



Workplace bullies Apply zero tolerance

Nothing good comes from bullying at work. Organisations can experience a breakdown in teamwork ▪ employees suffering stress and other mental or physical health effects ▪ reduced productivity ▪ high staff turnover ▪ resignations ▪ replacement costs ▪ absenteeism ▪ suppression of participation and new ideas ▪ negative culture ▪ reputational harm ▪ litigation costs. And bullying is on the rise. **...To Page 2**



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Workplace bullies

Apply zero tolerance

Bullying is a harmful social conduct which manifests in behaviours such as unwarranted or invalid criticism ▪ being treated differently from the group ▪ harassment ▪ verbal abuse ▪ being shouted at or humiliated ▪ excessive monitoring or micromanaging ▪ unrealistic deadlines ▪ target of practical jokes ▪ blame without justification ▪ exclusion or social isolation ▪ physical intimidation ▪ purposefully withholding vital information ▪ setting impossible goals ▪ tampering with personal belongings ▪ public ridicule. Employees may bully for various reasons, ranging from the need for power and an obsession to control the environment, to being threatened by another's competency, popularity, or experience. (Gobind, 2015)

"People act out when their ego is threatened."

Amy Gallo

Bullying can appear in the workplace as subtle hostility in the form of 'microaggressions'. The term 'racial microaggressions' was coined by American psychologist Chester Pierce in the 1970s and subsequently Mary Rowe widened the scope to include similar aggressions towards women. Microaggressions in the gender context are behaviours by men which undermine women. (Jain, 2017) Research shows that casual sexism and microaggressions have as strong an effect on organisation culture and mental health as more overt forms of harassment. It is easy to dismiss them, and easy to accuse someone who acts offended as being too "sensitive". These microaggressions share a common thread of being everyday verbal, nonverbal, and

environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their gender, race or membership of another marginalised group. (Montana, 2017)

Weiss (2015) and Montana (2017) provide the following scenarios as examples of microaggressions. Do any sound familiar?

- "What are you ladies gossiping about?" – said to two or more women having a conversation.
- "You're taking notes, right?" – a question by a man to the only woman in a meeting.
- "Hi, I'm looking for the manager." – addressed to a female manager.
- "You're being dramatic. You're overreacting." – a manipulative way to undermine a woman's view.
- When women behave assertively, particularly in the workplace, they are called shrill, aggressive, or pushy, while men who behave assertively are viewed as competent leaders.
- Frequent interruptions of women when they speak.
- 'Mansplaining' or explaining something to a woman that she already knows. Mansplaining reminds women that their knowledge and expertise is considered less valuable than men's.
- Gender stereotypes have become normal and supposedly funny topics of conversation. People laugh about how women nag their partners or are bad drivers as if it's all in good fun, when really, it perpetuates beliefs used as evidence for women inferiority.

Cyberbullying is bullying behaviour in the form of intimidation, threats, humiliation, and harassment that takes place using computers, cell phones, or other electronic devices. (Wright, 2016). It is possibly the most recent form of bullying to appear in the workplace. With the growth of working from home cyberbullying can take the problem directly into what should be every person's sanctuary of peace and security – their homes.

Employers should adopt a comprehensive programme of action to eradicate the scourge of



workplace bullying from the workplace. In South Africa, August is Women's Month. Research shows that women are affected more by workplace bullying than men. There is no better time than now to act against those who see the workplace as an environment where they can conduct their bullying ways. Here is a list of measures employers can implement:

- A bullying policy.
- Encourage reporting.
- Have a quick response process.
- Investigate every complaint.
- Protect victims.
- Provide specialist counselling support.
- IT Policies and disciplinary codes categorise bullying as serious misconduct.
- Take disciplinary action and dismiss proven bullies.
- Behaviour modelling by the organisation's leadership.
- Diversity training during induction and through the employment lifecycle.
- Offering marginalised groups access to mentoring and coaching to deal with microaggressions.
- Use of pulse surveys and other information gathering techniques to continuously listen to employees' experience of work.
- Analysis of reasons for avoidable staff turnover.

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Politicking

No place in employment relations

What happens when a political party gets involved in the workplace and instigates unprotected strikes and other disruptive employee behaviour? In interdicting an unprotected strike, the Labour Court sent a clear message that political parties must not make the workplace the battlefield of their political ambitions.

The employer in this case study is a furniture manufacturer based in Selby, Johannesburg. The employer had no option but to apply for an interdict in the Labour Court when its employees engaged in an unprotected strike and engaged in other acts of misconduct.

