

**LOCAL 721**



**SEIU**

Report Card

County of Ventura

Bullying in the Workplace

2011

## Bullying in the Workplace

**Purpose:** To give opportunity to SEIU 721 members to come together to create a positive work environment and to eliminate bullying behavior in Ventura County worksites.

### Introduction

The Ventura County Grand Jury issued its report, *Bullying in the Workplace* on May 24, 2011.<sup>i</sup> The Grand Jury found that bullying is occurring in County government and the County lacks adequate procedures or policies to address bullying in the workplace, including an anti-bullying policy.

SEIU 721 called together members from throughout the County for a meeting to assess how widespread and what impact bullying had on the County workforce. The turnout was so large that follow-up meetings were relocated to a larger facility. The SEIU Anti-Bully Committee (Committee) developed and distributed a survey to the members' home address as a first step, followed by worksite meetings and survey analysis. A summary of results is compiled in this report which was presented to the Ventura County Board of Supervisors.

### What a Bully Looks Like

A bully is only interested in maintaining his or her power and control. Some bullies are obvious- they throw things, slam doors, engage in angry tirades, and are insulting and rude. Others, however, are much more subtle. The following is quoted from the *Graziado School of Business and Management* at Pepperdine University:

“Because bullies are cowards and are driven by deep-seated insecurities and fears of inadequacy, they intentionally wage a covert war against an organization’s best employees-those who are highly-skilled, intelligent, creative, ethical, able to work well with others, and independent (who refuse to be subservient or controlled by others.) Bullies can act alone or in groups. Bullying behavior can exist at any level of an organization.

Bullying is not about being “tough” or insisting on high standards. It is “abusive disrespect.”

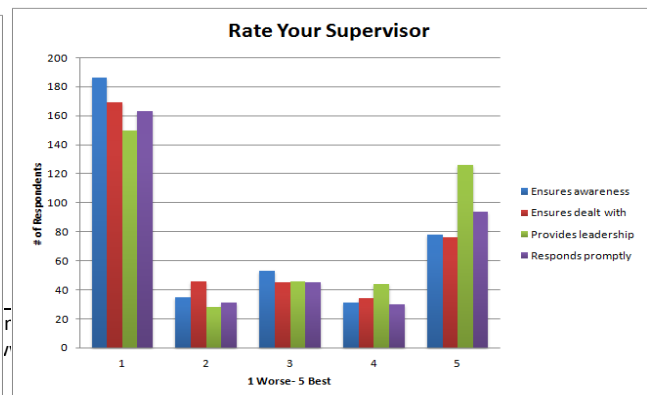
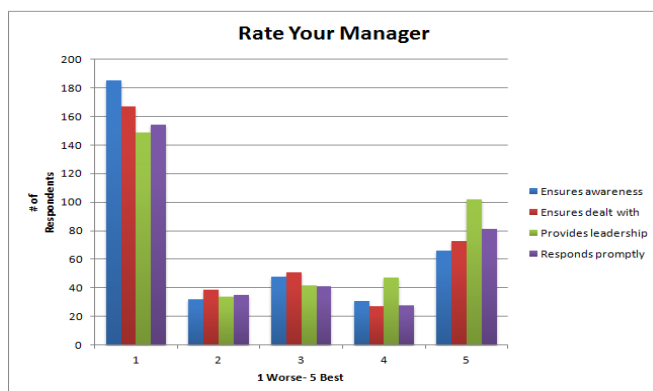
Bullying is not about a “clash of personalities,” a “misunderstanding,” or “miscommunication.”

