

## Exclusion - is it bullying?

Industrial Relations  
Human Resources



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When an employee is being bullied in the workplace, it is likely they wish they could be just left alone. However, under Australian legislation, being ignored by your colleagues or excluded from work activities could actually be considered part of a pattern of bullying behaviour. Exclusion could even be more damaging than overt forms of bullying or harassment.

Recent research conducted by a British University, found most people think ostracism is less harmful than other bullying behaviours. We've all been taught, 'if you don't have something nice to say, don't say anything at all', which indicates that ignoring someone is socially preferable. However, being excluded is much more likely to lead to people feeling more helpless or not worthy which can lead to health problems and work issues.

As the dominant opinion from the research indicated exclusion was considered less harmful than other forms of bullying, this prompted the researchers to conduct further investigations. Additional research undertaken over a three-year period, found that employees who have had experience of being ignored at work were significantly more likely to quit their jobs.

As we see in the news and reflected in legislation, there is a major effort to counter bullying in schools and workplaces, which is a step in the right direction. However, abuse is not always obvious, therefore it is important that workplaces are supportive of positive relationships and ensure staff are aware of the anti-bullying policies and legislation. Ensure your business has all the tools required to combat bullying by attending workplace harassment and bullying training provided by Brismark.

There are currently sessions scheduled for 22 October 2014, 17 March and 27 May 2015 so keep an eye out for the registration form. Alternatively, if you have a number of employees you would like to attend the training, Brismark can adapt the sessions to suit your policies and deliver exclusively for your business.

If you would like more information on workplace bullying and harassment or the training available, please contact Lisa Dwyer on 3915 4213 or [esm@brismark.com.au](mailto:esm@brismark.com.au)

*(Source: iHR Australia, HR News and Resource, 14 July 2014)*

#### Toughest work chats

In Issue Number 13 we talked about tackling difficult topics with staff and colleagues and to continue the theme, this edition focuses on handling an employee's 'poor attitude'. Here are some helpful hints:

Hint 1: Never use phrases like "I don't want you to take this the wrong way" as this is a classic priming statement that sets up your employee to almost always 'take it the wrong way'. Always prime them towards a successful outcome, therefore a more positive statement such as "I need us to be on the same page" would get a better result.

Hint 2: Avoid naming unhelpful traits, for example, "I want to talk about you being arrogant" is not

conducive to a positive conversation. A better approach would be to lead with a positive attribute, for example “One of your strengths is that you are very confident, however there are times when your confidence can be a little overwhelming. Let me give you an example...”.

### **Watch your language!**

As mentioned in the previous article, there are many sensitive situations that crop up when managing staff or a business. While you might be saying the right thing, your body language may be undermining your words of wisdom.

Body language expert, Alan Pease, identifies some of the key signals you may be sending without realising and how to change them.

#### *Keep uncrossed*

When giving bad news, people have a tendency to cross their arms on their chest or clench hands/fingers together. These are ‘self-protection’ signals – if someone sees you doing that they will think that you’re not feeling very confident about what you are saying.

#### *Avoid superiority signals*

Have you ever seen anyone sit back in their chair with their hands behind their head – it’s the worst thing a person can do. It is the most intimidating management pose that you can take in the presence of an employee or direct report. Make people feel relaxed, lean forward and engage in conversation.

#### *Palms up*

Don’t have your hands in your pockets or under the desk – make them visible and talk with them facing up. It’s the most non-threatening position a person can take because it shows you’re not concealing anything.

#### *Great handshake*

Most importantly, keep your palm vertical in a handshake to create a rapport and equality. The origin of handshakes is arm-wrestling where the person with the hand on top had the upper hand. It’s no longer arm-wrestling, there is no winner, exude the same pressure you receive and people will not feel as though you are trying to threaten or dominate them.

*(Source: HCOOnline, by Janie Smith, 24 July & 4 August 2014)*

Need Brismark’s Help!!

For more information contact Lisa Dwyer on 3915 4222 or email [esm@brismark.com.au](mailto:esm@brismark.com.au)