Harassment.

8. Example of Workplace Bullying in Law Enforcement.
9. The Cost of Workplace Bullying.

*“You don't ever have to feel guilty about removing toxic people from your life. It doesn't matter whether someone is a relative, romantic interest, employer, childhood friend or new acquaintance- You don't have to make room for people who cause you pain or make you feel small. It's one thing if a person owns up to their behavior and makes an effort to change. But if a person disregards your feelings, ignores your boundaries, and "continues" to treat you in a harmful way, they have to go.”*

— [Danielle Koepke](#) (goodreads.com)

### What is Workplace Bullying?

Several definitions of workplace bullying are: "...a repeated and persistent destructive process of attempts by one person to torment, wear down, frustrate, get a reaction from another or exclude him or her from the work environment. It is treatment that provokes pressures, frightens, intimidates and through its repetition leads to devastating effects (Brodsky, C.M. 2007) also “...the accumulation, over a long period of time of hostile proposals (and behaviors) expressed by one or several people towards a third person at work (Leyman, H. 2007). The Workplace Bullying Institute defines workplace bullying as repeated, health-harming mistreatment of one or more persons by one or more perpetrators that take one or more of the following forms: verbal abuse; offensive conduct/behaviors (including nonverbal) which are threatening, humiliating, or intimidating; and work interference — sabotage — which prevents work from getting done (workplacebullying.org 2013).

Workplace bullying creates fear and apprehension in the target in order to keep the target from performing at their peak performance. This eventually leads to absenteeism, low morale, low productivity and high turnover. Workplace bullying is not directed specifically at one gender, race, color or creed - it can affect anyone and at any time. Bullies are relentless to those they target. Bullying is not simply what the bully says to the target. It is what the bully says to others about the target, what others see happening to their peers, and the history of past abuse that lives in the stories told at work (Crawford, 2001). Their behavior is not beneficial to the work environment and actually serves to weaken it. When you have a bully in your department, not only are your recruits affected, your seasoned workers, veterans and experienced professionals are also threatened.

Bullies are not confined to any particular workplace level. They can be supervisors, subordinates, or coworkers. The bullying behavior is used by individuals who have a need to control those whom they target. Bullies intimidate, harass and hurt others because they have to hide their own personal inadequacies. They cannot face their problems, so to raise their own self-esteem, they bully others. By bullying others, it also makes them appear stronger and cover the weakness within themselves. Bullies typically are insecure about themselves and are not as competent as those they bully.

#### Why does Workplace Bullying Happen?

As members of the Law Enforcement community, officers should be very familiar with bullies, because we come in contact with many on a daily basis. Domestic violence, harassment, and sexual assaults are all situations that are initiated because of a bully. Officers should be experts in this field, yet somehow we allow individuals within our own ranks to use similar tactics to victimize ourselves, our coworkers, and our friends. For example, when recruits come

out of the academy they often receive some hazing from senior officers. Officers usually laugh this off, but this type of behavior can easily cross the line and become bullying. Officers who participate in hazing the recruits, such as calling them demeaning names like, “kid,” or “rookie,” and having them perform meaningless tasks or repetitive actions, offer excuses for their behavior such as, “They need to learn to deal with the stress of the job.”

In Law Enforcement, the ones officers fail to police the most are themselves. The thin blue line is sometimes confused by officers as a wall of silence. Officers who bully their peers do so for a multitude of reasons, just as it is done in other workplace environments throughout America: jealousy; inadequacy of the bully; resentment towards fellow officers; and a variety of other reasons. Supervisorial bullying is usually done to redirect attention from the inadequacies of the supervisor.

Workplace bullying occurs because of many factors: It can be overlooked by management; those who are not being bullied do not report it for fear of retaliation; and those who are bullied either choose to not report it or are too afraid to report the behavior. Many in Law Enforcement do not want to be perceived as weak, so if they are targets of bullying, it is not reported. The Law Enforcement culture has been created to make cops hardened and expects them to deal with the daily pressures of the job. Officers throughout the years have been expected to go to their calls, deal with them, and move on to the next. However we know that every officer has internal pressures they must deal with. Add a bully or bullish behavior on top of these daily pressures, and you are setting up the officer, agency, and the citizens they protect for failure.

