

# COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

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**Author:** Kara Martin  
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## Taking It Further:

1

Look at the first list of bullet points, at the things we want for our lives. How many of those things are the desires of your heart? Which ones would be hard to release? Take time to hand them over to God. Ask God to provide you with what you need. Be encouraged by these words from 1 Timothy 6:17: "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment."

2

Go through the set of questions to test your own attitude to your working. Which questions did you find difficult to answer? In what ways were you encouraged? In what ways were you challenged? What should you change as a result of your responses?

3

Work through the stewardship Bible verses listed in the chapter. Make a list of your priorities versus God's priorities in the areas of stewarding time, talent, and treasure. What could change? What can you continue to build on?

4

Write a letter to someone who knows you well (partner, child, parent, pastor, friend, or even God) and write down the ways that you are going to reorient your life to achieve greater balance. Ask them to follow up with you in six months to test whether you have kept to these commitments.

## Chapter 7

# Handling Bullying and Conflict

(Much of the material in this chapter initially appeared on the Fixing Her Eyes website<sup>1</sup>)

Jackie was excited about landing her dream job teaching at a Christian school. But reasonably quickly the situation began to deteriorate. No one explained to her how things worked, so she was constantly having to ask questions which were responded to curtly.

She had a particular clash with one staff member and when she asked their common manager to intervene, he asked her instead to explain her actions. Jackie pulled out her position description to demonstrate she actually had authority over the disputed situation. The manager admitted she was right, but no one apologised and the tension continued. After several months, she was on the receiving end of an angry outburst from a fellow teacher. From that incident, she discovered that there was resentment by that teacher in particular, but also more generally by the staff, about the manner of her appointment. The correct procedures had not been followed.

Her manager had agreed that her workload was too much, but when giving her the much requested administration support, he also gave her a new project. When she explained her inability to complete the extra project because of a focus on other tasks and marketing, he told her to stop marketing. Three months later, she was told that lack of income generated from marketing meant her role was being cut back.

There were a hundred other little cuts: her name left off lists of staff; no room allocated at a staff retreat; being told she was not qualified to apply for a higher duties job she was already doing for a year, and that job then given to a less qualified and less experienced man; asked to address a group, and then not being invited to present; ignored in a meeting when she said something, only to have someone else say the same thing and be affirmed; being told her contract would not be renewed, but that she was not allowed to inform anyone beyond immediate family.

<sup>1</sup> Fixing Her Eyes, <http://www.fixinghereyes.org/read-all/author/Kara-Martin>.

While each of these situations might not be considered particularly harmful individually, the combined force can be seen to be part of a systematic issue of bullying, particularly by Jackie's manager.

### Defining Workplace Bullying

Bullying is repeated, unreasonable behaviour directed toward a worker, or group of workers, that creates a risk to health and safety. It includes behaviours such as:

- Abusive, insulting, or offensive language or comments.
- Malicious sarcasm.
- Unjustified criticism or complaints.
- Spreading misinformation or malicious rumours.
- Deliberately excluding someone from workplace activities.
- Withholding information that is vital for effective work performance.
- Setting unreasonable timelines or constantly changing deadlines.
- Denying access to information, supervision, consultation, or resources to the detriment of the worker.
- Unreasonable treatment in relation to accessing entitlements such as leave and training.
- Interfering with someone's personal property or work equipment.<sup>2</sup>

### Positive Workplace Culture

Bullying can also be contrasted with a positive workplace culture, which will:

- Ensure the dignity of all employees at work.
- Ensure fair and just dealings.
- Build happy and constructive working relationships.

<sup>2</sup> This definition is from a document: "Workplace bullying: Violence, Harassment, and Bullying Fact sheet", Australian Human Rights Commission. <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/workplace-bullying-violence-harassment-and-bullying-fact-sheet> (cited 7-Feb-2018). It is a standard for Australian workplaces.

- Ensure respect is shown and differences valued.
- Encourage constructive discussion of differences of views and approaches.
- Ensure open and constructive communications.
- Prevent actions of bullying, exclusion, unfair treatment, and other negative or demeaning behaviours.
- Deal firmly and fairly with negative behaviours, including bullying and harassment.<sup>3</sup>

Christians may further face the challenge of being victimised for their faith, a situation that has been reported several times in groups I have spoken to.