The employer has a collective bargaining relationship with National Union of Furniture & Allied Workers of South Africa (NUFAWSA), a long-established trade union, which was the first respondent in the employer's application to the Labour Court. However, in Court it quickly emerged that the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) were driving the strike.

Two EFF officials stood up before the Labour Court judge and announced that no matter what the Labour Court may order, the strike action would continue until the employer acceded to all the employees' demands. The employees with the EFF's backing made no attempt to comply with the dispute resolution procedures of the Labour Relations Act.

The judge advised the officials that a failure to comply with an order of the Labour Court would constitute contempt of court and could lead to severe penalties. The judge urged the strikers and their backers to seek proper legal advice. The Labour Court issued an interim order, which declared the strike unprotected, ordered the strikers to refrain from interfering with the employer's business operations, and ordered costs against the respondents.

On the return date, around one month later, the litigants appeared before the same judge. The



employer asked the judge to confirm the interim order in its entirety.

The court proceedings shed light on the EFF's *modus operandi* in infiltrating the sphere of employment relations. The events which ultimately ended up in the Labour Court unfolded as follows:

1. The EFF arrived unannounced at the employer's premises and met with employees during a lunch break.
2. A day later the EFF wrote to the employer with a list of grievances and demands and said it would present a memorandum to the employer four days later.
3. The employer's attempts to engage directly with employees and encouragement to follow prescribed procedures were ignored.
4. On day 4 the EFF arrived at the employer and met with employees. The meeting extended, without permission, a 10-minute tea break to 2.5 hours.
5. Immediately after the extended meeting, the EFF served on the employer a pre-prepared 9-page memorandum, of inflammatory rhetoric, which accused the employer of exploiting and victimising the employees, and subjecting the employees to 'appalling and unethical' working conditions. The EFF declared its intention to take up the plight of the employees. The EFF gave the employer seven days to comply with its demands or face an intensification of its action.
6. The employer's attorneys responded to the EFF stating that the party had no legal status to represent the employees, that there was a recognised union, and a grievance procedure available to any dissatisfied employee.
7. The EFF sent a letter dismissing with contempt the attorneys' letter.
8. Ten days after the first appearance of the EFF employees started a go-slow at the employer's factory.
9. Eight days after its letter dismissing the employer's attorneys the EFF told the employer they would be intensifying their programme.
10. The employer asked the recognised union to intercede with employees. The union official was booed out of a general meeting with employees and was replaced on the podium by EFF officials.

11. The EFF's chief whip ignored the employer's request that he intervene.
12. A month and two days after the EFF's first appearance on the scene, the employer's factory workers downed tools and started their unprotected strike.
13. Striking employees ignored the interim interdict and continued with the unprotected strike. Two and a half months after the strike started, it was ongoing when the employer approached the Labour Court to have the interim order made final.

"The practicing of any form of politics, be it under the guise of protecting employee rights or other socio-economic aspirations, in the workplace, is an untenable proposition."

Labour Court

The Labour Court concluded that the involvement of a political party, in this case the EFF, in instigating and driving unprotected strike action by employees was inappropriate. A political party has no *locus standi* in the workplace and should stay out of employment relations, especially where the workplace has a recognised union.

The court found that the conduct of the EFF was unacceptable and underlined its finding with the imposition of a costs order against the EFF.

Case: Calgan Lounge (Pty) Ltd v National Union of Furniture and Allied Workers Union of South Africa (NUFAWSA) and Others (J2648/18) [2018] ZALCJHB 334; (2019) 40 ILJ 342 (LC); [2019] 4 BLLR 393 (LC) (9 October 2018)

How to?

Conquer email overload

You have implemented a time management system which is built on daily task planning and categorisation of your tasks in the importance/urgency matrix. You are committed to spending more than 80% of your time in the 'important tasks' quadrant. Yet your best efforts are being derailed by a daily influx of emails



which regularly take your focus in directions not on your plan.

This note offers practical steps under five headings to conquer the prevalent challenge of email overload. As an addition to your time management system, these steps will contribute to the outcomes of greater productivity, job success and less stress.

1. Check your email in batches

Research shows that setting aside specific chunks of time two or three times a day is more effective and less stressful than near-constant monitoring of email inboxes and nibbling away at responding to emails throughout the day. (Rampton, 2019).