Workplace bullying continues because those around the target do not intervene and stop the behavior of the bully. Martin Luther King Jr. is quoted as saying “*He who passively accepts*

*evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it.*" (www.goodreads.com). Targets of bullying usually find that they are alone and deserted by their coworkers. Those who oppose the bully are subject to be bullied themselves, therefore you will find that the onlookers will remain silent and allow the behavior to continue. Several reasons, explain why coworkers fail to assist those being bullied are: the bully creates a climate of fear where everybody is afraid to speak out or take action, a fear of reprisal, bullying often goes on behind closed doors so no one sees it or recognizes it and bystanders see only the Jekyll side of the bully; only the target sees the Hyde side. (bullyonline.org 2013).

### Who are bullies targeting?

In order to combat workplace bullying in Law Enforcement, one must be able to recognize the signs and indicators of such behavior. Officers must be able to identify bullies, their targets and if possible do their best to keep this behavior from destroying Law Enforcement agencies. A bully is like any other predator and will take the first opportunity they can to attack a target. Bullies are looking for targets that are successful in what they do. They are going to target officers who are popular within the agency, excel at their jobs, have a well-defined set of values, are experienced, and are independent. Certain situations can occur which can start the bullying process. The following are examples of what could trigger bullying: the previous target leaves, there's a reorganization, a new manager is appointed, the target gains a promotion, or the target stands up for a colleague who is being bullied.

Bullies tend to choose individuals who have a strong sense of integrity and work ethic. They seek to find those in our agencies who are competent and strive to perform at their best levels. Bullies are envious and jealous, so the targets they choose are ones they perceive to be threats to them. If they succeed in their goal the loss of the best and brightest officers could be

the result. Yet not only does the target suffer but the abuse of the bully negatively affects the entire group and all suffer due to the actions of bullying.

### Other Types of Workplace Bullying

Workplace bullying does not have to be carried out by just one individual. The bully can, and oftentimes does, seek out others to assist in bullying targets. There are several types of bullying that occur when a bully has others in his army. There is mobbing, wannabes, and pair or gang bullying.

First is mobbing. Ken Westhue, a professor of sociology at the University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada writes, "In the workplace, a mob consists of ordinary workers who, after deeming an individual worker a threat, collectively attack the perceived enemy. Like birds, the individual workers harm the target by collective and relentless small jabs. The mob of workers can be understood as an entity in and of itself. Once it is formed, it takes on a life of its own, even when members may question the benefit of continuing to punish the target." (workplacebullying.org 2012). Yet in its form, it still is controlled by a primary leader. This leader is an egotist, working the mob of bullies from the background. These types of bullies are harder to identify and are much more difficult and threatening.

Wannabe bullies are the second type of group bullying. Wannabes are bullies who are not in a position of power or authority. However they are commonly used by other bullies who do have power and authority. Wannabe bullies are not competent, nor do they have the skills to do the jobs in which they are assigned, yet they remain in their positions because of their loyalties to the primary bullies whom they wish to be like. These are the officers who will do anything to promote themselves over everyone else. They are the ones who stop at nothing to throw target officers under the bus to gain power and prestige.

Pair or gang bullying is the final type of group bullying. Pair bullying is quite simply team bullying. These are the ones who have others do the bullying for them. One of the bullies will do all the talking and the other will remain silent and observe. The observer is the one who actually has the most power in the pair and is the most dangerous to the target. Usually the bully has conspired and gained support of co-worker(s) by creating or repeating allegations about the target. This garners support for the bully and his actions. Some of the co-workers are happy to go along with the bullying because it gives them a feeling of power, and others join the gang for fear of becoming the next victim. The best thing about gang bullying for the bully, is that if anything goes wrong, he/she has others to blame and does not have to take the entire responsibility for the wrongful actions of the group.

#### Recognizing a Bully in your Ranks.

Recognizing a bully in your ranks takes little observation. Bullies are cowards who avoid responsibility. They blame others for their failures, favor weaker employees, are inconsistent in their actions, and they will take credit for work that others have done. A bully cares only about themselves. They will be aggressive, dump work on others, and use manipulation whenever possible. When dealing with subordinates, bullies will never guide or instruct, they will tell the subordinate what to do. Bullies withhold information only to release small amounts in order to control their influence upon others. They enjoy creating confusion and use this to gain and maintain power. Bullies are obsessed with the past and do not focus on the future. The behavior of the bully is immoral and without integrity. Bullies can be self-centered, focused on themselves and only identify with others like them.