### How Bullying Can Affect Your Work

If you are being bullied at work you might:

- Be less active or successful.
- Be less confident in your work.
- Feel scared, stressed, anxious, or depressed.
- Have your life outside of work affected, e.g. study, relationships.
- Want to stay away from work.
- Feel like you can't trust your employer or the people whom you work with.
- Lack confidence and happiness about yourself and your work.
- Have physical signs of stress like headaches, backaches, sleep problems.<sup>4</sup>

Bullying is a significant problem in the wider workforce. The Australian Workplace Barometer reported that, "There is a serious

<sup>3</sup> For more ideas about anti-bullying policies, see: "Preventing bullying at work", *Worksafe Victoria*, October 2010. [https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0013/11191/MIA\\_bullying\\_Final.pdf](https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0013/11191/MIA_bullying_Final.pdf) (cited 18-Dec-2017).

<sup>4</sup> See: "Workplace bullying: Violence, Harassment, and Bullying Fact sheet", *Australian Human Rights Commission*. <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/workplace-bullying-violence-harassment-and-bullying-fact-sheet> (cited 18-Dec-2017).

concern regarding levels of bullying and harassment. Results from the AWB show that levels of bullying are at 6.8%, which are substantially higher than international rates." Those 6.8% experienced bullying in the previous six months, and more than half said that bullying had been continuing for longer than six months.<sup>5</sup>

Such statistics do not tell the whole picture, since generally bullying and mental health issues are under-reported. In the United States 45% of workers say they have experienced workplace abuse.<sup>6</sup>

### Dealing with Workplace Bullying

Dr Michelle Callahan in the *Huffington Post* gives an excellent list of tips for dealing with bullying:

1. **Don't get emotional.** Bullies take pleasure in emotionally manipulating people. Stay calm and rational to diffuse the situation.
2. **Don't blame yourself.** Acknowledge that this is not about you; it's about the bully.
3. **Do your best work.** The bully's behaviour will seem more justified if you aren't doing your best work, or if you do things like come to work late, take long lunches, turn in work late, etc.
4. **Build a support network.** Instead of hiding or retreating into your office, work on building your relationships with your co-workers so that you have support.
5. **Document everything.** Keep a journal (on your personal computer or in writing, but never leave it in the office) of what happened when (and who witnessed it). Keep emails and notes.

<sup>5</sup> Maureen Dollard et al., "The Australian Workplace Barometer: Report on psychosocial safety climate and worker health in Australia" (Magill: Safe Work Australia, 2012), 59.

<sup>6</sup> Michelle Callahan, "10 Tips for Dealing with Bullies at Work", *The Huffington Post*, 17 November 2011. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-michelle-callahan/work-bullies\\_b\\_833977.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-michelle-callahan/work-bullies_b_833977.html) (cited 18-Dec-2017).

6. **Seek help.** If you think you're being bullied, it's time to start talking to others who can help you manage this situation. Try a mentor, advocate, seasoned/experienced friend, even a legal advocate who specialises in bullying and inappropriate or discriminatory behaviour in the workplace.
7. **Get counselling.** It will help you deal with the stress, especially if the bullying is already affecting your physical and mental health. You have to take care of yourself.
8. **Stay healthy.** Maintain a balanced lifestyle outside of work to help you cope with the madness at work. Work out, get a good night's sleep, and eat a healthy diet.
9. **Educate yourself.** Learn everything you can about bullying, your company's policies on inappropriate behaviour and occupational law regarding this kind of experience.
10. **Don't expect to change the bully.** Real behaviour change is difficult and it takes time. You have no control over a bully's willingness to accept that they have a problem and to work on it. In the worst-case scenario you may need to leave your job.<sup>7</sup>

### A Christian Perspective

For Christians, there are some tensions:

- Jesus told us to turn the other cheek, but tough love may involve standing up to the bully.
- There is a desire for revenge that is palpable, but it must be offset by a desire for righteousness.
- We are told to love our enemies, but how is that balanced by our godly fight for justice?

