



TRANSCRIPT

Episode #22: Not Your Typical Episode on Bullies (Part 2)

You are listening to episode 22 of *Mastering The Power Skills*. You know, work place bullies are such a common phenomenon that we had to have two episodes just to cover the topic. But just like our first episode, this one is chock full of tips that are practical and effective, and we even provide sample scripts for your conversations. Come join us now in part 2 for more strategies on navigating The bully experience to ensure you come out the other side with even greater power and credibility.

How much more could you accomplish if you were 25% or even 50% more influential and persuasive? Welcome to *Mastering The Power Skills*, the podcast that provides you with the tips, strategies, and the inspiration to grow your own power and win support for your ideas. And now here's your host, C-suite leadership coach Kathy Dockry.

Well hello everyone. Welcome back to part two of our series on bullies in the workplace. So why would we devote two entire episodes to workplace bullies? Well, as I've said before, at some point in all our careers, perhaps at several points, we are very likely to encounter bullies or be subjected to bullying behavior. And when that happens, it's very hard to find good resources on what to do.

As we observed in part one of this series, the general guidance out there, and the other resources available to us through our employment, don't always feel like they'll be effective or prompt solutions to what we're encountering. But another reason for devoting two whole episodes to the topic is that there are actually two completely different types of bullying experiences. And as a result, there are two entirely different strategies for dealing with the situation.

So one form of bullying involves a true bully, someone who truly intends to bully you and even enjoys the process. That sort of person is someone who likes to acquire and abuse power. And as we've discussed in our previous episode, the most effective way of responding, in other words, the way where you're more likely to thwart the bully and come out of the experience even more respected and credible, is to grow your own power, and then use it skillfully and wisely.

Be sure to check out part one of our series, which is episode 20 I believe, for some guidance about how to tell which type of bully you're dealing with. And for a step-by-step process for dealing with a true intentional bully.

Today, however, we're going to be talking about the second type of bullying experience. This is actually the most common form of bullying in the workplace. In this situation someone is exhibiting bullying behavior and it's having the effect on us that we associate with bullying. In other words, we're intimidated or offended. We shut down in discussions or we back down in debates. Or we stand our ground, but sometimes suffer unwanted consequences when we do so.

The important distinction here is that this type of bully doesn't consciously intend to have that impact. Now, of course, they may be conscious of the direct behavior they're engaged in, like a raised voice or dominating the conversation. But they're blind to the bullying impact that they're having. And they are quite likely blind as to why they're behaving that way in the first place. In other words, they have the behavior but they don't have the intent.

Now, this type of bully isn't what I call a true bully at all. They're someone who indulges in bullying behavior. Don't get me wrong, I'm not letting them off the hook. I completely believe bullying behavior is wrong and needs to be eliminated in a healthy workplace. But it's important to know the difference between

bullying intent and bullying behavior, because your strategy and addressing each one needs to be different as well.

So when I encounter a bully, the first question I like to answer is, why is this person behaving this way? If you know why it's happening, it helps you in two ways. First, you actually feel a heck of a lot better. The bullying behavior is dysfunctional, for sure, but you're also seeing the slightly messed up person who is indulging in the behavior. And you might even feel a little sorry for him or her. You realize they're struggling and using dysfunctional instead of effective behavior.

They're actually getting in their own way and they need some supportive, but firm, tough love to get them in a better place. Both for their own sake, and let's face it, for the sake of everyone else. And the interesting thing in feeling sorry for someone is you feel stronger and more confident. You feel better prepared to take action when you have that kind of mindset.

The second reason for understanding why this person is indulging in bullying behavior is that it helps you figure out the right strategy to use. If you have the right diagnosis, you're then in a better place to cure the disease, right? And that's what we'll talk more about in the later part of this episode. What actions do you take to either eliminate or substantially dial down this sort of dysfunctional behavior?

So back to the question about why people would unintentionally bully in the first place. The core understanding here is that we are all, and I say we including myself, we're all in some ways a little blind to the emotions and feelings that drive us. That can be particularly true for smart high achievers, any of them out there? Hopefully, for you and me each year our insight into that gets better and better. And with better insight, we can make better and wiser choices.

But some of us are better at developing self-awareness than others. And a very large amount of people that we're going to meet in our lives are not always so good at understanding themselves deeply and with clarity. Will they ever get there? Who knows. But we can't wish them out of existence. They're there, and wishing them out of existence would be dysfunctional for us to do as well, right? The impulse to do that is very human.

