Eliminate Workplace Bullying

Bullying or lateral violence is a term that describes disruptive behaviors displayed by one colleague toward another. These behaviors can be physical, verbal, or emotional. Examples of bullying behavior range from being ignored or excluded to undermining activities such as excessive monitoring of work to overt threats of physical violence.

Victims of workplace bullying may experience symptoms such as weight loss, headaches and difficulty sleeping eventually leading to a drop in self-esteem and job satisfaction.

Organizations bear the cost of disruptive behavior through lost productivity (work hours lost to worrying, avoiding the bully, and a weakened sense of commitment to the organization), increased healthcare costs (due to stress) and finally, the cost of replacing employees who leave organizations to escape bullying.

However, there are both individual and organizational approaches to eliminate bullying in the workplace.

FACT:

Healthcare occupations have the highest rates of workplace bullying.

(Johnson & Rea, 2009)

Individual Strategies

Recognize Bullying Behaviors – The most important step is to recognize bullying when it occurs and not assume that it is normal or accepted behavior (Center for American Nurses, 2007).

Confront the Situation – Avoidance is the number one means by which bullying behavior is handled in the workplace. However the use of avoidance as a strategy only delays the inevitable recurrence of the behavior (Friesen, DeWitty, Osborne, & Rosenkranz, 2009).

Acquire Conflict Engagement Skills – Learning to deal with bullying behavior incorporates the basic skills of self-awareness, building trust, listening, acknowledging, reframing, and generating options (Center for American Nurses, 2008).

Organizational Strategies

Promote Workplace Respect – Bullying is less common in organizations that promote a respectful and positive workplace (MacIntosh, 2006).

Understand the Cost of Bullying – Adverse outcomes to bullying have included poor morale, decreased productivity, and increased errors (Sofield & Salmond, 2003).

Expect Zero Tolerance – Organizations should adopt a zero tolerance approach toward disruptive behavior and develop standards and policies based on collaborative efforts between the organization, managers, and staff (Center for American Nurses, 2007).

Support Leadership Competence – Nurses report being bullied by managers and supervisors most frequently. Offering conflict

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engagement skills directed toward front line leaders and managers will improve the team's capacity for dealing with bullying behaviors (Scott, 2007; Vivar, 2006).

Implement Skills-Based Training – The Joint Commission's sentinel event alert #40 recommends skills-based training for leaders and managers. Training should focus on strategies for giving feedback on unprofessional behavior and conflict resolution (Joint Commission, 2008).

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