In the report, two psychologists conducted surveys on bullying and found:

1. Bullies use surprise and secrecy to gain leverage over those targeted.
2. They are never interested in meeting someone else halfway.
3. They routinely practice psychological violence against specific individuals whom they intentionally try to harm which is devastating to the target person’s emotional stability “and can last a long time.” <sup>ii</sup>

In her article, “Great Leaders are Great Decision-Makers,” Larina Kase, PsyD. MBA argues, “Emotional intelligence, the ability to understand and manage your emotions and those of others, is one of the most important qualities a leader must possess. According to the authors of *Primal leadership*, a leader’s emotions are contagious. This is why resonant leadership is so important- a leader’s mood will resonate with others and set the tone for the emotional climate in an organization. Emotional intelligence consists of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management.” <sup>iii</sup>

Leadership is essential to a professional work environment. As such, members were asked in the survey to rank their supervisors and managers from 1-5, 5 being the highest positive score, in regards to how well they mitigated bullying behavior and encouraged a positive work environment. The charts below summarize the results, illustrating that while the County does have some excellent supervisors/managers, overwhelmingly members felt that supervisors/managers failed at ensuring awareness, ensuring that concerns were dealt with in an appropriate manner, and that supervisors/managers did not provide appropriate leadership or respond promptly to issues.



The SEIU surveys identified supervisor/manager bullies in the workplace. The following list identifies the agencies in which SEIU received bullying surveys. The list is ordered from highest respondents to least high. The agency director/head is listed as they are ultimately responsible for the entire agency.

Agency/Department	Director/Head	
Health Care Agency	Dr. Robert Gonzalez	**
Human Services Agency	Barry Zimmerman	**
RMA	Christopher Stephens	*
Sheriffs	Sheriff Geoff Dean	*
Public Works	Jeffery Pratt	*
Child Support Serv.	Deborah Frahm	*
Probation	Mark Allen Varela	
District Attorney	Gregory Donald Totten	
Fire	Chief Bob Roper	
General Services	Paul Scott Grossgold	
Information Technology Services	Rick Jackson Interim Mike Reed	
Auditor Controller	Christine Cohen	
Assessor	Daniel Goodwin	
Harbor	Lyn Krieger	
Clerk & Recorder	Mark Anthony Lunn	
Library Services	Jackie Griffin	
Area Agency on Aging	Victoria Anne Jump	
Airports	Todd Lee Mc Namee	
Animal Services	Monica Nolan	
Air Pollution Control District	Michael Villegas	

**\*\*Highest number of survey respondents**

**\*Significant number of survey respondents**

### Survey Methodology

1. Members from various County departments and agencies met to review the Grand Jury report and share their own experiences.
2. Members developed an action plan including survey questions and agreed on a definition to be used as outlined in the Grand Jury Report. In

developing the survey, members used the following definition of bullying: “behavior that intimidates, degrades, offends, or humiliates a worker.”

3. Several meetings were held during the months of July, August and September to finalize the survey and prepare an analysis of results.
4. SEIU 721 worksite organizers and member leaders held several worksite meetings to inform members of the process and assure confidentiality for those who wished to report but feared retaliation.
5. Responses were received from nearly 500 responders.
6. The Grand Jury Report was used as a guideline. Additional independent research was conducted and a final report was prepared for the Board of Supervisors.

### **Analysis of Data**

Sixty percent of respondents reported they were a victim of bullying. Sixty-nine percent reported they had witnessed bullying in the workplace. A 2008 doctoral research dissertation by Dr. Judy Fisher-Blando determined that almost 75% of employees surveyed had been affected by workplace bullying, whether as a target or a witness.<sup>iv</sup> The SEIU surveys had even greater results. (Attachment #1)

Examples of bullying behaviors surveyed in the SEIU survey included being shouted at or yelled at, excessive monitoring, isolation or exclusion from activities, threats, and physical intimidation. These behaviors were chosen because they have been adopted by a number of academic researchers. SEIU 721 survey results (Attachment #2) surveyed fifteen different categories. Respondents ranged in length of County service from less than 1 year to 35 years, with the average being 10 years. Thirty-two percent have worked at more than one department.

