

When She Is the Workplace Bully

written by Rory Lodge | March 28, 2013



The prevalence of bullying and harassment is on the rise, particularly among women.

As women we have been exposed to female on female bullying since we read *Cinderella* or watched *Mean Girls*, and it doesn't stop on the playground.

Women, as a gender can be a jealous, malicious group. We are raised to compare ourselves to the other women in our lives in a judgmental way. Are they thinner than us? Prettier? Better wives? Better mothers? Stronger leaders? We even judge our closest friends. Despite the idea of girl power or sisterhood, we're more likely to be critical of each other than men are. This mentality carries over into the workplace where female on female bullying is on the rise.

A recent Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) survey found that 73 per cent of workers reported verbal abuse including shouting, swearing, name calling and malicious sarcasm occurring at work. This bullying often leads employees having decreased morale, increased stress and depression and decreased trust amongst co-workers. In total, 40% of bullies are women, 58% of targets are women and astoundingly women bullies target women in 80% of cases. According to the Workplace Bullying Institute this number is on the rise, from 71% in 2007. The workplace is growing more and more toxic for women, at the hands of women.

One may mistakenly assume, as more women are breaking through the proverbial glass ceiling, they would be more supportive of other women facing similar challenges but the facts demonstrate this simply isn't the case. All too often once women break through the glass ceiling they appear to be repairing that ceiling right away.

Women today hold more than 50% of college degrees and make up more than 50% of management, professional, and related occupations. The pressure "to have it all" may actually increase pressures on women, with more women believing they can have a family and attain the top job. Unfortunately, a variety of discriminatory practices are still preventing many women from acquiring them. A logical conclusion then is, for women to perceive female co-workers as competitors rather than as potential allies. To that end, women in power may feel an inordinate amount of pressure to keep their leadership positions. This insecurity often leads to bullying behaviour that

stems from a lack of confidence with an objective of control and self-advancement or self-protection, not improving organizational performance. According to the Canada Safety Council, bullies typically target high-potential rivals, particularly those who have the skills they lack and which businesses need.

As women in the workplace, to be so down on each other does not bode well for our future not only in the workplace but amongst ourselves as a gender.

Over a billion women will be entering the workforce in the next decade and once these women begin to step into positions of leadership, they will change the fiscal potential and corporate culture of the world's biggest and brightest organizations. We owe it to ourselves to stamp out female on female bullying and to stand up for respectful work environments and to support other female leaders. We would not be where we are today if another woman didn't pave the way for us so we owe it to the billion women behind us to pave the way for them.

By [Debby Carreau](#)

For the past 20 years, Debby and [inspired HR](#) have been helping teams deliver superior business results by making strategic decisions about human capital. In any industry you can't beat real-world experience, and that's what makes Debby a premier Human Capital consultant in a multitude of business sectors. She uses her experience as a senior leader in operations and Human Resource Management to provide pragmatic advice on attracting and retaining top talent, and developing programs and systems to get the most out of your team.