



# DIVERSITY FRIDAY

Issue 18-2016.05.05

Our colleague, Obakeng Setlogelo, at the Labour Relations Unit, requested us to deal with bullying in the workplace this week.

## BULLYING

What is bullying, and when is it bullying? Let us have a look at a quotation about bullying: *"Bullying, mobbing, victimization, harassment, discrimination, abuse – different descriptions by different authors – remain recognized psychological problems in the workplace today and are clustered under the umbrella term of 'Workplace Violence'. Treating co-workers and others without dignity equates to emotional violence and it hurts just as much as physical violence, if not more."* (Dr. Susan M. Steinman, 1997)

It is important that we understand what bullying in the workplace is; and what it is not. Duncan Chappell and Vittoria Di Martino, in their book 'Violence at Work', 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, 2006, pp. 21 defines bullying at work as *"harassing, offending, socially excluding someone or negatively affecting someone's work and tasks. In order for the label 'bullying' (or mobbing) to be applied to a particular activity, interaction or process it has to occur repeatedly and regularly (e.g. weekly) and over a period of time (e.g. about six months). Bullying is an escalating process in the course of which the person confronted ends up in an inferior position and becomes the target of systematic negative social acts. A conflict cannot be labelled as bullying if the incident is an isolated event or if two parties of approximately equal strength are in conflict. Bullying behaviour may include making life difficult for those who have the potential to do the bully's job better than the bully; or punishing others for being too competent by constant criticism or by removing their responsibilities, often giving them trivial tasks to do instead."* Dr. Steinman calls bully's in the workplace 'Hyenas'. Lets look at an excerpt from her book 'Hyena's in the Workplace', pp.73, about how 'hyenas' create chaos in the workplace and how to become 'hyena-proof'; or 'bully-proof':

Annah, a public relations executive, organized a large event and when the PR executive of a sister non-profit company learnt about her plans, he tried to organize an even larger event with the same sponsors. He invited Annah to his big meeting with the sponsors where she could give some input and make it a joint effort. Annah, a 'hyena buster', shrugged it off and talked to the sponsors as if the workplace hyena, who wanted to steal her idea and ride on her back, was just an observer. By being focused and sure of herself, she effectively neutralized the 'workplace hyena' without putting up a fight.

## MOBBING

Dr. Steinman continues to say that "mobbing involves a group of workers ganging up against a target employee and subjecting that person to psychological harassment. Mobbing in the workplace includes behaviours such as making continuous negative remarks about a person or criticizing them constantly; isolating a person by leaving them without social contacts; gossiping or spreading false information about a person' or ridiculing a person constantly." Let's look at the story of Thembi from the same book by Dr. Steinman, pp.74:

Thembi once described to us her pain when she discovered that her colleagues were mocking her unfortunate divorce. She became the laughing stock of a 'hyena clan' at the workplace, as they revelled in the fact that she had "egg on her face", because things went wrong in her marriage. There was no compassion for her pain, and her abilities and performance were criticized at the same time. To make things worse, her supervisor overloaded her with work and threatened her dismissal if she didn't pull up her socks. As she was about to become a single parent, Thembi became very vulnerable.

The Office of the Premier is a "ZERO TOLERANCE ZONE" By adopting the 'Dignity at Work Policy and Procedure', the Office recognizes that workplace violence is a growing problem that needs to be addressed by the employer. The Office will soon launch this policy and embark on an awareness raising and training drive. For now, let us look at some tips on resolving problems from the book 'Leading with Confidence' (p.200) by Bobb Biehl, where he advises that we ask ourselves these questions: *"How would I prioritize the problems I face today? In a single sentence, what is the problem? How is my personal balance or imbalance affecting my ability to solve this problem. Why does the problem exist? What are the three greatest resources I can bring to bear on this problem? Who can help me solve this problem? Should I spend more money to reduce the time needed to solve this problem? Of all the potential solutions to the problem, which one has the greatest potential to be right and also involves the lowest risk? What policy would keep this problem from recurring?"*

As usual I went to Oom Andries for some advice on the matter of workplace violence, and the first thing he said was, *"Maar is die Premier's Office dan nie 'n Zero Tolerance Zone nie?"* I just smiled and said, *"Exactly Oom, net soos Oom daar sê."* Out of nowhere Oom Andries became very worked up and he started giving me a speech: *"Hoekom kan mense nie maar net NEE sê vir bullying nie? Mense moet begin die positiewe goeters in ander raaksien, dan is dit inevitable dat die negatiewe sal verdwyn van die scene af, net soos die donker nag afwyk sodra die son sy kop lig. Wat het ooit geword van 'do to others like you want done to yourself'? Die positiewe is mos baie kragtiger as die negatiewe! If doing the negative can cause such grave results, verbeel jou dan net the power of doing good. As ek vir jou 'n mooi ding sê dan versterk ek mos ook my eie karakter en good qualities. Is mos Mahatma Gandhi wat gesê het 'The greatness of humanity is not in being human, but in being humane'."* He stopped speaking; deep in thought he just stared at the wall puffing on his pipe....



Remember, the Office of the Premier is a "Zero Tolerance Zone".

Have a Mngca Diversity Friday

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