SEIU 721 Ventura County members have reported the following:

- |                                                                  |     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1. Made to report to a manager (other than immediate supervisor) | 20% |
| 2. Impossible deadlines                                          | 43% |
| 3. Diminish work accomplishments                                 | 47% |
| 4. Criticized in public                                          | 51% |
| 5. Teasing, insults                                              | 34% |
| 6. Spread rumors                                                 | 38% |
| 7. Belittling or disregarding opinions                           | 57% |

8. Excessive monitoring	62%
9. Yelled at	44%
10. Isolation or excluded from activities	42%
11. Physical intimidation	18%
12. Threats (verbal, written, or online)	36%
13. Shouted or sworn at privately	33%
14. Placed on administrative leave or disciplinary action	15%
15. Retaliatory behavior	43%

### Consequences of Bullying Behavior

Health effects are common to the victim and the witnesses to workplace bullying. Forty-nine percent of SEIU respondents have sought medical or psychological attention. Health effects are linked to a host of physical, psychological, organizational and social costs. According to *The Project for Wellness and Work-life at Arizona State University*, “stress is the most predominant health effect associated with bullying in the workplace. Research indicates that workplace stress has significant negative effects that are correlated to poor mental health, poor physical health resulting in an increase use of sick days or time off from work.”<sup>v</sup>

There is indication that these adverse health effects as a result of bullying are already occurring and as a result costing the County. According to the Ventura County Health Care Plan Medical Cost and Utilization first quarter report, March 31, 2011 costs for prescription medications for depression was \$90,000.00, for this health plan only. In the same report, 26% of medical costs in 2011 were for behavioral health services totaling \$2,236,532. Therefore, at a minimum, there is a cost of **\$2,326,532.00** in **one quarter** to address health concerns that could be caused by stress related to unnecessary and adverse working conditions. This does not include other health care plans used by Ventura County employees or inpatient care costs.

Additionally, the Ventura County Department of Industrial Relations did not respond to the SEIU July, 2011 request for information about the number of workers compensations claims out on stress leave. However, the State Department of Industrial Relations Workers Compensation Board did provide SEIU with a list of approximately 500 names of non-sworn, non-law enforcement, county employees, excluding law enforcement officers, who over the years filed

stress-related workers compensation claims for injuries to their mental health. This does not include the number of state disability stress claims filed by county employees who chose a disability claim over a workers compensation claim. People who witness bullying have fear, stress, low morale, and emotional exhaustion. Bullying can also hinder organizational dynamics such as group cohesion, peer communication, and overall performance which once again causes fear, stress, low morale, and emotional exhaustion. However, it is important to remember that unlike other medical ailments, these symptoms can be largely alleviated.

### **Bullies are Expensive**

The March, 2002 issue of the Orlando Business Journal quotes a survey of 9,000 federal employees, indicating that 42 % of females and 15% of male employees reported being harassed within a two-year period, resulting in a cost of more than \$180 million in lost time and productivity.<sup>vi</sup> This includes high absenteeism, reduced productivity and high turnover.

High turnover has an economic drain, 82% leave the workforce, 38% leave for their health, 44% leave because they are victims of a performance appraisal system manipulated to show them as incompetent. Human Resource experts say the cost of replacing an employee at two to three times that person's salary. This is consistent with the Grand Jury report that said employees did choose to quit the County to escape bullying.

### **SEIU Member Recommendations**

From the beginning of this project, SEIU 721 members made it clear that they enjoyed their career with the County and hoped to work with the County to make essential improvements that would benefit both the employee and employer. It is clear that a policy is needed. Despite the number of members who reported bullying behavior on the survey, **only 11** respondents indicated that they reported bullying to a supervisor or manager. The most common reason cited for not reporting was fear of retaliation.

The SEIU Member Committee makes the following recommendations, in support of the Ventura County Grand Jury Report recommendations.

1. Adopt an Anti-Bully Policy defining what bullying is and giving some common sense descriptions of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors at work.

Including a statement that the County supports the right of all employees to work in an environment free from bullying.