But trying to wish things weren't so is probably the biggest cause of dissatisfaction in our own lives. We upset ourselves, we drive ourselves crazy when we do that. What we do want to do is not to wish them away, but rather help the people who lack self-awareness improve. They may never become as insightful as you and me, but they can become better. And there's a big payoff for getting better. Not only do these people make better choices, but your life improves as well. And that should be powerful motivation for all of us.

Working with difficult people to get them on track and heading in the right direction is almost the very definition of someone who leads. Someone like that leads everyone else to better and more effective outcomes. Things improve. And if you're listening to this podcast, I suspect that's your goal, to become a highly skilled leader who improves things.

The path to becoming that person means taking on tough things, not taking the comfortable way out. But the good news is that you have greater capabilities than you can even imagine to take on tough things. And the rewards for growing yourself in that way, are truly meaningful.

So what about the people who may lack some of that capability and self-awareness that you have? What's driving that dysfunctional behavior in the first place? Well, oh boy, there's a list of possible things that could be driving them. And I tend to think of these things in two categories.

The first is what I informally call a generally decent person in a bad place. Here's a couple of examples to show you what I mean. Someone who is currently highly stressed. Someone who looks okay, but has underlying fear or insecurity. Or someone who has a higher need than most for step-by-step control, and gets quickly overwhelmed by complexity or rapidly changing situations or the unknown.

What this category of people all have in common is that they feel bad. They may look confident and in charge on the outside, but it's a front. Instead they're a churning mess of stressful emotions. And in fact, the more confident they look, the worse they probably feel inside. This is because in addition to feeling bad, they have to put an enormous amount of energy into not looking bad.

So what's your best strategy for dealing with a person in this category? It's taking the first step to helping them dial down their bad emotions. This helps them get into a better place where, one, they actually start acting better. And two, they can better hear you later on when you gently suggest more productive ways of interacting to them.

So here's the story of my first person who probably fell into this category. It's my father. And he was the elementary school principal in a small town, where that was one of the big positions in town. Now, my father was a very kind and big hearted person underneath his facade of I am in charge. But he also was a person who felt danger when things around him were changing. And he overcompensated for those very real and painful feelings by getting even more controlling, and even angry with everyone around him.

I got that about him when I was a child. And on my better days, I could help steer him to a better place. So fast forward to when I entered the work world and I

encountered intimidating and angry men all around me in the work world, who used bullying behavior all the time. By the way, I'm not including women in that category, only because when I first started out in the particular professions and business categories where I was, there were precious few women. So I saw mainly men.

But where other people saw these men as nasty and bullying, I was already wired to see most of them as normally decent people in various emotionally painful places. And I didn't take it personally, I didn't like the behavior and I resented how it made me feel. But I also realized that the person who was having that behavior was out of control and didn't have enough emotional maturity to manage how they were feeling in a balanced way.

So I would help them calm down, at least a little. I started using phrases like, "Don't worry, I have your back" or, "Don't worry, we're going to make you look good." And if they started lashing out at me randomly, I'd get over my initial shock and say things like, "I can see you're upset. What can we do to make you feel better or safer or more reassured going forward about this business issue?"

This would give them the opportunity to vent a little. And then often on their own, they actually would become a little bit more self-aware and articulate about what they were feeling and why. We could then have a more productive discussion about a good path forward.

Once you dial down the emotions of someone in this category in the short term, then the final step in the process is to try to minimize bullying behavior in the long term. You need to wait a little while to do that because you want them to feel greater trust and safety with you. So you may need to go through several rounds of bad behavior and those “I have your back” interactions first, to get to that spot.

But eventually people in this category do start trusting you because you're that person that helps them to feel better. Now, they may not say that or even be consciously aware of that, but inside they're thinking thoughts like, “Oh, that Kathy Dockry, everything seems to go more smoothly when she's around.” This is the point where you have a different conversation with them.

You wait until they're in a good mood or more relaxed than usual and then you have a conversation about the overall working relationship. First, you start off by reaffirming the importance to you of the relationship, both on a personal level and on a work level. And you might say something like, “You know, one of the things I like about working together is that no matter how challenging things get, we usually can get on the same page pretty quickly, even when others can't. We can get to better solutions faster.”

And then once you have a bit of back and forth affirmation, you then provide a suggestion for how things could be even better. You might say something like, “You know, one thing I wanted to reassure you about is that whenever you have some concerns about what's going on, you don't have to wait until things go too far and the challenges start getting more critical. Just come to me earlier and we can get on the same page about what needs to happen to avoid any of those concerns you have.”

