

Nine Ways to Build Your Assertiveness



1. Pretend you are confident.
2. When you meet people, look them in the eye.
3. Know your stuff.
4. Rehearsal is the best confidence builder.
5. Every day, remind yourself that you have done some things well.
6. Read inspiring biographies and autobiographies.
7. Be thankful.
8. Push yourself to accomplish short-term goals.
9. Do something for yourself every week.

Am I Being Bullied?

Here are some things that might indicate bullying is present. We would suggest that if three or more of these points apply to you, you can be fairly sure that you are being bullied.

- ✓ You have severe anxiety about going to work.
- ✓ You are physically ill when you have to go to work. (Many bullying targets report vomiting in the
- ✓ You feel so ashamed and/or guilty about what is happening that you haven't told anyone.
- ✓ Although you haven't told anyone about the bullying, your co-workers, family, and/or friends have asked if something is wrong at work.
- ✓ You use sick days as sanity days to get a break from the bullying.
- ✓ You notice that you are treated much differently from co-workers.
- ✓ You don't enjoy activities outside of work and time spent with loved ones.
- ✓ Work that was acceptable before is never good enough.
- ✓ You feel that the bully doesn't trust you to complete work. They micro-manage and interfere.
- ✓ You suspect that others have been through your personal space at work (such as your desk, computer, and personal belongings).
- ✓ You are not allowed to transfer to another department or apply for other positions.
- ✓ The bully's actions are undermining the company. For example, you have to re-do a project so many times that it puts you behind schedule and makes other projects late. (Of course, this reinforces the message that you are an incompetent failure.)
- ✓ You have frequent emotional outbursts, such as crying or yelling.
- ✓ You believe that you're responsible for what is happening to you.
- ✓ Other people at work have been warned that you are a problem in the workplace, asked to file complaints about you, or asked to avoid you.
- ✓ Other people at work see what is happening, agree with you, but do not want to act.
- ✓ You often receive unpleasant surprises at work, such as short-notice meetings, deadlines moved, and new projects assigned. Other people do not experience this to the same degree.
- ✓ Others verbally harass you with insults, yelling, and put-downs.
- ✓ Others accuse you of harassment, incompetence, and criminal offences.
- ✓ Personal information, such as medical records, is brought into the workplace and used against you.
- ✓ You get a performance review that shows that you are incompetent, despite excellent reviews prior to this.



A Bully's Favorite Tactics

1. Blaming the target for errors that do not actually exist.
2. Unreasonable job demands.
3. Excessive criticizing
4. Inconsistent application of rules and procedures to the target.
5. Threatening the target with termination
6. Insults and put-downs.
7. Denying their accomplishments.
8. Exclusion and isolation.
9. Yelling, screaming, and general verbal abuse.
10. Taking credit for the target's ideas.

Creating an Anti-Bullying Culture

- Lead from the top down.**
The anti-bullying movement should start from the top and flow downward (just as bullying does).
- Be clear and consistent.**
Be specific in what constitutes bullying. Then, be sure that the rules are applied constantly and consistently.
- Lead by example.**
Your bullying movement won't have much force if your CEO is a temperamental person who likes to slam doors, throw things, and berate staff.
- Say it loud.**
Ensure that all employees (executive team included) read and sign the anti-bullying policy.
- Be proactive.**
Encourage managers to be hands-on with teams.
- Give people the tools to fight.**
Train employees about what bullying looks like, what they can do, and what the employer will do for them if they are bullied.

Tactics That Don't Work

- ✗ Ignore or avoid the bully.
- ✗ Try to appease the bully.
- ✗ Comply with the aggressor.
- ✗ Be aggressive.

Take Action!

We're often at a loss for words in tough situations. Here are some phrases that can help.

