HOW TO
TRANSFORM
WORKPLACE
BULLIES
INTO ALLIES

JACQUELINE A. GILBERT

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Disclaimer

All scenario vignettes, companies, places, projects, people, and employee names
within this manuscript are fictitious. Any resemblance to existing entities
or people is coincidental.

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To Jack Ivancevich, Bette Stead, Norma Carr-Ruffino,
Joe White, and Gary Namie, who taught me to persevere,
make a difference, and move mountains.

And to my mother, Johanna Gilbert, who made everything possible.

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Foreword

The book in your hands is bursting with relevant information, thanks to Jacqueline Gilbert's commitment to eradicate bullying in all workplaces. Her voice is effusive. She starts the reader on a journey toward mastery. And as a veteran educator, she knows that the book is only the beginning. There are recommendations aplenty for managers and leaders craving to learn beyond the minimum. Of course, learning about bullying is not for self-interest alone. Do it for the sake of your organization's sustainability.

Contemporary workers, led by workers raised on anti-bullying programs in primary and secondary school, are the least tolerant of all generations toward abusive bullying misconduct. Managers and leaders who remain ignorant about, or indifferent to, bullying risk personal and organizational failure. Work doesn't get done without people. It is futile to manage without understanding the zero-tolerance expectations of the newest workers. Being aware of bullying and its deleterious effects on employee health and productivity is not optional; it is mandatory.

I cannot overstate the comprehensiveness of Gilbert's coverage of the bullying phenomenon in this book. She leads readers through profiles of bullies—the perpetrators—and targeted individuals, the workplace culture that enables bullying, bystanders, top management support for eradication, and aspirational features of an ideal "people-centered" culture. Breadth is coupled with a realistic touch certain to appeal to modern readers accustomed primarily to truncated social media communication and visually appealing stimuli. She does not preach or over-teach.

A variety of features attracts readers with graphical depictions of several phenomena, tables and charts comparing aspects of bullying and incivility, moral development, destructiveness of shame, family tree charting (a guided tour of your family of origin and socialization patterns, characteristics of a community-centered culture, bystander continuum, mature assertiveness, how to think before posting on the web, and a four-dimensional view of diversity. The pages employ vivid visual messaging techniques to optimize absorption of the information.

The book, at first glance, looks like a quick read. After all, Gilbert identifies all the resources for readers. She found the research. But don't be fooled by the ease of access to information. Take the deep dive into each bullying sub-topic masterfully designed for you in the study and rehearsal exercises. Only then will readers glean the best outcomes from the book. Slow down. Incorporate the lessons taught to the practitioner-readers eager to stop bullying. There's more inside than is first apparent.

To me, the challenges that immerse readers in the ideas under discussion in each chapter are key deliverables. Frequent self-assessments force readers to confront personal beliefs that may lead to misperceptions and misunderstandings at work. Readers have the chance to gauge the role of personal envy, toxicity of your workplace culture, bystander status, problem-solving orientation, flawed unilateral communication styles, cyberbullying experiences, organizational inclusivity, and styles of conflict resolution.

Our Workplace Bullying Institute education is "evidence-based." I know of no other non-academic book written about the prevention and correction of workplace bullying that cites research as meticulously as does Gilbert's. She makes references (sneakily) painless for her lay audience of managers and leaders in the field not familiar with academic studies. It is an amazing accomplishment. Look for the Web Quest sections. They are great reads.

As with all self-assessments, descriptive scenarios among workplace actors, suggestions to read materials at their source, and tutorials that characterize workplace bullying in a new light, the author brings readers back to the necessity of applying that new-found knowledge to realistic situations. It all comes down to the question of "What Would You Do?" in each chapter. Gilbert asks us how we would react when faced with opportunities to bully, witness, or get involved. Experiencing the phenomenon from the inside fosters empathy for targeted coworkers and colleagues.

The author also makes several points not found in other books on the topic. Among the bully types are stalkers—the creepy ones who invade a person's life at work and off-site. They are responsible for genuine paranoia

by targets. Stalking or "gang stalking" appears to be on the rise. Gilbert wisely acknowledges its emergent presence.