Now, you can come up with your own language, but what you're doing here is you're steering the person to avoid bullying behavior. And you're also giving him or her a motivating solution to do so. Almost everyone you talk to in this way is going to not see this as criticism, but as a great way to make life even better for them.

I call this type of motivating solution aspirational leadership. You're giving someone something to aspire to, versus making them feel like they need to fix themselves. They continue to feel trust and safety with you, and they also love the idea that things could be even better.

Finally, and this is really important so listen up, you can really seal the deal by closing your conversation with a promise from you. You've just asked the other person to make an investment in the relationship. That's a request, and to balance that requests, you need to make an investment as well. The good news here,

though, is that your investment doesn't have to be big in order for it to have a meaningful positive impact.

So here are some examples of things that you could say to the other person. You could say, "I promise I'll always work with you to come to workable solutions." Or, "I promise I care deeply about avoiding problems before they happen, versus cleaning them up afterwards." Or, "I promise that I always look for win/win solutions." And there's a host of other small promises that you can make as well.

None of these examples should be hard things to promise, you're probably doing them already. But the critical words in all these examples are, "I promise." Those words make visible to the person that you're talking to that you are investing in the relationship too. You're not only asking them to. Research shows that by making a promise, you've created a shared sense of reciprocity that makes it more likely that the other person will take action on your request.

If you're dealing with this category of person with bullying behavior, in other words the normally decent person in a bad place, the technique I just described has a high degree of success. If you stick with it, you will see a big improvement over time. In fact, I often see that a year or two later the person who was using the bullying behavior towards you can become your biggest fan and advocate.

They can be strong supporters for you getting promotions, or bigger roles. And they'll likely be strong supporters of you if you're being challenged by other people. That's a wonderful and pretty gratifying return on your investment. If we're looking at this through a power lens, you've not only neutralized the bullying, but you've also grown your own power.

So what about that second category of people with bullying behavior? What's driving them? In this second category, the people with bullying behavior aren't feeling pain, like the first category we just talked about. Instead, they're afflicted with too much of something. What does that look like? Well, here are two very common examples that we often see.

One is the person who dominates every conversation and talks over everyone. I had one client way in the past where someone described him as always sucking the air out of the room. And then there's the over eager achiever. They're kind of like that kid in class at the front of the room with their hand and they are going, "Ooh, ooh, call on me."

Now, the people in both of these examples have normal and natural desires, but they just have too much of those desires. They're squelching other people. And they may feel good, but they don't look good. The person who dominates has too much enthusiasm and passion. And the person who is eager and an overachiever has too much of a need for validation and reward.

The really interesting thing about this category of person is that they generally have no idea about how they look to others. So if you ask the domineering person about himself, he'll say, "Oh, yeah, sure, sometimes I take over. But I don't do it that much, and it's only because I care so deeply." They lack the ability to see themselves as others see them.

So remember that client I had who someone described as sucking the air out of the room? He sincerely and genuinely didn't understand why people thought about him in that way. In fact, he was a little hurt because he would never intentionally want people to feel that way. You know what changed his mind? He went to a weeklong leadership development program where they would occasionally video the participants as they worked in teams together.

And of course, they'd watch the videos and critique themselves. He actually saw himself for the first time. And you know what? He was appalled. He was so upset with himself that I kind of had to talk him off the metaphorical ledge for a few weeks.

And the same thing is true of the eager high achiever. If you ask them about themselves they'll say, "Oh yeah, sure, I'm a little competitive and I care about getting ahead. But isn't that true of everyone?" What looks so big to everyone

else, actually feels like a little quirk to them. They lack the self-awareness to see how they're really showing up.

So, okay, how do we handle the person who's just a little too much and who's behavior ends up having a bullying impact? Well first, just like the person who is driven by painful feelings, it helps to build some trust with them. You don't need to spend a lot of time reassuring them that you have their back, but you do want to make clear to them that you don't dislike them as a person, regardless of their bad behaviors.

You want to create some sense of appropriate workplace connection with them. Once you feel you have that good foundation and trust, it's again time for conversation about the pattern of behavior. And again, it's best to do that informally, when the behavior is not actually happening. Start off the conversation, again, by reaffirming that you appreciate the relationship. Find some attribute of them that you particularly appreciate and tell them why you value it.

Next, you want to help them become aware of their behavior by kindly pointing out their blind spot and the consequences. So here's an example of what you might say to someone who dominates conversations. "You know, I always appreciate the passion and the high energy you bring to the table. But sometimes I find it hard to speak up and contribute because you come on so strong.