These individuals excel at deception and will ruthlessly use such deception to further their agendas. They are known to have a need for control and will try to attempt to control what

you say, think and do. Bullies have a compulsion to be critical, have a hard time acknowledging others in their achievements, and don't like giving commendations. Several other signs which indicate that you might have a bully in your midst are: bullies isolate and exclude targets, they taunt and tease where the intention is to embarrass and humiliate, they use excessive monitoring, supervision, micro-management, or they invite targets to "informal" meetings which turn out to be disciplinary hearings (bullyonline.org 2013).

Bullies also try to make the targets feel like they are going crazy or "losing it." They try to use tactics by saying one thing, then contradicting it, then saying they never said the statement in the first place and blaming it on others. This is a form of "crazy-making." It is used to keep the target off balance and make them feel like they are the ones with the problem. This helps the bully as mentioned earlier, isolate and exclude the target. Ignoring communications or request, using the silent treatment and keeping the target segregated from departmental functions such as meetings are further examples of how a bully uses isolation and exclusion techniques.

#### Correct and Incorrect Perceptions about Workplace Bullying.

Workplace bullying has many correct and incorrect perceptions. One of the primary misconceptions concerning bullying is that the target must have had something to do with being bullied in the past. Does the property owner ask the thief to steal? Does the child ask the molester to molest? The target does not ask the bully to bully, they just do. "Targets represent everything the bullies are not, and never will be." (bullyonline.org 2013).

Many imagine that it takes two for bullying to occur. However the bully is exhibiting a type of behavior and thus it is their choice to bully, as it is the choice for someone to abuse, harass or rape. It is unacceptable behavior that is the choice of the individual. Other examples of

the misconceptions about bullying are: targets are weak, sensitive or oversensitive and are just whiners who can't get along with people (bullyonline.org 2013). I believe crazy making, losing it, being labeled as paranoid or a problem employee/difficult employee are the most heartbreaking misconception of targets in workplace bullying.

Targets of bullies are not weak; they are individuals who go to “work to work.” (bullyonline.org 2013). They have integrity, strong values and morals and have strengths the bully can only dream about. Victims of bullying are not sensitive or oversensitive. They have an ability to distinguish and identify those who have bad intentions. Bullies are the ones who lack any sensitivity and therefore label their targets as oversensitive when confronted. The individual who is targeted is one who is often capable, efficient and popular. A bully recognizes this, and due to feelings of jealousy and hatred, will try to destroy the target. Once it is underway and the target reports or makes any kind of statement about the bullying behavior they are labeled as whiners who have trouble getting along.

Targets are nothing like problem employees/difficult employees. Problem employees/difficult employees don't turn their work in on time, leave early, charge the employer minute for minute compensation time, frequently use sick time, and neglect their calls for service. By making it appear that the target is losing it, crazy and paranoid, bullies keep the target isolated from the group. The observers and witnesses to bullying sometimes do not see the true nature of the bully and if the target voices their frustration about the bully's behavior it is not easily understood.

#### Workplace Bullying is not the same as Harassment.

Bullying and harassment are not one and the same. Harassment usually involves a physical component. The harasser typically invades the personal space of the harassee. Those

being harassed are chosen because of their gender, race, or sexual orientation. Usually harassment is a one-time thing or will only be a few incidences that eventually stop. Everyone can identify and recognize harassment, especially in Law Enforcement. As officers we all know and can recognize assaults, sexual assaults, batteries and the many forms harassment can take. Lastly, harassment is usually a quest of domination and superiority.

Workplace bullying however is almost always psychological. Criticism, emotional pressure, and mind games are typical of bullying. Bullies discriminate on the competency of the target. Their gender, race, sexual orientation or creed plays no part in bullying. Workplace bullying is an ongoing build-up of multiple incidents that by themselves might appear insignificant. Most officers are trained to recognize the many forms of harassment, however many cannot recognize bullying, and most that do refuse to acknowledge it for fear of retaliation. Individuals who bully do so because they want to control the perceived threat the target poses to them. Bullying is driven due to the bullies inadequacies, envy and jealousy, not because they want to be dominant over the target.

Just because harassment is not the same as workplace bullying does not mean the bully cannot harass their targets. It could be that the bullying eventually takes some form of harassment, however most of the time the bully uses psychological pressure on their target until such time as the target breaks. Once the target is no longer a threat, the bully will move on to the next target. We have to be ever mindful of the signs and signals of bullies within our agencies

#### Example of Workplace Bullying in Law Enforcement.

In a blog to the Workplace Bullying Institute, Police Chief Darryl Forté wrote about workplace bullying and his experience within his twenty eight year career. Chief Forté stated, “I can’t help but reflect on the many real incidents of bullying. Oftentimes, the bullies were in

higher ranks or positions than those who were being bullied. I've witnessed and have been the victim of bullying at KCPD (Kansas City Police Department). I reported the bullying, and in most cases it was discounted as: "He does that to everyone," "You need thicker skin," or "Don't make any noise about that." As I progressed through the ranks of the department, I found better ways to confront bullies" (workplacebullying.org 2013).