In Chapter 3 the author posits a significant role for past family dysfunction. It may help explain being a bullied target in adulthood. Thankfully breaking free from our destructive histories is encouraged.

Gilbert tackles the topics of multiculturalism and diversity in organizations. Diversity, as a practicable extension of the hard-won civil rights laws and inculcation of the movement from decades past, was thought to be widely accepted. But I was an academic. Diversity was once non-contentious on campuses.

However, the election of America's first black president obviously generated fear and resentment by whites who felt threatened. The election of 2016 revealed those hidden fears. It was in the college town of Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017 that marching white supremacists dared us to wage the Civil War again.

I thank Gilbert for Chapter 8 to remind us that work free from discrimination is not yet our reality. We know that Hispanics and African Americans suffer bullying at higher rates than whites despite legal "protections." We learn in this chapter about the routinization of negative acts against others, dubbed "cultural stoning"—micro-inequities and microaggressions that recipients easily detect, but witnesses who do not share the others' status normalize and miss. Extrapolating from the dyadic interaction to the dichotomous organizational response—as either reactive/apathetic or proactive/unifying—is brilliant.

Too many employers treat diversity as a legal obligation. Managers nod to the need to comply with laws and policies begrudgingly, undermining organizational commitment to doing the right thing.

We should consider indifference toward diversity and denial of bullying to be two indicators of troubled workplaces. Ignoring the former will eventually land employers in court. The latter will drain valuable resources that sustain the employer—highly skilled employees, a healthy and present work force, and productivity requisite to remain competitive. Stupidity about diversity belies the very public lessons learned by defiant companies that for too long defended harassers and abusers on the payroll. By now, wise employers have shifted gears into proactive mode, pushed by the #MeToo movement.

In an accordion-like demonstration of intellectual range, each chapter flexes from teaching to extended study before collapsing back to the focus on what can be done practically. The outcome is the biggest take-away from

each chapter and the book in total. The book helps answer the "So what?" questioning by those skeptical that bullying matters.

I've read all the books written in recent decades about workplace bullying. *How to Transform Workplace Bullies Into Allies* rises above other titles on several dimensions. It uniquely backs every idea and suggestion with evidence. Its methodology is multi-modal. It not only teaches; it assesses, challenges, and inspires. This single volume delivers the comprehensive toolkit that an internal organizational champion needs to plan, implement, and sustain an anti-bullying initiative. The timing is opportune. After two decades of denial, American organizations are more ready than ever to address their long-ignored bullying problems. This book tells them how.

I'm proud to call Dr. Gilbert a colleague and friend.

—Gary Namie, PhD
Workplace Bullying Institute

INTRODUCTION

A New Organizational Mandate

Have you been targeted by a toxic, nasty, or obsessive person at work? Did their mean-spiritedness catch you off guard and leave you isolated from former on-the-job friends? If companies don't know how to adequately address abusive conduct or how to instigate and maintain civil cultures, they can inadvertently foster additional confusion and dysfunction at work. Disrespectful treatment produces psychological angst, like PTSD, hypervigilance, depression/anxiety, and an overall reduced ability to contribute. It also manifests in physical ailments such as insomnia, irritable bowel syndrome, hypertension, stomachaches, ulcers, and headaches. Running for cover within firms is unfortunately common. When bosses fail to address toxic politics, workers may spend more time sparring with their perceived enemies than they do learning, growing, developing, innovating, and productively engaging with other people. Hurtful cultures (and the bad publicity they generate) may cause benefactors and corporate investors to withdraw their business.

Although numerous books and articles have been written to describe bullying, no comprehensive resource exists that

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- explains the multifaceted nature of abuse,
- provides examples of when and how it occurs, and
- gives learners guided exercises to promote awareness, to cultivate civility, and to improve their emotional intelligence.

One reason that incivility and abusive conduct continue is that people don't recognize it when they see it, and they don't know it when they do it.