Rampton (2019) advises that you resist the urge to reach for your phone as soon as the alarm goes off and start going through your emails. Other don't dos are checking your email messages as soon as you receive a notification -- even if it's late at night or when you're on vacation. To do so lets others know that you're at their beck and call. It also keeps you thinking about the constant flow of emails throughout the day and night. Before you know it, your important tasks that you have planned to tackle slip down your priority list, and you risk being perpetually behind in your work OKRs.

2. Do not CC everyone or reply to all

The "CC" and "reply to all" options in email software are almost always unnecessary multipliers of email traffic. Pham (2012) colourfully describes overuse of the CC button as the new digital clutter and replying to all as "productivity kryptonite".

Pham says that when it comes to copying emails, adding more than one CC to an email is unacceptable. Employees' inboxes quickly overfill with irrelevant information and it takes up unnecessary mental bandwidth of the recipients to determine what is important.

When you're copied onto an email chain, rather than spend time reading long threads to reconstruct the narrative simply ask for clarification: "Sorry, long email sent, can you please clarify why I'm added now and how I can help?" (Romney et al., 2020)

Pham advocates being explicit when you send an email to multiple recipients by adding a line to your email, "Please do not use reply-to-all -- only reply directly to me". Drawing attention to how you would like to be treated will inculcate better emailing habits in those you regularly correspond with.

3. Write a good subject line

The recipient should know from reading just the subject line what the email is about. It should be specific and keyword rich. (Pham, 2012) Consider framing your email headlines using the 4 Us applied by copywriters. The idea is to at the same time grab attention and be concise:

The four u's:

- Your headline should be unique.
- Your headline should be ultra-specific.
- Your headline should convey a sense of urgency.
- Your headline should be useful.

If you are sending an email to multiple recipients, you can amplify the guidance to readers in the email introduction below the heading. Clearly state the title and roles of people on the email to ensure that the recipients do not have to decode why they and others are being included on the email e.g. I've copied Peter, Human Capital Consultant, so that if necessary, he can alert us to any regulatory hurdles to changing the shift rosters.

4. Convey your message with clarity

"I apologise for such a long letter - I didn't have time to write a short one."

Mark Twain

In the world of work, many people appear not to have the time to write short emails. Wading through lengthy, vague, ambiguous poorly structured emails is a time killer. However, email inboxes can be tamed.



During the escalation of the Coronavirus crisis in New York City earlier this year there was a simultaneous explosion of critical email in the healthcare sector that at first exceeded their capacity to keep up. There was a risk that important information would get lost, stalled, or fail to reach the right people, and that the sheer volume and density of expanding threads would distract people from their essential work. (Romney et al., 2020)

To resolve the information overload, the medical fraternity applied the effective communication principles central to Crisis Response Management (CRM). Physicians were already familiar with CRM which they routinely practice in the ER.

To keep emails focussed on the essential message and the outcomes required, one can usefully apply to emails the SBAR (Situation, Background, Assessment & Recommendation) ER communication technique. (Romney et al., 2020) SBAR is an easy-to-remember, concrete framework for any conversation, especially critical ones, requiring the recipient's immediate attention and action. Emails applying the SBAR technique follow this layout:

- **S = Situation** (a concise problem statement)
- **B = Background** (pertinent and brief information related to the situation)
- **A = Assessment** (analysis and considerations of options — what you found/think)
- **R = Recommendation** (action requested/recommended — what you want) (IHI, 2020)

In just three or four sentences you can alert the recipient to what situation needs addressing, provide relevant information, perspectives on dealing with the situation, and a request for action.

In addition to the SBAR format you can apply the following rules to enhance email clarity: (1) keep emails short. (2) label things e.g. "Action required" or "No action — FYI only". (Gallo, 2012) Pham (2012) recommends no more than 6 lines for every email. This forces everyone to write succinct emails that are straight forward, easy to read and reply to.

5. Stem the email flow

Work towards reducing the number of emails that land in your inbox. Four steps you can take are:

- Ask colleagues and subordinates to stop copying you on all emails.
- Unsubscribe from emailed newsletters that are not relevant and useful.
- Use phone calls / meetings as alternative communication methods when dealing with complex problems which will inevitably trigger many back and forth emails.
- Model the kind of email etiquette you expect others to apply. For example, resist the urge to use the copy button to keep all and sundry 'in the loop'. You cannot ask others to change their practices if you do not change yours.

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Work From Home Policy

Are you considering a more permanent work from home arrangement for your staff?

Working from home does not exempt the employer from meeting the need to provide a safe and healthy work environment for employees.

Tennant Human Capital Solutions can assist you with preparing a **Work from Home Policy** that clearly defines the responsibilities of the employer and the expectations of employees working from home.

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