Dealing With Workplace Intimidation? Here's How to Take Back Control of Your Work Relationships



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Workplace intimidation is alive and well. Whether working remotely or on-site, employees continue to experience high levels of intimidation, often resulting in an environment made up of toxic behavior or bullying.

The Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI) estimated that more than 48.6 million American employees experience some form of bullying at work. Additionally, the WBI survey found that around 30% of working adults have ongoing direct experience with bullying in the workplace, an increase of 57% between

2017 and 2021.

While some business leaders might feel that being more assertive – or oftentimes, intimidating – will bring out a more submissive attitude in their employees, it often results in a working environment that is toxic for everyone and can lead to greater employee turnaround or lower productivity.

Related: **How to Deal With a Workplace Bully**

Bullying vs. intimidation

Although the two terms might be closely related, for employees it's important to differentiate between both and know how to act upon them when they are confronted with this sort of behavior.

Bullying is often considered an act of domination. This is usually through using threatening gestures, whether it's verbal, non-verbal, physical or even physiological.

On the other hand, intimidation is defined as a deliberate act of frightening a person into doing something. This could be an employer threatening one of their employees with their job or withholding their wages if they are unable to finish a certain task or project, or do not agree with what they are being told to do.

The lines are often blurred when it comes to differentiating between being bullied or intimidated. Nonetheless, in the modern workplace, professionals consider intimidation as a form of bullying, which can harm their performance and their relationship with their peers.

Creating room for improvement

Taking control of bad or negative workplace behavior is never an easy challenge, and confronting a person on their actions

can often result in even more uncomfortable situations for employees, managers and employers.

To put things into perspective, nearly 60% of American employers tend to react negatively when they find out that bullying is being reported in the workplace. The result is that perpetrators often don’t see the consequences of their actions, which in turn creates a sense of fear among those in the workplace.

However, this creates a lot of room for improvement, and for employees that encounter bullying or intimidation regularly, there are ways they can reclaim their workplace relationships and take more action to hold their perpetrators accountable – even if it might be their boss.

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Acknowledge the reality of the situation

Take note of when intimidation occurs and realize that it might not be just a person’s personality or a clash of opinions. This is important both for employees that experience it or perhaps managers witnessing this behavior among team members.

Make clear distinctions on whether or not a person is deliberately going out of their way to make other colleagues feel scared, threatened or uncomfortable. An action that is repeated multiple times shouldn’t be considered a coincidence, but can rather be seen as a choice to act in a certain way.

Identify when or where it takes place

Intimidation can be a physical threat or even something that might occur in an email or other forms of communication. If you become aware of when and where this might have taken place, you can start to take more note thereof.

Make sure to keep a record of this, either on some notes on your phone or on a separate email account that is not linked to your work. Include as much information as possible, who was involved, what was being said and whether or not the issue has been resolved.

Have an open dialogue

Often employees tend to feel intimidated by things they don’t know, whether it’s having to deal with group projects, new programs or even a new colleague. Simply raising specific points with a person in an open dialogue can help resolve a lot of issues.

If you can understand a person’s point of view and what they expect from you – in this case, either a manager or employer – you will get a better idea of where you need to make possible improvements or adjust your understanding going forward.

Don’t directly accuse any person of being intimidating or call them out on their behavior. Rather see whether or not it’s possible to resolve the underlying conflict.

Take action when needed

Employees and teams need to know when to take action and what their options might be. Employees need to assess their options, whether it’s talking to a colleague, their manager or even HR. The same goes for those in upper management roles.

Additionally, if an employee is being intimidated or bullied by a fellow peer or their manager, approach them in private and see whether or not you can assist them. Always use the available channels you have available to resolve any confrontation before it transcends into bigger problems.

Evaluate workplace policies

Most organizations will have policies in place that aim to prohibit the act of bullying in the workplace. Make sure that as an employee, you know what the workplace policies are in terms of this, and when it’s possible to identify if someone has stepped out of line.

If there are no workplace policies, see whether or not you can bring this up with management or employers. There should be clear guidelines on how bullying or intimidation should be handled within the office.

Find your voice

There’s no harm in standing up to someone if you feel that they have crossed a certain boundary. Standing up for yourself isn’t easy, and it’s even harder to do so for other people, especially in the workplace.

Not everyone can muster up the confidence to speak out when it’s needed. In these cases, keep a record of these particular instances, or perhaps approach a person to see whether or not there might be some unresolved problems that can be sorted out.

To conclude

Intimidation in the workplace only creates a toxic work environment for every employee. Having the courage to stand up to someone is not always an option for everyone, so it’s

important to consider other possibilities that can help them find a viable solution to resolve workplace bullying.

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