

26 March 2003

Ms Evelyn Field
Vic

My name is Evelyn Field, I would like to make a submission to the public inquiry into a national workers compensation and occupational health and safety framework.

I am taking the liberty of sending you a brief profile about myself and I will send you an article I have written to demonstrate the extent of the problem.

However, basically I am a psychologist in private practice, and see quite a few victims of workplace bullying. I am running what I believe is the first Australian group for the victims of workplace bullying once a month. I am also a progressional speaker and speak to school and organisations about dealing with bullying. My book " Bully busting" (Finch 1999) is now a best seller and I am currently writing a book for the targets of workplace bullying.

Thus I am very passionate about the Federal Government developing guidelines to reduce bullying at work. I would also like to suggest that you invite submissions from Paul McCarthy and Michael Sheehan at Griffiths University who have done major research in his area.

I would like to ask for a number of forms in order that some of my clients can make submissions.

My address is Evelyn Field Rear 75 Barkly Ave Armadale, Victoria 3145.

Yours

Evelyn Field MAPS

PERSONAL PROFILE

Evelyn M. Field has been a psychologist and speaker for over 29 years. Originally she worked in a large institution and since 1990 she has worked full-time in private practice, assisting adults, adolescents and children. She has a special interest in helping people deal with their emotions, improve their social relationships, students and adults who are bullied, harassed and victims of trauma, abuse and crime.

Arising out of her personal experience and her professional work with clients, she has developed a simple six-step model, which helps people create their own social survival skills. This model has been presented to adolescents, parents, teachers, business organisations and professional psychology conferences. Evelyn has presented in New Zealand, Spain, USA and Israel.

In addition to her private practice Evelyn is an Accredited Speaking Member of National Speakers Association of Australia. She has appeared on the "Today show", " Good Morning Australia", "A Current Affair", the "Seven thirty Report" and the " Today Tonight Show". Evelyn is one of a number of media spokespersons for the Australian Psychological Society and is quoted regularly in the media. She was an ambassador for National Friendship Day run by Disney Corporation 1998 and 1999.

Evelyn's story about the evolution of her model, the Secrets of Relating " I do what I am", was published in "There's More to Life than Sex or Money", (Penguin 1997) Co-authored by Sue Calwell and Daniel Johnson. Her first book, a self-help book for parents, children and educators, called " Bully Busting" was released in May 1999 by Rex Finch. It is a **best seller**. It is based on the six social survival skills she has developed. Based on community interest she is now writing a book on dealing with workplace bullying.

She is actively involved with the Victorian Branch of the Division of Independent Private Practitioners of the Australian Psychological Society. She represented the society to the Inquiry held by the Human Rights Commission into the " Rights of the Mentally Ill". She was on the board of VOCAL for 5 years, [Victims of Crime Assistance League, in Victoria] and spent 20 years as a Board Member of the Mental Health Foundation of Victoria and 11 years as Honorary Secretary of the Australian Association for Mental Health.

WORKPLACE BULLYING.

In 2000, Cerner was listed in Fortune magazine's 100 best companies to work for in America.

On the 6th April 2001 shares in the company Cerner Corporation headquartered in Kansas City nosedived after the Neal L Patterson, head of the company, sent an angry bullying e-mail to 400 managers, which was then posted on a Yahoo financial message board: Patterson, who is Chairman of the Board, Chief Executive Officer and co-founder of Cerner Corporation which claims to be the world's leading clinical healthcare information technology company, explained away his outburst by saying he'd been brought up on a farm. However, his harangue wiped off 22% of the share value of the company amid fears by investors that employee morale would plummet.

While most of us were growing up, bullying was regarded as just a part of life. Even the most responsible parents accepted bullying as a school hazard. Today, most parents won't accept it in any form. Some even take legal action. More recently employees, academics and trade union officials are beginning to identify bullying in the workplace, to research and evaluate its impact. Like all forms of abuse and violence, bullying thrives on secrecy. Consequently, when a worker becomes sick and tired of constant abuse, seeing their friends and colleagues forced to leave because of a serial bully, they find the courage to take union and legal action.

High profile companies will find that the Internet, shareholders meetings, questions raised in parliament and the media, are great forums for displaying the toxic tactics of organisations who condone bullying behaviours, protect the bully and discriminate against the target and whistleblowers. Lawyers are on standby – waiting for those with courage to approach them, and for the changes in the law next year in Victoria and the other states which will follow suit. Basically, bullying involves an abuse of power. It can be defined as ‘all those repeated actions and practices that are directed to one or more workers, which are unwanted by the victim, which may be done deliberately or unconsciously, but cause humiliation, offence and distress, and this may interfere with job performance, and/or cause an unpleasant working environment. (Einarsen 1998)

There are many types of bullying behaviours. They range from social bantering to teasing, verbal abuse, blame, humiliation, personal and professional denigration, overt threats, harassment (eg racial, sexual) manipulation of job specifications, aggressive e-mails or notes, professional exclusion, sabotage of career and financial status, whistleblower attack, blackmail, overt aggression /violence, criminal assault and murder.

