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## Women Workplace Bullies - More Prevalent Than You Know

According to recent research, approximately 40 percent of office bullies are women. While male bullies tend to bully both women and men in equal measure, women choose other women as targets 70 percent of the time.

Researchers determined that women make up more than 50 percent of management, professional, and related occupations, but only 15.7 percent of Fortune 500 officers and 15.2 percent of directors are women. "Backlash - Women Bullying Women at Work," *The New York Times* (May 11, 2009).



### *Commentary and Checklist*

Experts report that female bosses may have different methods of bullying than men and different reasons for bullying, but the effects are just as damaging. While male bully bosses tend to scream and rant, female bosses prefer sabotage, the silent treatment, and spreading rumors.

No matter the gender or the technique, bully bosses are bad for business. They force out valuable employees and make life miserable for those who stay. Bully bosses also increase the risk of employment lawsuits, destroy employee morale and productivity, and increase absenteeism.

Bully bosses are not easy to spot. They save their bully behavior for those that have less power than they have and usually for times when executive management is not present. When bully behavior is noticed, it is seen in "bits and pieces," and too often executive management classifies the behavior as "tough love" with little to no understanding how the bully is undermining their organization.

Unfortunately, when employees report bullying, they are often characterized by the bully as "soft" or as a "whiner." Since bully behavior is different than discriminatory harassment and not illegal per se, human resources too often stand to the side instead of counseling and warning the bully.

Employers should pay attention to complaints from employees and other managers. Pay particular attention to the turnover rate of those employees who work for suspected bully bosses. Bully bosses tend to terminate more frequently, and employees who work for bullies seek transfer more frequently.

Finally, educate managers and supervisors on the signs and effects of bully bosses and encourage employees to report bully bosses to human resources.

Here are additional signs of bully bosses:

- ✓ When employees complain, do they attack the reporter?
- ✓ Do they ridicule or make fun of other employees?
- ✓ Do they abuse employees in front of others?
- ✓ Is their abuse related to issues outside of the job, like appearance or dress?
- ✓ Do they pick on one or two people who are different in appearance, belief or culture?
- ✓ Do they discipline for no apparent reason?
- ✓ When discipline is rendered, is it too harsh for the offense that was committed?
- ✓ Do they believe that all employees are bad employees?
- ✓ Do they play favorites?

✓ Do they encourage others to treat fellow employees badly?

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