



**RESEARCH STUDIES**

*workplacebullying.org*

**The WBI Website  
2012 Instant Poll  
A- Why Bullying Happens**

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## WHY BULLYING HAPPENS

### WBI 2012-A Instant Poll

Workplace Bullying Institute Instant Polls are online single-question surveys that rely upon self-selected samples of individuals bullied at work (typically 98% of any sample). No demographic data are collected. Our non-scientific Instant Polls accurately depict the perceptions of workers targeted for bullying at work as contrasted with the views of all adult Americans in our scientific national surveys.

The 658 respondents to this survey were asked:

*Why does bullying in the workplace happen?* Check up to 4 factors. [which led to 2,384 votes]

The rank order and percentages for each response option were:

1	.21	<i>Bullies are not punished &amp; thrive</i>
2	.15	<i>Laws to stop it are either absent or too weak to be useful</i>
3	.13	<i>No one in the company/agency has the will to stop it</i>
4	.13	<i>Coworkers stand idly by &amp; fail to stop it</i>
5	.10	<i>The workplace culture rewards cutthroat behaviors</i>
6	.10	<i>A few hyper-aggressive individuals have psychological &amp; social problems</i>
7	.06	<i>Executives/owners/senior managers are the bullies</i>
8	.05	<i>Bullying is part of the larger society &amp; culture</i>
9	.03	<i>Bullies follow orders from the top</i>
10	.03	<i>No one in the company/agency has the power to stop it</i>
11	.01	<i>We humans are aggressive by nature; it is inevitable</i>
12	.007	<i>Targeted workers somehow invite their fate</i> [only 7/10 ths of 1%]

The top three reasons from the target's perspective are employer-focused. The absence of negative consequences (punishment) for bullies and lacking the will to stop it both reflect employer mishandling of bullying. Employers establish and maintain the work environment.

The absence (still the story in early 2012 in the U.S.), or weakness, of laws also contributes to employers' ability to ignore bullying. No policies are necessary in the absence of laws. That's why so few are created voluntarily.

Coworker failure to help is ranked fourth. At WBI we assert that no policies or laws would be required if witnesses did not shirk from their social responsibility to help their colleagues. The multiple reasons for bystander not intervening are built on decades of social psychological research. Simply put, coworkers fear for their own survival. Bullied targets understand this on some level even when they suffer consequences from the inaction.

Reason 5 is again work environment related. Reward theory explains most bullying. It brings positive outcomes for bullies. Observers of the work environment, which includes most employees who bother to pay attention, learn quickly that aggression pays in a bullying-prone workplace culture. Bullies act accordingly and personally benefit from the misconduct. Look no further for a rationale.

The bully's flawed personality is reason 6 (actually tied) with bullying's reward. Targets are more realistic than the naïve public. It is too easy to blame bullying on the aggressor's anti-social personality (bordering on psychopathic). In fact, bullying is a complex behavioral pattern that requires both a willingness to exploit and harm another person (that does not require psychopathology any more than an affinity for reality TV shows that use humiliation for entertainment) and a place where exploitation can happen (which is the work environment).

The lowest rank reason is that targets somehow invite the misery inflicted on them. It seems obvious that no one would welcome nearly daily intimidation and humiliation. Yet, the public view is that victims of any misfortune must have wanted to experience their fate. This is the core of rape myths (her skirts were too short), domestic violence myths (he's a great guy, she must do something to set him off), and bullying (you just have to learn to work with him and grow a thicker skin). This survey shows that bullied targets know they did nothing wrong. Their view is the accurate one.

Causes -- Work Environment: 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 7, 9 & 10; Societal: 2 & 8; People: 4, 6, 11 & 12

Here is a graphical summary.