How to Transform Workplace Bullies Into Allies supplies readers with a framework to assess their workplaces and/or schools, to learn about the fallout from acts that dishonor their peers, and to develop an action plan derived from resources that promote civil discourse. It includes:

- Inventories and activities to gauge knowledge and skill development in the areas of abusive conduct, bully typologies, target background, mobbing, effective dialogue at work, cyberbullying, diversity/microaggression, interpersonal conflict, and change management.
- Summaries of research that supports a mandate for good behavior and illuminates company deficiencies.
- Rich bits of what civility experts, management researchers, and ethics practitioners say about abusive conduct to help readers learn why it's important for businesses to examine their culture, and the consequences for continuing status quo.
- Case studies, scenarios, and exercises designed to reinforce key concepts and to stimulate critical thinking about workplace misbehavior.
- Examples of firms that proactively modified culture to minimize (and eliminate) toxic practices.
- Concrete steps for changing organizational policies and "the way we do things" to honor and respect people's spirits. Recognizing unconscious norms is a first step to promoting a positive environment.

By navigating web quests, learning modules, and teachable moments, readers will develop a keen awareness of what it takes to be a respectful contributor in any setting. Moreover, they will gain expertise in what has been deemed a critical skill set by many organizations, including the Society for Human Resource Management. *How to Transform Workplace Bullies Into Allies* supplies readers with the tools to

- recognize conditions that contribute to abusive conduct,
- deter schoolyard/workplace bullies by suggesting alternative behavior,

- develop a program for recovery, and
- behave as proactive change agents.

Through reflection and assessment, you will learn what to do when faced with behavioral dilemmas and how to be a first responder when you see an explosive situation. Community-centered companies can diminish peer aggression and promote collegial support. Organizations that hold workers to a higher standard create respectful cultures, competitive advantages, and ideal places to work.

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Acknowledgments

This book represents the culmination of my personal experience and previous work. A sincere thanks to Jeff Cornwall (professor and master blogger) for his encouragement, and continued gratitude to my MTSU Write mentors Dr. Jennifer Kates and Dr. Linda Busby Parker for their patience, guidance, suggestions, and directive critique. A special thank you to my editors—Dr. Bob Giacalone and Dr. Carole Jurkiewicz—for their support and for their insights, to Jennifer Goode Stevens for her superb copyediting, and to Kara Hooper, Kathryn Bowlin, and Micah Loyed for their guidance and custom artwork.

Most of all, I wish to acknowledge the targets of bullying who inspire me to write. The downtrodden have a unique perspective—one that gets shuffled to the bottom of the stack when they are sidelined, discredited, verbally smeared, and questioned as to their very sanity—all the while stoically attempting to do their jobs. Incidents of workplace abuse must be recognized for what they are. They are not joking, entitlement of rank, or put downs in the guise of "just playing around." Respect as mandate (over time) can morph into a larger anti-bullying resistance movement.

I am grateful to my management students for creating awareness. They have educated corporate executives, Oakland High School freshmen, and the YouTube community. All of you teach me something new every day.

To the unsung heroes at RFID journal (and especially editor Mark Roberti) who provide extraordinary, cutting edge material on topics that

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profoundly impact our lives, I am grateful. You do a herculean job at describing nascent technology.

I hope that continued workplace bullying education will make stories of ridicule, contempt, disbelief, and public smear non-existent. To all those who rally in support of this cause (including Drs. Gary and Ruth Namie, co-founders of the Workplace Bullying Institute), and the network of Healthy Workplace Advocates who create momentum to do more, I am indebted.

SECTION I

Overview of Bullying

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Introduction to Bullying—Impact

Recognizing Our Part in Problem Creation

> *Courage is fire, and bullying is smoke.*
> —Benjamin Disraeli

The Problem and Definition

In 2013, two university student teams stood nervously inside a multinational headquarters. Each team was about to present its version of a civility policy before executives in a head-to-head competition. The stakes were high: winners would receive media coverage, prominence, extra credit, and a donation made to their college on behalf of the winning team. When the master of ceremonies introduced them, he said:

> "I'd never even heard of workplace bullying before, I had no idea what it was..."

Many people feel the same way. Even though my students have presented on topics of mobbing, cyberbullying, stalking, hazing, and corporate bullying for school and corporate audiences, the reason for audience

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surprise is always the same: "We didn't realize this was a problem." The elephant in the room of unaddressed abuse can morph into something much worse, and it can permeate company corridors until it creates a toxic culture and an unstated norm of incivility. Employees who appear mean-spirited may be casualties of cultures where ostracism, industry blackballing, and months (if not years) of unemployment occur for people who side with their "marked" coworkers.