Research reveals that 1 in 6 students are bullied every week in an Australian school. Nothing much seems to change when they grow up and join the workforce, apart from the damage being far greater. The figures of bullying in the workplace vary from 4-5% in Norway, lasting an average time of 18 months, to 10-20% in the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Figures of up to 50% have been mentioned in the literature. In the Unison study, (U.K. 1998) two thirds of workers had witnessed or experienced bullying. One in thirty workers is a serial bully. **Thus, we could make a guesstimate from the current research that an average of 15% people are being regularly bullied in the workplace at any time.** Ultimately, anyone can be a victim or bully. Bullying is caused by many different interacting factors including being in the wrong place at the wrong time. These include: -

- The fact that the bully believes that they can get away with it, and generally they can.
- The organisational system either promotes equality and a 'fair go for all', or it condones the abuse of power. It is either too scared to confront and resolve conflicts or it basically believes that bullying is effective.
- The target may be a quiet achiever, who may not have developed socially assertive skills to confront the bully.
- The loud mouthed, insecure, generally less competent bully, who has poor leadership skills, and lacks any desire to inspire employees and believes in using a verbal horsewhip to get a job done.
- The sociopathic bully who enjoys seeing people suffer.

Damage can be looked at from the point of view of the victim, whose life may be in tatters, the organisation or the economy. Many companies are content with mediocre results, rather than achieving the best possible. They sacrifice long term success in favour of the short-term profit achieved by bullying.

The consequences of bullying mean that if 10% of an organisation are bullied, 25% of targets will leave, and 20% of witnesses will leave. Of those who leave, 35% do so very quietly, without any fuss or feedback. A parliamentary debate in the United Kingdom estimated that 40 million working days are lost each year because of bullying at work, more than 160 times the number of days lost through strikes.

Most organisations do not realise the damage and costs associated with bullying. These include hidden and obvious costs. Overt damage includes workcare costs, because most

victims experience physical and psychological health difficulties, and 76% of victims experience a post traumatic stress disorder, legal costs, time lost in preparing or attending court cases and replacement of staff. Covert costs include costs of internal complaints, mediation, adverse publicity, brain drain, lower morale amongst staff, absenteeism, and reduction in efficiency, productivity and profitability, loss of accumulated wisdom and experience, retaliation and the poor public image which attracts less capable workers.

According to the Workplace Bullying Project Team, Griffith's University, (2001) a recent impact and cost assessment calculated that workplace bullying costs Australian employers between \$6 and 13 billion dollars every year, when hidden and lost opportunity costs are considered, using a very conservative prevalence estimate of the extent of the bullying (3.5% rate based on Leyman 1997) and up to \$17 and 36 billion dollars per year when a somewhat higher estimate of 15% prevalence (mid range between estimate of a number of a very large surveys) is applied. The number of victims can be assessed at 350,000 based on the first estimate and 1.5 million workers based on the second calculation.

According to Michael Sheehan et al (2001) workplace bullying could cost a small organisation employing less than 20 people, which is about half Australian employers, between \$ 17,000 and \$ 24,000 a year. A larger corporation, with about 1000 employees, could expect to incur direct, hidden and lost opportunity costs of between \$ 0.6 and \$3.6 million every year because of workplace bullying. In comparison the costs of intervention programs and prevention strategies are marginal. These cost estimates are limited to the business sector, they do not include costs to family and personal life, the impact on the wider community such as the impact on products, poor decision-making and customer services or corrupt practices.

Action needs to take place on a number of levels within an organisation. The first level is to develop a Code of Conduct, which includes appropriate processes and procedures to identify bullying, to prevent it from happening and training resources to reduce it. All staff requires a preventative and educational program in order that can recognise what is happening and know where to get help. Employees require appropriate assistance to deal with a crisis. This will need to come from a variety of people within and external to the organisation.

Intervention procedures need to be explicit and followed equitably. Investigations, mediation and dispute resolution or conciliation needs to be conducted by trained professionals, with

respect to the Laws of Natural Justice. Sanctions need to be applied to employees who lack empathy, insight, appropriate relating skills and an inability to listen to clear feedback and change inappropriate behaviours. In addition, because bullying can be so traumatic, skilled therapy needs to be available to heal victims. If nothing is working then they need to have support to exit an intolerable situation without being financially disadvantaged. The bully too needs help in learning more appropriate ways of getting the job done without resorting to mental torture. This means learning empathy, anger management, leadership skills and communication skills.

According to the Harvard Business Review (1998-1999) the employee affects the organisational climate. In fact, it can be regarded as a predictor of the company's success. Happy workers create a productive climate and as a consequence, a more profitable company. Unhappy workers affect the climate and the company's success decreases. A few years ago schools were negligent in their approach to dealing with bullying. The same applies to industry. Ultimately good business practice means looking after employees in order that they can achieve the organisation's aims and objectives as an organisation and that they feel a valued integral part of the process. Ethically, legally and financially, it is up to every organisation to take responsibility for creating a safe and productive working environment.

Evelyn M. Field is a counselling psychologist and an Accredited Speaking Member of National Speakers Association of Australia. She is the author of "Bully Busting" (Finch 1999) and is currently completing her second book to assist targets, employers and bullies to deal with workplace bullying. She would love to present to your organisation.

She can be contacted at 03 9509 1414 or efield@netspace.net.au