

# BULLIES & CLIQUES

## IN CORPORATE AMERICA

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Chances are pretty good that you have met one of these rascals in the workplace. According to a Wayne State University study, “at least one worker in six has experienced some sort of bullying on the job.” Because of the lack of awareness in the workplace, coupled with most bullies’ highly developed Machiavellian skills, their bad behavior may go undetected for years.

Bullying cannot be limited to a few simple examples of bad bosses. In fact, according to Dr. Gary Namie, author of the book “The Bully at Work” and co-founder of the Workplace Bullying and Trauma Institute, bullying is not just limited to a single participant. Often, the bully instigates group action that ultimately causes feelings of isolation for the victim. This action is referred to as ‘mobbing’.” (In high school, didn’t we call those cliques?)

You may be surprised to learn that, according to Namie, “Women represent more than half of the workplace bullies.”

Bullies of both genders have common traits such as a need to control and exploit others for their own personal gain. Such behavior is destructive to an organization because it undermines achievement of the company’s goals, thwarts employees’ creativity and productivity, escalates healthcare, workers comp and turnover costs, fosters absenteeism and sometimes prompts litigation.

## **Do you know any bullies?**

Most bullies are hard to detect because they don't fit the stereotype of belligerent, screaming, tantrum-throwers. Instead, based on the research from Bully Online, the serial bully is a "convincing, practiced liar who, when called into account, will make up anything spontaneously to fit their needs at the moment."

Contrary to popular opinion, Dr. Namie tells me that bullies are not "evil people". In fact, he says that they are your next door neighbor, "soccer moms and church deacons."

Why would a normal person resort to such bad behavior at work? That's exactly Dr. Namie's point – it's the circumstances in the workplace that promote bullying. Take for example, NBC's The Apprentice, a popular "reality show" where the project leaders substitute brute force to get things done, viciously degrade other team members -- and call their methods "leadership." These individuals are deprived of sleep and under extreme pressure to perform. (We hope that they would behave better under ordinary circumstances.)

## **Are you strong enough to deal with a bully?**

According to Dr. Namie, the bully will often seek out and assault the strongest player in the group. 'They're not a bunch of whiners," stressed Dr. Namie in an interview. Quite the contrary, "targets often endure bad behavior by bosses and cliques for an average of 22 months."

According to Dr. Namie, in the unethical organization, people become targets because they possess the very best of qualities:

- First, they are usually highly ethical people who tend to be somewhat naïve and, therefore, vulnerable. Unfortunately for them, the Machiavellian

bully's expertise in office politics make them adept at exploiting a trusting employee.

- Victims usually have better technical skills than their tormentors. The bully resents "competition" and his personal lust for control will overshadow the organization's need for proficiency.
- Individuals who have a strong work ethic will retreat into work – putting in longer hours to "prove themselves". Because the bully takes advantage of this work ethic, he or she will literally run the person into the ground through constant "nit-picking" criticism and by setting arbitrary, unrealistic deadlines. These actions frustrate the worker and eventually squelches their self-esteem.
- Finally, targets tend to be independent thinkers and may ask valid questions – a huge threat to the bully who may feel that his authority is being questioned.