And you know, if someone like me who really gets you feels that way, others who don't know you as well might feel a little intimidated or overwhelmed. They possibly could shut down even if that's not what you want. So I have a suggestion that would help you get them more engaged and involved. That way, you're more likely to get the outcomes you want faster and easier.”

And finally, at this point, you make your suggestion. And here's how that goes. “If you are actively telling other people you're not trying to shut them down and you encourage them to speak their mind, they're more likely to engage and get on the same page with you.” And you can see what you're doing here, you're asking this person to actually steer things and reassure people that they can speak up.

And you, of course, make your promise as well. Here's one way of doing that, “I promise to have your back and support you in this. I want to be sure you have the biggest degree of success that you can achieve. For example, if I sense people are shutting down, I could either point it out to you or give you a signal of some kind. Maybe I could ask you if you want our feedback. That would give you the chance to more proactively ask individuals questions so they feel more appreciated and included.”

Now you can probably find an even more graceful way of saying this, but the good news is I've actually never seen a domineering person react badly to this approach as long as you're kind and supportive in your delivery of it. Remember,

while they may have dominating behaviors, this sort of person rarely actually intends to intimidate other people. And they appreciate a solution that will correct the perceptions that everyone else has.

Now, of course, there might be a few comments to the effect of, “Well, I don't intend to intimidate and other people should just speak up and talk to me on their own.” But when that happens, just acknowledge that of course they don't intend to dominate. But their natural passion and enthusiasm is causing others who don't know them well to feel that way. They'll actually get what you're saying, and they're going to want to do something about it.

Now, just because they genuinely intend to do something about it doesn't mean that you won't see this behavior from them from time to time in the future. And that's because this behavior is a habit. And as you know from your own personal experience, I know I do, habits can be hard to break. But don't be too worried about that because this is why you made that promise to help them out.

If you see recurrence of domineering behavior, you now have a perfectly acceptable reason to talk to them about it again offline, and to make further suggestions to help them break the habit. Eventually, they get to where they need to go.

And as one of my former clients once said, the guy who sucked the air out of the room, when he finally broke his own habit of dominating he said, “Oh, now I get it. In order to move faster, I sometimes need to move a little slower. It actually works out better for me when I do that.”

And what about that competitive overachiever? Well, the strategy you use with them is exactly the same. You just have to give them a different motivation to aspire to. So the domineering person usually is motivated by wanting to make something happen. And he or she gets more motivated to change when they realize they're creating more resistance, rather than less resistance.

The competitive overachiever needs approval and validation. They get more motivated to change when you help them become aware that their behavior is getting in the way of that. You offer to help them set themselves up for even more approval by changing their behavior in a way that makes clear they don't intend to bully or intimidate.

So there you have it, a variety of strategies that you can use for the different types of unintentional bullies that you encounter. Now, this is the point where clients often say to me, “Kathy, those strategies sound great. But how do I decide in real time which type of bully I'm dealing with?”

Well, in this case, I've given you definitions in this episode and in episode 20, which was part one, that will help you understand the various types. But be sure to also listen to episode 21, which is called *What Gets in Our Way*, because those tips will help you become masterful in reading the situation.

When you develop your curiosity, and you avoid the intent behavior reasoning trap, and we talked about those in Episode 21, you'll become better and better at spotting what's driving the people around you. And when you understand that, you'll choose the right approach, the tool that will get you the results that you want.

And as comprehensive as these episodes have been, I'm sure we haven't answered each and every single question on the topic of bullies. So if you have any particular questions yourself, just send me an email at powerskills@significagroup.com. That's powerskills@significagroup.com. We'll include that email in our show notes for this episode. And when I get your questions, I'll either answer you directly, or provide an answer in a later episode of the podcast.

For those of you who are listening to this episode in real time, I hope you're entering into a warm and relaxing holiday. I know that's what I'm looking forward to right now myself. We have some really helpful and interesting topics planned for you in the next year, so I'm looking forward as well to helping you become

even more masterful in growing your power through the use of your influence, persuasion and presence skills.

Imagine just where you're going to be and what you'll have accomplished by this time next year. And I'll see you soon in our next episode.

Hey there, would you like some personal guidance about how to use the power skills of influence, persuasion or presence on a particular situation in your workplace? Well, if so, we've got your back. Just send us a note explaining your situation to powerskills@significagroup.com. We'll drop that email address in the show notes. We'll feature your inquiry in an upcoming episode, keeping your identity anonymous of course, and make sure you have some tips and strategies to help you navigate your particular situation skillfully.

Thanks for listening to this episode of *Mastering The Power Skills*. If you like what was offered in today's show and want more insights and resources from Kathy, check us out at www.significagroup.com.