

BACP has a fantastic CEO in Laurie Clarke, and BACP/ACW's solid foundations, infrastructure and membership demonstrate levels of experience that are all huge strengths when responsive, flexible and proactive in its influence. BACP is a membership organisation – are ACW members reaching high and wide enough? What issues are facing them? Is change welcomed or perceived as a threat? Are the visionaries focusing on what the future might look like, identifying the cutting edge, considering how the workplace may change? And is anyone listening? While coaching is riding high now, what is coming next? Is therapeutic coaching the way to go? Or is there something that none of us has imagined yet?

Q *Where do you see ACW in five years' time?*

A I have no idea, but I would say be prepared to keep evolving; look how much *Counselling at Work* has – it looks great! We've all seen how rapidly the world of e-networks has influenced communication. Sustainability, spirituality and the soul life of organisations are hotter issues now than when I was writing about this in the journal more than 12 years ago; integration is also a buzz word. Where is ACW on any of this?

Q *Any last points you'd like to add?*

A Well thank you for giving space for some ACW history. I have just two thoughts. There is that phrase in therapy of 'good enough'. Jim Collins in his book *Good to great: analysing corporate success* stated that good was the enemy of great, meaning we settle for less than might be possible and in a sense, play safe to maintain 'good'. How does that resonate with ACW?

In 1998 I invited Professor Brian Thorne to speak about values and spirituality at work at the ACW conference, which he did most eloquently. A summary of his presentation is in *Counselling at Work* issue 21, reprinted in the first *Counselling at Work* anthology. If you read nothing else this week, read that. Therein lay seeds of a vision.

The impact of bullying at work

Damian Stroupe reflects on the emotional fallout from workplace bullying

A client (we'll call him Peter) walks through your door, sits down and tells you about an abusive relationship he is having. The list of issues includes constant criticism, abusive behaviour, isolation from friends, constant monitoring, being 'set up' and being both lied about and to. He sees no way out of his situation and often feels trapped. The other person is popular, stronger and more powerful. Add to this the fact that everything the abuser says is accepted by others to be true.

Peter continues with his story. You begin to understand the physical symptoms he is experiencing: the sleeplessness, weight gain, panic attacks, lack of motivation to do anything. As he explores his feelings, you begin to sense his emotions: anger against himself and his abuser. You also begin to sense Peter's anxiety, isolation, depression, fear, guilt, and his sense of failure that he has let down so many other people. You may begin to sense the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Your mind may be drifting towards a situation at home or school. One thing is missing from this picture and that is support from other people. The client feels he is not being heard by anyone, there is no support. His family is saying 'pull yourself together ... it's all in your mind ... be strong and confront the bully'. Your client's confidence has been shattered, he has no strength to confront the bully and he needs someone to understand what he is going through. If this was school or home, various organisations would act to stop the abuse. However, Peter is talking about his workplace; fear of losing his job and income prevents him from complaining to his employer.

You might be surprised to find that this bullying has been going on for more than a year; you might be more

Damian Stoupe is a counsellor in private practice working with the anti-bullying organisation Just Fight On! He is studying counselling in organisational settings for an MSc at Bristol University. damian@bully-freeworkplace.co.uk

‘EAP providers felt that a greater understanding of the workplace was required by counsellors’

surprised to realise that there is very little hard evidence to support your client's case.

Peter's story provides an insight into what a bullied client may be experiencing. Peter was a high flyer and as part of his career plan he was moved to a new division to set up a new department. While he was exceeding all his objectives, he committed three 'major crimes' in the eyes of his new managing director:

- he refused to get rid of a 'troublemaker'
- he was successful in his job; not normally a 'crime' but his success was perceived as threatening by an insecure managing director
- he identified inconsistencies in reports to the board and major customers.

His punishment started off with petty acts such as removal of parking privileges, abusive language, jokes at his expense, extra work, unrealistic targets and decisions being overruled. He reacted to these challenges by working even harder to win the approval of his boss. The level of challenge escalated. Every aspect of his work was criticised, his level of responsibility was reduced and everything he did required approval by his boss. His authority was continuously undermined and he was slowly but effectively isolated from the rest of the management team. He was being set up to fail and was even alerted this by a major customer.