A survey of several hundred employees and leaders within 17 industries revealed that targets of incivility quit in approximately 12% of cases.[1] Christine M. Pearson and Christine Porath, authors of *The Cost of Bad Behavior: How Incivility Is Damaging Your Business and What to Do About It*, estimate that a single bullying incident experienced by half of a 10,000-person workforce can result in millions of dollars in damages, including health claims, absenteeism, and time spent worrying about the incident. Bullying can also increase employee turnover and "presenteeism": sickness and disengagement due to poor treatment, along with litigation, mediation/arbitration, and workers' compensation/disability claims.[2]

Bullies have been described as

> people who are willing to cross the boundaries of civilized behavior that inhibit others. They value the rewards brought by aggression and generally lack guilt, believing their victims provoked the attacks and deserve the consequences.[3]

Why Should We Pay Attention?

Targets can feel they have lost control of their lives, particularly if they experience obsessions, compulsions, and hypervigilance, or an overpowering, constant need to avoid danger. In *A Life Interrupted: The Story of My Battle With Bullying and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder*,[4] author Sumi Mukherjee describes the mental torment and repetitive behaviors he suffered as a result of unrelenting school bullies. People with OCD may feel an urge to check and recheck what they have done to escape potential punishment.

Scene: An employee describes how she feels in the wake of prolonged psychological abuse.

OCD muscled out positive thought. My new mental warden, my own personal conveyor belt of anxiety, panic, fear, and intrusive thought, allowed

for only short-lived periods of relief. Things spiraled out of control when I got home. At night the unwanted Others, like a never-ending amusement park carousel ride, made their appearance: Had I locked my office door? Did I shred the documents from our client meeting? Had I thrown something valuable into my garbage? Were the papers correctly placed in my report? Turning my office key to go home unlocked a Pandora's Box of potential disasters, mistakes, and gargantuan liabilities in the making. *I just had to check one more time.*

Because psychic turmoil is not always evident, bullying may seem like a victimless crime. What observers fail to realize is the profound and lasting impact of abusive behavior. Targets have described their tormenters as "devils," "witches," "demons," and "owners" and have depicted their coworkers as wildly cheering, bloodthirsty spectators.[5] Their willingness to "tough it out" only exacerbates their symptoms of high blood pressure, social isolation, obsessive thinking, anxiety, embarrassment, shame, and missed days from work. Correspondingly, the "John Wayne" individualistic norm within the United States mandates stoicism and moving ahead.

Bullying can leave permanent physical marks. Nobel Prize-winning research has found that stress shortens telomeres—the protective encasings at either end of a DNA strand. Reduction of these end caps is associated with an increased chance of disease and an abbreviated life span.

> A bully can literally shorten your life.

Abuse that is severe, or that continues over an extended period, can shrink the brain's mnemonic center, or hippocampus, and make it difficult for targets to distinguish the past from recent occurrences or to place events in contextual perspective.[6]

Scene: Dave, who was humiliated in a company meeting, talks about being terrified of expressing himself.

We all bring our respective baggage to the office. A lifetime of trauma can leave us silenced, banging our fists against the walls of a soundproofed plexiglass cube. I've learned the costs of free speech can far exceed its benefits, so I keep my mouth shut.

Electronic encephalograph (EEG) research found that after people read shame-inducing scenarios they experienced desynchronization, or an interruption of coherent activity that occurs in relaxed individuals' alpha brain waves.[7] Targets may feel overwhelmed from the OCD/PTSD/hypervigilance and/or depression they experience after an attack, and from the embarrassment, shame, and humiliation they feel at work.

> You can kill a person only once, but when you humiliate him, you kill him many times over.
>
> —The Talmud

Abuse can also contribute to hippocampal hyperactivity, which is associated with intrusive and unwanted thought.[8]

Reflection

Think of a time when you felt bullied or disrespected by another person. What were your feelings toward the aggressor? Toward yourself? What action did you want to take?

