## Bullying in the workplace



*We have got to dispel this myth that bullying is just a normal rite of passage* – **Barack Obama**

Bullying in the workplace is a topic that we don't often talk about. It is often assumed that a bully is a person in power or a direct manager, however this is not always the case. Sometimes the bully could be a co – worker who bullies and treats fellow colleagues in a condescending and abusive manner. Dr Gary Naime describes a bully as a person who has the need to control another person. Shockingly studies done by the World Health Organisation (WHO)  found that 78% of South African labour force has been bullied one time or another in their working career.

Unfortunately  in South Africa there is no legislation that deals with workplace bullying specifically. The closest legislation to addressing the issue of bullying is found in Section (6) of the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998. It states that "(1) No person may unfairly discriminate, directly or indirectly, against an employee, in any employment policy or practise, on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, family responsibility, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, HIV status, conscience, belief, political opinion, culture, language and birth.

(2) It is not unfair discrimination to –

(a) Take affirmative action measures consistent with the purpose of this Act; or

(b) Distinguish, exclude or prefer any person on the basis of an inherent requirement of a job.

(3) Harassment of an employee is a form of unfair discrimination and is prohibited on any one or a combination of grounds of unfair discrimination listed in subsection (1)."

Ultimately employers must create a work environment that is safe and not toxic for all employees. A great South African author, Dr Octavia K Mkhabela has written a whole chapter on bullying called 'bully – proofing your organisation'. In her writing she goes on to describe two systems that every organisation should adopt: the hardware and software system. Hardware system deals with values, policies and procedures formulated to curb workplace bullying. The software system addresses the organisational culture, and looks at the climate that the leadership should create in their organisations. This means that if an organisations could adopt these two systems, not only would they be able to detect incidents of workplace bullying, but would actually curb them completely.

Bullying must be eradicated from our society, whether it occurs in the context of children at school or it is within our work places. Most importantly the victim must always report such occurrences in order to get the necessary support and lessen any sense of isolation. Most organisations have an 'open door' policy and HR is always included in the conversations to protect the victims of bullying. Victims can also contact SADAG ( South African Depression Anxiety Group ) – 0800 21 22 23

References: World Health Organisation – Burton J WHO Healthy Workplace Framework ; Naime G- US Workplace Bullying; Octavia K Mkhabela – Workplace Bullying