Eventually, after 18 months of this treatment, he went to the doctor and was signed off for a month suffering with anxiety. He returned to work to find

his team had been disbanded and his responsibilities taken away from him. He was told this was because he could not cope with the pressure and that he had no aptitude for management. He went off sick again with the doctor's comment ringing in his ear 'for the sake of your health don't go back again'. He eventually signed a compromise agreement and never returned to the job.

Initially, Peter could not believe what had happened to him. This is a common situation. Calls and emails to support groups (such as Just Fight On!) from those targeted by workplace bullying suggest that the greatest difficulties are accepting what has happened and obtaining support.

Workplace bullying has been defined as: 'the repeated, malicious, health-endangering mistreatment of one employee (the target) by one or more employees (the bully, bullies). The mistreatment is psychological violence, a mix of verbal and strategic assaults to prevent the target from performing work well.'

While I find this definition workable, I think it lacks consideration for the bully and the wider collateral damage caused by bullying. I see the bully as a victim also. When I deal with those labelled as 'bullies', with the exception of the true sociopaths, many are concerned about their behaviour. Often their defence is 'I was doing my job' or 'I am a strong manager'.

Most organisations have a management style that people adapt to if they want to get promoted. I remember one director telling me that if I wanted to get on in the company I should remember I 'was an officer not a rating' and that I should not 'fraternise with the ratings ... they are there to do a job and your job is to get the job done'. Looking back, I can see how I could be described as a bully – though I was not aware of it at the time – and I

The policy should be:

- Relevant to the workplace
- Developed in consultation.
- Easy to understand
- Followed and consistently and fairly applied.
- Consistent with any other health and safety policies

The policy should include:

- A value statement
- A strong relevant definition of workplace bullying, which recognises the impact of bullying
- Clearly defined standards of behaviour
- Transparent grievance, complaints and resolutions procedure
- Consequences of breaching the policy
- What support services are available for both the target and the bully
- Management commitment
- Continuous reviews and monitoring of the policy

Figure 1: Checklist for effective 'dignity at work' policies

would have been mortified if I had been described as a bully.

In the 2005 National Workplace Bullying Survey², management style was a major factor preventing organisations dealing with workplace bullying effectively, along with reluctance to confront the issue. I was once asked by a HR manager not to use the term 'bullying' as it had too many connotations and she felt that she would be held accountable for any incidents. She preferred me to use the term 'harassment' as it was less negative.

Other issues highlighted were:

- more than half the respondents had said they had been bullied at work
- more than a third said the bullying had lasted longer than 12 months
- more than 70 per cent were aware that bullying existed in their organisation
- 41 per cent did not have specific policies in place regarding workplace bullying.

The survey shows that more than 70 per cent of respondents said their experience of bullying lasted more than six months, with more than 50 per cent saying it lasted more than a year.

The same snapshot provides insight into the effects on the organisation; half of all respondents said they had taken time off work. The aim of many occupational health and HR departments is to reduce sickness absence. This often means getting people back to work. This opens up the issue of presenteeism, where people are in work but their performance is reduced. More than 60 per cent of the respondents said that their work had been affected.

This is one area in which the organisation becomes a victim. In a time where organisations are concentrating on cost reduction as a means of providing a competitive advantage, the costs of bullying are often hidden. Organisations can identify these costs by looking at their sickness absence records. Research³ estimates that between a third and half of all workplace stress could be a result of workplace bullying. Maybe organisations should also investigate the levels of staff turnover, the level of morale and even loss of business?

I do not believe that all responsibility for tackling bullying rests with the organisation. I do think that the organisation has a duty of care to its workforce to provide a safe working environment. While the

At the very outset help the target:

- Gain clarity of the situation – understand the target's concerns and desired outcomes
- Identify the pros and cons of both process options
- Identify whether the target wants to use the formal or informal process
- With the offer of immediate support (eg counselling)
- Understand consequences of false claims

