

Sent: Friday, 15 June 2012 2:56 PM  
To: Committee, EEWorkplaceBullying (REPS)  
Subject: Submission to House Standing Committee on Education and Employment - Inquiry into workplace bullying

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment  
Inquiry into workplace bullying  
Parliament House  
Canberra

Dear Members of the Standing Committee,

Please accept this submission to the House inquiry into workplace bullying.

This submission particularly addresses the following point from the terms of reference:  
*"The role of workplace cultures in preventing and responding to bullying and the capacity for workplace based policies and procedures to influence the incidence and seriousness of workplace bullying."*

Bullying is better addressed by reviewing and changing a negative workplace culture i.e. one that breeds negative impacts on workplace harmony. A program exists that appropriately addresses the issue and a summary of this program is attached. The program significantly reduces the incidence of all workplace disputes, including bullying, and also fosters a stimulating and harmonious working environment.

It may be helpful to outline why and how the program came into being.

I have worked for a number of organisations and have successfully resolved a significant number of workplace grievances by utilising conventional dispute resolution and mediation techniques. As my experience grew in this area of workplace conflict resolution, it became obvious that the earlier that one intervened in the particular dispute, the easier the solution. A problem in early resolution attempts though, is that sometimes, indeed often, neither one party nor the other may yet be ready for mediation or other forms of dispute resolution.

Taking early resolution to its extreme, and at the same time creating a healthy working environment, the problem of early intervention is overcome by employees resolving their own issues between themselves. In simple terms - they are trained to significantly improve their people skills through a series of workshops throughout their working lives within the organisation, initially via an induction workshop.

The concept of the workshops combines a number of established and new disciplines eg

utilisation of a range of dispute resolution techniques to enhance each employee's people skills, languaging, OHS, listening skills (including profiles), mapping solutions, career development, bullying prevention and EEO issues.

I have personal knowledge of cases where workplace harmony training saved the organisation significant costs and, more importantly, restored the health and careers of employees involved in disputes. I have de-identified one such example:

Two engineers were involved in a dispute where the first seeds of friction were sown on the first day the supervising engineer hired an assistant. The supervisor had impatiently berated the assistant for not correctly selecting a key for a lock from a large bunch of keys. This incident created nervousness within the assistant that was to impede his career progress over the next 5 years. The assistant consulted his doctor and his lawyer and commenced stress leave. Lessons taught in workplace harmony workshops were integral to a manager reporting the circumstances to the organisation's contact officer. The contact officer was able to arrange a successful mediation prior to the assistant commencing his stress leave. This positive mediation outcome saved the workers' compensation process including the employment of a rehabilitation officer to monitor recovery. A potential bullying claim was also prevented. The supervisor and the assistant now have a first class relationship. Other examples are available, with similar savings to personnel relations and costs.

The real savings emanating from workplace harmony workshops are greater because the above complaint could have potentially been prevented earlier if the complainant and the alleged perpetrator had, 5 years sooner, attended a workshop, as do current generation new appointees. The workshops also had a positive EEO impact with the number of female managers increasing by 100% over a 5 year period. OHS stress claims declined by 50%. Operation of the program has led to significant reductions in legal costs. The program's success stories have been recognised as representing effective management.

The attachment to this submission was prepared when Ms Julia Gillard was Minister for Workplace Relations and the quoted opening comments in the attachment were made during that period. The following comment was also made by Minister Bill Shorten during that time: **"Bullying is an absence of kindness and empathy towards one's fellow human beings"**. The program addresses, in detail, the concerns of both Prime Minister Gillard and Minister Shorten. I believe the program to be the way forward in achieving healthy, harmonious and bully free workplaces throughout Australia. The program is innovative and topical.

I now wish to address a second point from the terms of reference:

*"Whether the scope to improve coordination between governments, regulators, health service providers and other stakeholders to address and prevent workplace bullying."*

The majority of this submission has addressed the preceding point from the terms of reference regarding workplace culture. Under this next point, from the terms of reference, regarding coordination between a range of stakeholders, we submit that the emphasis we are placing on the creation of a harmonious and well trained workforce is far more effective in

reducing bullying than applying more focus on bullying as a single topic. Prevention is better than cure and understanding ourselves and our colleagues will significantly eliminate or minimise the bullying problem. Health service providers and other stakeholders could act as conduits for implementing appropriate training to achieve a higher skilled workforce in the area of excellent workforce relationships thus reducing bullying in the workplace.

In conclusion - a workplace harmony program is a genuine alternative to traditional reactive means of countering workplace bullying and harassment.

I look forward to the opportunity of providing further details, including a potential workshop demonstration, to the Standing Committee in support of this submission.

Yours sincerely

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