Chief Forté wrote "many others have communicated their experiences, often hearing identical trite expressions from those who had the authority to intervene but didn't. There have been incidents in which individuals were cursed out and even threatened, but no actions were taken against the bully. Transfers requests have been lost and denied without explanation. I've witnessed above-average yearly evaluations change to an employee who suddenly can't do anything right in the eyes of his immediate supervisor/commander. Most alarming, oftentimes no one intervened on behalf of the one being bullied. In some cases the bullies garnered the support of others, resulting in group bullying. The result in several cases was civil action being filed with monetary compensation being awarded to the bullied employee." (workplacebullying.org 2013).

In his blog, Chief Forté encourages others within the law enforcement community to report bullying to their supervisors so that allegations of bullying can be properly investigated. Chief Forté expresses how its best to create and develop a bully-free environment where officers are comfortable about speaking out if they experience any forms of maltreatment. Chief Forté believes "We must set the tone of non-tolerance, and most importantly, prevent the long-term emotional toll on those who are being bullied" (workplacebullying.org 2013).

#### The Cost of Workplace Bullying.

Workplace bullying can be costly to the target's health. Bullying can sometimes occur for years and can leave the target with multiple health issues. Scholars at the Project for

Wellness and Work-Life at Arizona State University claim “workplace bullying is linked to a host of physical, psychological, organizational, and social costs.” (Gallant, 2013). The psychological effects of workplace bullying on the target can create anxiety, panic attacks, depression, PTSD, shame, guilt and a sense of injustice due to the unfairness of being targeted by the bully. Many times these psychological effects of bullying can lead to such stress that the target ends up in a suicidal state of mind.

Bullying creates stress on the target’s body which, when applied in a severe manner, has dire consequences. Targets can develop high blood pressure, strokes, heart attacks, diabetes, skin disorders, frequent infections, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia (workplacebullying.org 2012). Symptoms the target could experience might include nausea, tremors, chills, diarrhea, chest pains and headaches (workplacebullying.org 2012). These physical symptoms might seem unrelated at first but could be indicative of the physical effects of how workplace bullying is negatively affecting their bodies.

There may be economical costs to bullying for both the target and the employer. Many times targets who are bullied end up losing their jobs or leaving their jobs due to the bully at work. Those who experience bullying and those who witness it are all subject to become part of a high employee turnover due to a bully in the ranks. The old expression of ‘a middle income family is only two pay checks away from poverty,’ could become all too real. The stress the target experiences from dealing with the bully and losing their job can be compounded by the possible loss of their property, husband or wife, and family as well. The employer can face litigation which is costly regardless whether the lawsuit is won or lost. Litigation is quite expensive and therefore creates a financial burden upon employers as they go through the process.

### Conclusion.

I believe the workplace bully must be stopped if we are to maintain a positive work environment for ourselves, our coworkers and our community. Bullies are individuals who have no place in our agencies. Those who practice bullying are only self-serving and work to destroy others by a steady bombardment of attacks which individually might seem trivial yet when totaled create tremendous pressures upon those targeted. Others must speak for the targets of bullying because sometimes they cannot or will not speak for themselves. Eleanor Roosevelt once said “*No one can make me feel inferior without my consent.*”(goodreads.com 2013). Targets must be reminded that they are not to blame and are not the cause for the bullying.

Unfortunately bullying does occur in Law Enforcement, and it happens more frequently than many officers would like to admit. When you work in an environment where bullying is the rule, you either become a bully yourself, or you become the target of one. Few can simply remain bystanders, and because you have to adapt and gain skills which allow you to survive, you can either choose to do right or wrong. We must take a stand. Unfortunately the wrong way, joining the bullies, is the easiest route and the one most accepted and therefore chosen. Taking preventative measures such as looking for the signs of bullying and initiating early intervention by implementing departmental policies to prevent the behavior are key steps to ending this problem. With knowledge and education the bully can be stopped. Supervisors need to take notice, be aware and make sure they promote a healthy work environment without the presence of bullying.

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