Informal process	Stage 1	Either: allow the target to have a discussion with the bully on their own; or facilitate a discussion between the bully and the target
	Stage 2a	If the outcome is successful: identify any support required by the target and the bully follow up at regular intervals
	Stage 2b	If the outcome is unsuccessful be prepared to move on to the formal procedure
Formal process	Stage 1	Identify terms of reference for the investigation – identify possible outcomes and timescales
	Stage 2	Identify a suitable independent individual (or group) to carry out the investigation
	Stage 3	Advise all parties as to what will happen during and after the investigation
	Stage 4	Establish the facts and circumstances of the situation
	Stage 5	Understand the implications of the findings of the report and prepare recommendations
	Stage 6	Publish the findings and recommendations of the report
	Stage 7	Follow up recommendations with both parties Review the investigative process for 'lessons learned'

Figure 2: Implementing a bullying investigation



organisation can never eradicate bullying, it does need to show that it takes the issue seriously. One way of doing this is by using a preventative policy such as 'dignity at work' (figure 1). The policy should be constantly reviewed, disseminated throughout the organisation, and monitored at all levels. Without commitment from the directors down, the policy will be almost worthless. This is an area where directors need to lead by example; this will happen if they fully appreciate what bullying is costing their business.

All claims of bullying should be independently investigated in a timely manner to ensure that the procedure has credibility (figure 2). If the process is not seen to be fair, people will react in a number of ways. In the National Workplace Bullying Survey² 32 per cent of respondents said they had made an official complaint. Of those that did tackle the issue only five per cent said the situation was resolved; 25 per cent said the situation was made worse. More than half the respondents said they had looked for another job; 22 per cent sought legal advice.

Training and awareness should be provided at all levels and clear guidance is required. However, there is a holistic aspect to all this. Bullying does not occur in isolation. The whole work-life balance should be addressed along with all the other identified causes of bullying; this is where the counsellor could be of value to the organisation.

Consideration could be made for using specialist 'bully champions' who would be responsible not only for the investigation but also for supporting both targets and bullies.

Counsellors can use many of their skills by:

- *Working with the targets*, helping them recover confidence and provide them with the skills to help them regain control of their work and home lives; in some instances helping them identify what they may have contributed to the bullying and thereby protect them in the future.

- *Working with the bully*, helping them to understand and evaluate the impact of their behaviour; assisting them in managing their own issues such as

stress or anger management, and where necessary, addressing the fundamental needs of attention and adulation.

- *Working with the target and the bully together*. Assuming the bully is not a sociopath, and the target is willing, then an informal 'mediated' discussion may benefit both parties. This can be very successful and therapeutic for the target and the bully but it must be used with care.

- *Working with the organisation*. Claringbull⁴ identified that counsellors should acknowledge the needs of the employer as equal to those of the employee. By viewing the organisation in a holistic way and treating it as an individual, counselling skills can effectively assist with any cultural or management style issues surrounding bullying. This allows the counsellor to take proactive strategic positions (for example, defining dignity at work policies, addressing cultural and ethical positions, managing independent investigative processes), alongside the traditional tactical initiatives such as stress and sickness absence management.

I would like to offer one final consideration for counsellors to think about. From discussions with targets and support groups across the world, it is clear that there is a demand for counsellors who understand the workplace. Research indicates that the average targets are middle managers who have been bullied by their boss; they want to talk to someone who understands the politics and pressures involved. It is interesting that this demand is also made by employers. Claringbull⁴ identified that EAP providers felt that a greater understanding of the workplace was required by counsellors.

Counsellors have unique skills that can be offered to organisations and these may help to reduce bullying in the workplace. Helping people to feel safer at work will lead to a better work-life balance, which has a beneficial impact on the performance of the organisation. A true win-win situation. ■

References

- 1 Namie G, Namie R. The bully at work. Naperville USA: Sourcebooks Inc; 2003.
- 2 Personnel Today and The Andrea Adams Trust. 2005 survey of HR professionals. www.digitalopinion.co.uk/?SERVICES-BULLYING
- 3 Hoel H, Cooper C. Destructive conflict and bullying at work. British Occupational Health Research Foundation. 2000 www.le.ac.uk/unions/aut/umist1.pdf
- 4 Claringbull N. Specialist practitioners – the next wave in workplace counselling? *Counselling at Work*. Spring 2004:5-7.

Further information

Just Fight On! www.jfo.org.uk
 Bully On Line www.bullyonline.org
 Andrea Adams Trust www.andreadamstrust.org