2. Provide mandatory training for all supervisors and managers, and Department heads on anti-bully behaviors and train all employees to ensure that everyone is aware of his and her responsibility to conduct themselves in a professional manner. Top management reinforcement of the “zero-tolerance” for bullying behavior and reporting procedures at new employee orientation sessions.
3. Independent third party oversight of well-defined and published report processing procedures.
4. Initiate meetings between SEIU 721 Member Committee representatives, Board of Supervisors and Department heads.
5. Return to a centralized human resources system that eliminates individual departments from skirting established policy and procedures.

### **Conclusion**

In today’s work environment, one of the surest ways for an organization to fail is to tolerate workplace bullying. It is SEIU 721 members hope that the 2011 Report Card will be taken seriously and that all recommendations be adopted formally by the Board of Supervisors. During the next few months, SEIU members will continue to monitor bullying behaviors in the County and will work with other labor organizations and their members to identify other bullies in order to create a positive work environment and eliminate bullying behavior in all Ventura County worksites. Workers will make decisions whether to issue an annual report card depending on progress of County elected officials and their management team. Additionally, the departments and department heads listed in this report are of the top offenders. Over 200 names were cited at least once and several others were cited multiple times. It is expected that a meeting will be held with Board of Supervisor members and management where specific details of bullying behavior and names of offenders will be discussed privately.



## SEIU 721 Survey Results

### Survey Part 1

Years worked	Worked Other Depts	Stress/Medical Attention	Witnessed Bullying?	Bullied yourself?	
Less than 1 year	32%	49%	69%	60%	Percentage Yes

### Survey Part 2

Impacted by or witnessed any of the below characteristics of bullying?

Excessive Monitoring?	Yelled at?	Isolation/Excluded?	Physical Intimidation?	Threats?	Shouted at?	Placed on Leave?	Retaliatory behavior?	
62%	44%	42%	18%	36%	33%	15%	43%	Percentage Yes

### Survey Part 3

Impacted by or witnessed any of the below characteristics of bullying?

Made to report to Mgr?	Impossible Deadlines?	Diminishing Work?	Criticized in public?	Teasing, insults?	Spreading Rumors	Belittling your opinions?	
20%	43%	47%	51%	34%	38%	57%	Percentage Yes

### Survey Part 4

Victim of bullying	Did you report?	
20%	2%	Percentage Yes

### Survey Part 5

Rate your supervisor				Rate your Manager				
Ensures awareness	Ensures dealt with	Provides leadership	Responds promptly	Ensures awareness	Ensures dealt with	Provides leadership	Responds promptly	
41%	37%	33%	36%	41%	37%	33%	34%	Worst- 1#
8%	10%	6%	7%	7%	9%	8%	8%	2#
12%	10%	10%	10%	11%	11%	9%	9%	3#
7%	8%	10%	7%	7%	6%	10%	6%	4#
17%	17%	28%	21%	15%	16%	23%	18%	Best- 5#

Attachment 1

<sup>i</sup> Ventura County Grand Jury 2010-2011. *Final Report: Bullying in the Workplace*. May 24, 2011.

<sup>ii</sup> John E. Richardson, and Linnea B McCord. "Are Workplace Bullies Sabotaging Your Ability to Compete?" *Graziado Business Review*, vol. 4 #4 (2001). Pepperdine University.

<sup>iii</sup> Larina Kase, PsyD, MBA. "Great Leaders are Great Decision-Makers: Three Qualities to Take the Paralysis out of Decision Analysis." *Graziado Business Review*, vol. 13 #4 (2010). Pepperdine University.

<sup>iv</sup> Judy Fisher-Blando. *Aggressive Behavior: Workplace Bullying and Its Effect on Job Satisfaction and Productivity*.

<sup>v</sup> The Project for Wellness and Work-Life at Arizona State University, as quoted in *Wikipedia.com*, "Workplace Bullying." Accessed online at [www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Workplace\\_bullying](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Workplace_bullying).

<sup>vi</sup> Michael H. Harrison, Ph.D. In *Orlando Business Journal*, March 18, 2002.