

Dealing with an Office Bully

Written by Peter Post



'd like to post a question regarding a colleague; this person is basically an office bully.

He interrupts my conversations with other co-workers, and when I say "Excuse me" to let him know he's interrupted us, he replies, "Good for you" and walks away. He sits at his desk and knowingly sings with the radio or taps his fingers on his desk—then when someone asks him to stop, he says, "Deal with it."

This person does do his job well but he lacks all respect for the other co-workers around him, and doesn't care what anyone thinks. I feel like I'm in high school and being bullied. There were a couple of days when I didn't feel like coming into work because of this individual. I've been tempted numerous times to go to HR and accuse him of harassment. As it is, his workplace behavior has been brought up to management repeatedly by myself and others, but nothing's been done. Management simply says that they're taking care of it. I've been told to ignore him, but enough is enough. What do you think my next step should be?

Your situation is a perfect example of how rudeness in the workplace can be the cause of significant stress. Nor only are you spending valuable work time worrying about the problem, but you're even considering not coming in to work to avoid the instigator. This is bad for you and bad for the company. Something's got to give.

As an individual, your options are:

- do nothing and wait for management's supposed efforts to take effect;

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- talk to HR about whether this person's behavior rises to the level of harassment, and decide if you want to initiate a formal complaint if it does;
- explain to your manager how the situation is affecting you. Unfortunately, it sounds like you and others have already been down this last road without success.

You indicate you're not alone in feeling frustrated by this person's actions. Before you file a complaint—or hurt your own status by missing work or becoming less productive—you may want to try meeting with your manager as a group. In your conversation, stick strictly to the facts. Make it clear that your goal isn't to get anyone fired, but to create a pleasant work environment where all employees are respected and are able to focus on their jobs.

Managers take note: Surveys show that as many as forty percent of those workers who have been treated rudely leave their jobs because of it. Can you afford to lose even one worker because of rude behavior?

Source: Post, Peter. "Etiquette at Work." Boston Globe 22 Oct. 2006.

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