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The Workplace Bullying Institute reports that "29% of bullied targets considered suicide; 16% actually had a plan to execute."[9] Inability to cope with a life-altering event (and resulting fallout) can be fatal. Consider what happened to:

Kevin Morrissey: former managing editor of *Virginia Quarterly Review* who made multiple attempts to contact university officials regarding a perceived hostile work environment, and who later died by suicide. According to Ted Genoways (Morrissey's former boss), the University of Virginia found Morrissey's complaints of supervisor abuse without merit. An employee at the magazine stated that people may perceive bullying as something that happens on school playgrounds.[10]

and

Tyler Clementi: talented, award-winning musician and freshman at Rutgers University, who experienced mental torment after his roommate secretly filmed and posted to the Internet an intimate encounter of Clementi with another young man. Clementi later died from jumping off the George Washington Bridge.[1]

Christopher Boehm, author of *Moral Origins: The Evolution of Virtue, Altruism, and Shame*, argues that a Cro-Magnon resides within each of us. Although people may know in their rational, thinking brains that bullying is wrong, the experience born of thousands of years of hand-to-hand combat suggests that appearing bigger and badder may increase opportunity.[11] The inner beast can, however, antagonize and profoundly hurt other people. Belligerent leadership styles can produce short-term gains, but they leave employees unmotivated. A Center for Creative Leadership study found that supervisors who had problems with people skills, team building, adapting to change, and maintaining a big-picture view of their functional specialty found their career trajectories derailed as they failed to ascend the ranks like their more-people-savvy peers.[12] Moreover, a study of 51,836 leaders showed the chance of being rated as both *highly unlikable* and *highly competent* was about 1 in 2,000.[13] Persona can thus influence perceptions of job competence. Positively rated leaders solicited feedback, encouraged give and take, and changed direction as a result.[14] To succeed, leaders must bring something additional to the table—a complementary set of soft skills for interacting with coworkers.

> Who would you rather work for? Someone who is continually disgruntled, or someone who possesses superior people skills?

The Behavioral Continuum

Not all abuse appears as over-the-top, in-your-face onslaughts. Abuse resides on a continuum, one ranging from willful intention to sniper attacks, to unawareness or ignorance. The most egregious abusers physically injure other people.

Overt bullying → **Covert bullying** → **Incivility**

Overt Bullying: (Physical Abuse, Hazing, Emotional, and Mental Abuse)

Physical Bullying

The strikingly uncivil blatant bullies engage in physical assault. In the schoolyard, physical abuse manifests as kicking, pushing, shoving, punching, hair-pulling, and yanking. Although these behaviors rarely appear at work, acts of screaming, overpowering by standing too close, and intimidating individuals with a hostile stare (or staring them down until they look away) do occur. The dirty look, hairy eyeball, eye roll, or sneer with upper lip curled are all ways to show signs of physical disapproval and disdain.

Sexual harassment—defined as gender discrimination via unwelcome sexual overture—can also have an element of physical abuse. Examples include cornering someone against a desk, wall, or copy machine so that it is impossible to escape, ogling with elevator eyes, leaning against someone, hovering over another person's desk, unwanted touching or requests for touching, caressing, or "coming on" to someone in an overtly sexual way.

Hazing

Hazing occurs when pledges in school organizations like sports teams, bands, fraternities, and sororities, or when new employees in organizations like the NFL, fire and police departments, and other large companies endure rituals during their probationary period—ones that consist of danger/suffering and/or humiliation. At one Houston fire department, five firefighters were dismissed for waterboarding a rookie employee with substances like mustard, flour, chocolate, and ice cream until he started to cry. Stophazing.org describes violent, physical hazing as branding, spanking, kidnapping, and forced intoxication. Harassment and intimidation hazing are more frequent, but they are less-recognized forms of abuse (see the "Hazing Continuum" below). At work, hazing does not usually progress past the intimidation phase. Examples of intimidation include coercing new or probationary employees into doing favors for senior members, demanding credit on projects to which senior members contributed minimally, and/or assigning newbies undesirable tasks. Hazing at work stems from cultures of fear and/or suspicion. Mary Wilfert, who compiled the "NCAA Building New Traditions: Hazing Prevention in College Athletics Report" explains that individuals who are on "power trips" may exercise their authority inappropriately. They may physically or emotionally abuse other people.[15]