

## Dignity at Work: bullying and harassment

Dignity at work is a phrase which has become vogue over the last few years. But what does it actually mean? Dignity at work is about having the right to be treated with respect whilst at work. This means an employee can carry out their duties without risk of harassment or bullying.

According to a report commissioned by the Dignity at Work Partnership in May 2008<sup>1</sup> a significant amount of time was lost in 2007 due to issues related to dignity at work. The Health and Safety Executive figures for 2007 suggest that work-related stress cost the country £4.55 billion pounds and bullying in the workplace cost £682.5million. The Work Partnership report also concluded that 33.5 million days were lost due to absence caused by bullying and 200,000 employees resigned due to bullying. This equates to 100 million days of productivity. Based on these, and other, figures the report concludes that the loss to the growth in Gross Domestic Product in 2007 was in the order of £17.65billion.

Having determined that bullying and harassment can cause major loss of productivity for an organisation let's consider what you can do to tackle these issues and promote dignity at work. In 2006 the Dignity at Work Partnership put forward several recommendations for dealing with bullying and harassment in the workplace, these are listed, and considered, below:

1. Zero tolerance  
The simplest way to deal with bullying and harassment is to have a zero tolerance policy which will ensure all staff know exactly what is expected of them. Put simply; tell all your staff that bullying and harassment will not be tolerated.
2. Build a business case  
Think about the costs you may incur if you don't deal with bullying and harassment issues effectively. By considering financial and non-financial data you will be able to determine the appropriate action for your own organisation.
3. Develop Policies  
You will need to develop a Dignity at Work Policy and ensure that your disciplinary and grievance policies clearly identify the actions that will be taken in relation to unacceptable behaviours.
4. Strong leadership  
As principal in the organisation you will need to demonstrate that you're

---

<sup>1</sup> Giga, S I; Hoel, H & Lewis D (2008) The Cost of Workplace Bullying, Bradford University, Research commissioned by the Dignity at Work Partnership  
([http://www.unitetheunion.com/resources/equalities/equalities\\_campaigns/dignity\\_at\\_work/downloads.aspx](http://www.unitetheunion.com/resources/equalities/equalities_campaigns/dignity_at_work/downloads.aspx) accessed 1 November 2009)

---

taking bullying and harassment issues seriously. By doing this, and by adopting the principles of dignity at work yourself, you will engender a culture where dignity at work is commonplace.

5. People focus

Remember that your staff are your key asset. Bear this in mind when developing your business controls. Don't accidentally build in bullying command and control.

6. Early Intervention

As soon as you become aware of any issues you should deal with these immediately. By doing this you confirm your commitment, and more importantly you nip the problem in the bud.

7. Training

As with any new policy or procedure you will need to ensure that all your staff are trained and understand what is expected of them. They also need to understand what action they can take, and who to speak to, should they feel that they are victim to bullying or harassment at work.

8. Working together

If your organisation recognises trade unions then you should work with them to develop your dignity at work policy. Your organisation may be too small to recognise unions, in this case work with employee representatives to draw up the policy. By doing this you will ensure buy-in.

By taking action you will be able to:

- Reduce the time effort and money spent on resolving complaints.
- Reduce your absenteeism levels and improve efficiencies.
- Reduce your recruitment costs as you will retain staff.
- Reduce your employee turnover and therefore your training costs.
- Reduce the risk of participating in an expensive tribunal which could lead to considerable sums being allocated in settlement.

Addressing each of the points discussed here will ensure that your bottom line isn't eroded by unnecessary action dealing with bullying and harassment.

Sue Berry is Director of TimelessTime Ltd.

For more information email [sue.berry@timelesstime.co.uk](mailto:sue.berry@timelesstime.co.uk)

Note: This document is intended only as a discussion of selected issues relating to the subject matter. It is neither a definitive statement nor a legal document, nor does it purport to suggest any detailed commercial strategy. For this reason, readers are advised to liaise with the appropriate authorities and, if necessary, seek suitable legal and/or technical advice prior to making business decisions. Whilst TimelessTime Ltd has exercised every care in the preparation of this document, no responsibility can be accepted for any omissions or errors contained herein.