

March 2014 Essential Update

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This month's update has a focus on Bullying and Harassment – its dangers, the new Work Safe Guidelines and what you can do to protect your organisation.

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- **Essential Essentials** – Harassment management processes
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- **Courtesy of e3 Accountants** – Making Time

Helpful Hint

The Impact of Bullying in the Workplace

Sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me - or so the old adage goes. But the reality is that when people are bullied in the workplace, you and your employees can be faced with much more serious mental, physical and financial impacts than you might expect.

Bullying can have many serious effects on people, such as increased stress levels, decreased emotional well being and reduced coping strategies. Unsurprisingly, bullying at work is unpleasant at best - and not just for the people directly involved. In the workplace it decreases morale, increases stress, and increases the likelihood of staff absenteeism and turnover. It can also lead to Court cases - risking your reputation and tens of thousands of dollars.

Some of the most common scenarios in my experience are when managers put unrealistic expectations on staff members, and are then angry when their expectations aren't met. Other times I have seen managers swearing inappropriately at staff, or engaging in banter that's clearly designed to make someone uncomfortable. This is racial, sexual or just plain harassment. These managers have had to learn that just because they are in charge doesn't give them the right to bully – and that if they do the Courts will have them pay.

One specific case (not my client) from a couple of years ago that came out in the courts was a case where a shop manager put down an employee, 'stole' their sales and wouldn't relieve them for breaks. The employee complained, and the employer's failure to do anything about it resulted in a significant fine. In another case decided in the Employee's favour, a manager made cruel and public comments about an employee's psychological health. A reasonable employer would not allow such behaviour in the workplace.

The bottom line is: anyone that doesn't address bullying in the workplace is harming it. Managers need to motivate their employees not create antagonism. Strong leadership does not incite fear but makes people want to succeed for the company. Start by believing in your employees, and then they may believe in you. And if you need help call me!

For more information

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<http://www.essentialhr.co.nz/news/>.

This month I have posted on:

- **Health and Safety Reforms – Fine levels**
- **Minimum Wage Increase**
- **Wage increases and Being a Good Employer - the impact of Rates rises**

Mike's Whereabouts

Ashburton: April 2nd, 9th, 17th, 30th

Westport: April 22nd/23rd?

Did you Know?

Only 6% of NZ workers over 50 have enough savings for "financial security and a good lifestyle" in retirement. An OCG Consulting study of almost 1000 people has identified this as a human, a business and an economic issue.

The older worker brings experience and loyalty and there are plenty around (1 in 6 of our unemployed are in this group) – yet of the managers interviewed only 18% had a strategy for utilising them.

With recruitment proving difficult for so many, it must be worth thinking about how to better employ the over 50's and how to help them save more ... not that I am biased!

Legal Latest

Work-Safe Harassment Guidelines

WorkSafe New Zealand and the MBIE have released a new set of guidelines for businesses to prevent and respond to workplace bullying. The guidelines [define bullying](#) and advise both employees and employers – [how to avoid it](#) in the first place and [what to do if it occurs](#). It includes a number of useful case studies and tools.

[Workplace bullying is defined](#) as “repeated or unreasonable behaviour directed towards a worker or a group of workers that creates a risk to health and safety”. *Repeated* actions are persistent (but don’t have to be the same), and *unreasonable* actions are those that are unreasonable to a reasonable person.

Workplace bullying can take place through email or text messaging as well as in person, and may occur outside normal working hours. It may be conducted by a single worker or a group of workers, clients, patients or customers and may be direct and personal, or indirect and task-related (see below for examples).

Personal attacks

Belittling remarks

Attacking a person’s beliefs

Public humiliation

Shouting/Intimidating

Task-related attacks

Giving unachievable/changing tasks

Constant criticism of work

Demotion

Inappropriate monitoring

Bullying is not giving reasonable verbal or written work instructions; setting high standards; giving constructive feedback or discipline (in line with policy); and neither is it one-off instances.

Because it is a significant hazard when not properly managed, the business is in breach of employment and health & safety law if it takes no action. It can also incur serious losses in productivity.

So: Make your workplace culture, and your processes and procedures clear and easy to understand.

Employers are expected [to prevent bullying](#) in their workplace

To do this an Employer is expected to:

- Provide a respectful work environment; recognise diversity; make changes as needed; and build managers who lead;
- Encourage respect and responsibility; communication and treating each person as an individual;
- Have a clear code of conduct and processes;
- Educate staff in bullying prevention and response processes;
- Provide a designated contact person and other support;
- Monitor bullying as you do accidents etc.

[If Bullying is alleged, the clear guidelines for employers are:](#)

Take it seriously and be impartial. Follow your internal processes if you have them. Try an informal response first before taking more formal approaches (see next column for managing a complaint)

For the full set of guidelines, go to this website:

<http://www.business.govt.nz/worksafe/information-guidance/all-guidance-items/bullying-guidelines>

Essential Essentials

Managing a Bullying complaint

Actions a manager can take to deal with alleged workplace bullying:

- Treat all matters seriously – check out all complaints
- Act promptly – as if a serious accident to be prevented
- Ensure non-victimisation – come down hard on anyone who takes revenge
- Support all parties – believe in innocence until proved guilty
- Be neutral – consider an outside investigator
- Communicate the process and outcomes – have a clear policy
- Maintain confidentiality – at all times
- Keep good documentation – record everything and write up notes

I have a draft policy and procedure if you need a start.

From e3 Accountants

E3 Business Accountants not only leases me an office, but is also one of the accounting firms I work alongside. Jamie Tulloch found this:

The Answer to "Not Having Enough Time"

Not many of us sit around saying "boy, I have nothing to do". We have enough things to do to fill up our time. But when we have no gaps in our schedule, we can't learn, improve, re-create and be spontaneous.

The key to creating time is to write a "stop doing list". Kick out low value activities to make room for higher value ones. Write up a "things to stop doing today list" – and action it. You might be surprised how much time turns up.

-Thanks to Larry Janesky

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