<sup>7</sup> Michelle Callahan, "10 Tips for Dealing with Bullies at Work", *The Huffington Post*, 17 November 2011. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-michelle-callahan/work-bullies\\_b\\_833977.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-michelle-callahan/work-bullies_b_833977.html) (cited 18-Dec-2017).

The Bible reveals to us some of the causes of bullying behaviour:

- In the case of Joseph, it was **jealousy** from his brothers, which was inflamed by his prideful behaviour (Genesis 37).
- Goliath was convinced that his **power** could be used to bully anyone he wanted to, and which ironically made him vulnerable to young David and his slingshot (1 Samuel 17).
- The victim in Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan was picked on by thieves and robbers, and ignored by the religious establishment, because he was **vulnerable** as a single man travelling a dangerous road (Luke 10:25–37).
- Jesus was bullied perhaps more than anyone else in the Bible. We have graphic descriptions of his abuse and punishment including mocking, swearing, lashings, beatings, and then the horrific humiliation of the cross. It appears that those who treated him so poorly were mostly **afraid** of him, his wisdom, his miracles, his authority, his disciples, his popularity, and his claims to be the Christ (Matthew 27:11–56).

### Responding to Workplace Bullying as a Christian

So how do we respond to bullying and conflict from a Christian perspective? David Augsburger offers the following excellent guidelines:

- Conflict allows us to grow more like Christ (2 Corinthians 12:7–10).
- Peacemaking starts with our personal attitude, which in turn comes from a focus on God, not on the conflict (1 Peter 3:13–15).
- It is possible to reconcile unilaterally, but only if the past is forgiven completely (Philippians 4:2–9).
- Resolving conflict may require different methods at different times and places (1 Samuel 25:26–35; Esther 7:1–6; Proverbs 6:1–5; Acts 16:22–24; 22:22–23, 29).
- Differences of opinion are inevitable and usually acceptable (1 Corinthians 12).

- ☪ Reconciliation does not necessarily require giving up or giving in; loving confrontation may be preferable (Galatians 6:1–5).
- ☪ God reconciled all to himself, but we must pass this gift on to others to fully realise its benefits (Ephesians 4:29–32).
- ☪ Resolving conflict God’s way may require us to accept consequences and alter our behaviour (Ephesians 4:22–32).
- ☪ Justice is God’s, not ours (Luke 6:27–39).

Biblical peacemaking involves an active commitment to restore damaged relationships and have agreements that are just and satisfactory to everyone involved (1 John 3:18). A spirit of forgiveness, open communication, and cooperative negotiation may clear away the hardness of hearts left by conflict, and make possible reconciliation and genuine personal peace. True biblical vulnerability, honesty, and forgiveness can restore a person’s sense of value, both to God and to others, and lead to complete restoration of relationships (Galatians 6:1–3; Ephesians 4:1–3, 24).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> In “Workplace Conflict” in *The Complete Book of Everyday Christianity*. Edited by Robert Banks and R. Paul Stevens (Singapore: Graceworks, 2011), 212–213.

## Prayer:

To the one who loves peace and justice,

Forgive us when our lack of imagination or creativity stops us from seeing the way of peace.

Help us to be firm when we should stand.

Help us to be flexible when it is not our place to claim.

Help us to love you, and to love others, with our thoughts, words, and actions.

Thank you that suffering and conflict can bear fruit in us.

Help us to be peacemakers, and to stand up for justice.

Help us to remember Jesus when we have a desire for revenge.

AMEN

## Taking It Further:

1

Have you ever experienced bullying or seen it happen to someone close to you? What was the nature of the bullying? What were the consequences? Do you feel Dr Callahan's 10 points would have made a difference?

2

Look through the biblical examples of those who faced bullying. Choose one to examine in more detail. What parts of the story do you identify with? How could you use this story in helping to counsel others?

3

Work through the Scripture readings in David Augsburg's guidelines on responding to conflict and being a peacemaker. What deeper insights do you glean for a biblical response to conflict?

4

Read Jackie's story again. Imagine that she has come to you for advice in the midst of her experience of bullying. Write out the conversation you would have with her.

Chapter 8

# Toxic Workplaces