- Witnessing Bullying as a Manager**
 - I have some concerns about how you spoke to Jud in the meeting yesterday. Your tone and words were bullying. That's not accepted in this organization.
 - I noticed that your interaction with Jane yesterday was quite aggressive, to the point that I would call it bullying. That's not accepted in this
 - **IMPORTANT:** If you witness bullying on your team, you have a duty to nip it in the bud.
- Witnessing Bullying as a Subordinate or Co-Worker**
 - Comments like that aren't productive.
 - I don't think your tone/language is very professional.
 - I don't appreciate comments/jokes about <topic>.
 - I don't agree with you. Jim did a great job on this project. It was late because there were some extra requirements that we had to meet.
 - Take it easy!
- Receiving Bullying as a Target**
 - If you have feedback to give me, please give it to me in private.
 - I can't discuss this with you until you stop yelling.
 - Please don't call me <insult>.
 - I cannot fix the problem until we focus on it, not me.
 - I'd love to improve my sales numbers, but being called names doesn't help me achieve that goal – and it doesn't help the company, either.

Watch Out! Distorted Thinking Ahead!

One of the most common things that we see amongst bullying targets is the gradual destruction of their self-confidence. Here are some common ways that thinking can be distorted and how bullying targets can take control of the cycle.

- All or Nothing Thinking**
 - ✓ **Definition:** Looking at yourself in black and white categories.
 - ✓ **Example:** "I'm a total failure; I'm not good at anything."
 - ✓ **Cure:** When you have a thought like this, try to play devil's advocate with yourself. Think of something that you are good at, even if it's just something small.
- Mental Filter**
 - ✓ **Definition:** Dwelling on a single event and letting it discolor your entire view of life, much like a drop of ink can discolor a whole glass of water.
 - ✓ **Example:** "No wonder my kids don't respect me. I can't even do my job right."
 - ✓ **Cure:** Separate problems to help you get at the root of them.
- Magnification or Minimization**
 - ✓ **Definition:** Blowing a negative event out of proportion or minimizing a positive event.
 - ✓ **Example:** "I didn't deserve that promotion. It was just luck."
 - ✓ **Cure:** Give yourself praise when you deserve it. We are often taught that it's wrong to give ourselves a pat on the back. Overcome this conditioning and reward yourself when you overcome a challenge or do something well.
- Emotional Reasoning**
 - ✓ **Definition:** Emotional Reasoning
 - ✓ **Example:** You made a small mistake on a recent project, so you feel like a total incompetent idiot. You shouldn't even have a job!
 - ✓ **Cure:** Give yourself a reality check. Example: "Sure, I made a small mistake in those figures, but I fixed it before anyone else saw it. The client seemed really impressed, too."
- "Should" Statements**
 - ✓ **Definition:** Placing unrealistic expectations on yourself.
 - ✓ **Example:** After completing a project, you think of all of the things that you should have done differently.
 - ✓ **Cure:** Hindsight is 20/20. Treat life as lessons learned rather than mistakes and regrets, and you will be a lot happier with yourself.
- Chicken Little**
 - ✓ **Definition:** Always thinking that the sky is going to fall down.
 - ✓ **Example:** You got some good results from medical tests, but you think, "I have that blood test coming up next week. I am sure that will show something wrong."
 - ✓ **Cure:** Take each day as it comes. Celebrate good news when you get it; this will build strength for when bad times do arrive.
- Personalization**
 - ✓ **Definition:** Assuming personal responsibility for everything.
 - ✓ **Example:** "I feel so terrible that Jane didn't get that promotion. I bet it's because I didn't meet my sales numbers."
 - ✓ **Cure:** When you feel responsible for something, do a careful analysis of what your role was. Often you'll find that you're giving yourself too much blame, and rarely enough credit.

Short-Term Survival Tips

- Be assertive. Often, if you take a stance right away, the bully will go look for easier prey. Your body language plays a big part in this. To show assertiveness, stand up straight, don't fidget, and maintain eye contact.
- Remember that becoming the target of a bully is in no way your fault.
- Do what you can to minimize contact with the bully.
- Most importantly, build a support network. Focus on the people who have positive things to say about you. Keep those things in mind when you're dealing with a bully – not their unfounded accusations and mud-slinging.