



**RESEARCH STUDIES**

*workplacebullying.org*

**The WBI Website  
2014 Instant Poll-B**

**Intentions of Workplace Bullies**

**Gary Namie, PhD - Research Director**

*Do not cite findings without crediting WBI*

© 2014 Workplace Bullying Institute, All rights reserved

## INTENTIONS OF WORKPLACE BULLIES

### WBI 2014-B Instant Poll

There has long been a debate about intentionality of perpetrators' action in workplace bullying. Were the tactics committed deliberately? In the earliest WBI definition of bullying, we included "deliberate." But as our legal education progressed and we began to lobby lawmakers to introduce our anti-bullying Healthy Workplace Bill, we learned that the law did not require the discovery of motive if the action happens. That is, the wrongdoing — bullying acts — was evidence of intent. No one has to divine the hidden goals of perpetrators. If they committed the act, they meant to.

Nevertheless bully apologists — bloggers and reporters for business media — like to state that most bullying is unintentional. We certainly allowed for "accidental" or inadvertent bullying in our book, *The Bully At Work* (Sourcebooks, 2009). However, we now believe that it is very rare, not common like the apologist believe.

WBI 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.

For this survey, we asked 817 respondents (bullied targets and witnesses) to describe the intentions of perpetrators they have experienced.

*Of the workplace perpetrators of bullying I've known, they?*

The percentages for each response option were:

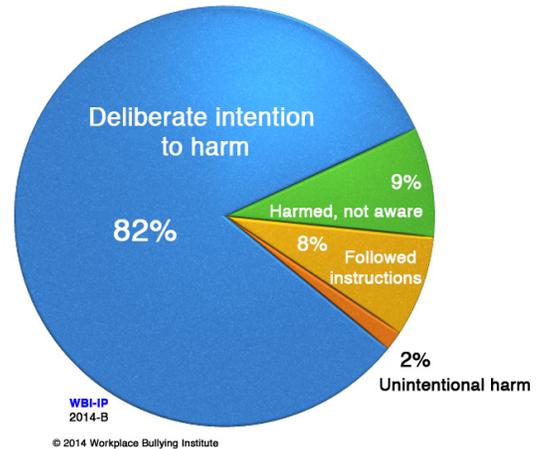
- .821 *acted with the deliberate personal intention to harm others*
- .086 *harmed others but were not aware of the consequences*
- .078 *followed instructions of superiors in ways that hurt others*
- .015 *never meant to harm others; were misunderstood*

In 91% of cases, the bullying was the result of the perpetrators' deliberate personal decision to act. That is, individuals most directly affected by bullying, targets and witnesses, seem to believe the actions were deliberate and malicious.

Malice involves the intent to inflict pain on others. Only 9% of respondents said the bullies were not certain of the impact of their actions. However, 98.5% of respondents were clear that their perpetrators were malicious.

Those on the outside looking in as disinterested observers are the only ones who like to say that workplace bullies are "misunderstood." Targets and witnesses, respondents in this survey, are not ambiguous about the claim. They believe it is false.

Originally, 823 respondents completed the survey. Only 6 chose the option "tried to harm others but failed." We excluded them from the findings above because of the low proportion of respondents it represented and the complicated set of reasons for the failure that was not explored in other response choices. Was the failure because of botched attempts to intimidate others? Or was a good manager present who stopped the actions before they could affect anyone? Because we cannot know the answer, we dropped the item.



Gary Namie, PhD  
WBI Research Director  
Daniel Christensen  
WBI Research Assistant

WORKPLACE  
**BULLYING**  
INSTITUTE  
*workplacebullying.org*