**Lateral Violence in the Workplace**

**Lateral Violence and bullying** has been extensively reported and documented among workplace teams, with serious negative outcomes for the employee, their team and the employer. These disruptive behaviors are toxic to the environment and teams and have a negative impact on retention of quality staff. Lateral violence and bullying should never be considered normally related to socialization nor accepted in professional relationships.

Lateral Violence, horizontal violence, bullying, are all labels for the same things. A lot of different names for it but what it is are…..***problem behaviors.*** Lateral Violence is hostile and aggressive behavior by an individual or group toward another individual or group. It is generally non-physical inter-group conflict that is manifested by overt and covert behaviors.

There are psychological, emotional and spiritually damaging behaviors that are projected on others, which can have devastating long-term effects on an individual.

Lateral Violence is a wide range of behaviors ranging from intentional, unintentional, thoughtless acts to purposeful and destructive acts meant to harm, intimidate or humiliate another group or individual.

Lateral Violence can be “random instances” to a pattern of repeated behaviors which create a culture or environment of hostility.

Lateral Violence comes in all shapes and sizes. Workplace violence and harassment experts identify the following behaviors that constitute Lateral Violence:

* *Aggressive or mocking body language such as raising eyebrows or making faces.*
* *Disruptive behavior that interferes with effective communication among colleagues and negatively impacts performance or outcomes.*
* *Verbal retorts, abrupt responses, vulgar language, sarcastic comments or retorts.*
* *Belittling gestures such as rolling of eyes, folding arms, staring into space when communication is being attempted by another.*
* *Undermining behavior such as constantly ignoring questions and/or devaluing comments.*
* *Criticizing or excluding individuals from discussion or controlling behaviors.*
* *Withholding needed information or advice.*
* *Sabotage such as setting up a new hire for failure, or tuning others against a person.*
* *Constantly confronting with negativity.*
* *Infighting and bickering.*
* *Scapegoating.*
* *Blaming or gossiping behind a colleague’s back.*
* *Humiliation and confrontations in public.*
* *Failure to respect privacy, and broken confidences.*
* *Shouting, yelling or other intimidating behaviors.*
* *Judging others on age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or size.*
* *Fault finding (nitpicking) different to those situations where professional and clinical development is required.*
* *Behaviors which seek to control or dominate (power “over” rather power “with.”)*
* *Elitist attitudes regarding work area, education, experience etc. “better than” attitude.*
* *Punishing activities by management or charge personnel who repeatedly send someone out of area, bad schedules or chronic heavy assignments.*
* *Physical violence, shoving, hitting, throwing objects.*

**Effects of Lateral Violence**  (W. Wilkie – 1996)

Lateral violence affects people progressively. Many people transition through these events and deal with their emotions, their environment and their job effectively. For others it becomes a day to day challenge.

Stage 1 – Activation of the fight or flight response

* Reduced self-esteem
* Sleeping disorders
* Free floating anxiety
* Doubt and confusion about self and what one deserves
* Low morale
* Eating disorders
* Physical symptoms (headache, stomach disorders, weight changes, hypertension)

Stage 2 – Neurotransmitters depleted with lack of sleep – fatigue – brain over stimulated and over sensitive.

* Difficulty with emotional control; bursting into tears or laughter or irritable and angry response.
* Difficulty with motivation – self-starter seems to be “burnt out.”
* Hypertension.
* Difficulty with concentration or forgetfulness.
* Nervous conditions.
* Apathy.
* Physical symptoms (cardiovascular disease, stomach disorders, headaches, hypertension, stress reactions.)
* Eating disorders.

Stage 3 - Brain’s circuit breakers activated

* A relative intolerance of sensory stimulation.
* A loss of ability to ignore things that before were manageable.
* Changed response patterns which superficially resemble a change of personality.
* Disconnectedness.
* Depression.
* Impaired personal relationships.
* Removal of self from workplace – psychologically, physically (sick leave, stress leave, resignation)
* Physical symptoms (as listed above)
* Suicide (successful or attempted)
* Loss of income, career sabotage

**Consequences of Lateral Violence: The Impact in the Environment**

* Threat to safety of employee, customer, and/or patient safety.
* Increase in errors
* Decreased satisfaction from customer and/or patient.
* Undermines trust in business.
* Decreased job satisfaction within team and employees.
* Increased absenteeism and stress related illnesses.
* Decreased employee engagement and commitment to organization.
* Increased staff turnovers and staff shortages.
* Decreased teamwork and efficiency of work flow.
* Potential for workplace violence increases.

**COMMITMENT TO ACTION**

Strategies for personal action to avoid lateral violence and create a plan for yourself.

1. Name the problem
2. Raise issue at staff meetings – break the silence about this issue.
3. Ask about a process for dealing with this issue in the workplace.
4. Engage in reflective practice. Keep a journal; raise your self-awareness about your own values, beliefs, and attitudes and your path for personal growth. *Ensure that you are part of the solution, not part of the problem.*
5. Ensure self-caring behaviors, counseling, peer support, good nutrition, adequate sleep, time out, a healthy lifestyle and happy in all aspects of your life.
6. Be willing to speak up when you witness it happening and name it for what it is.
7. Contact your management team or human services representative and discuss strategic options.



**Expected Behavior of those who call Themselves Professionals**

* Accept one’s fair share of the workload.
* Respect the privacy of others.
* Be cooperative with regard to the shared physical working conditions.
* Be willing to help when requested.
* Keep confidences.
* Work cooperatively despite feelings of dislike.
* Don’t denigrate to superiors or coworkers.
* Do address coworkers by the first name; ask for help and advice when necessary.
* Look to coworkers in the eye when having a conversation.
* Don’t be overly inquisitive about each others’ lives.
* Do repay debts, favors, and compliments, no matter how small.
* Don’t engage in conversation about a coworker with another coworker.
* Stand up for the “absent member” in a conversation when he/she is not present.
* Don’t criticize publicly.
* Keep your biases and language to yourself.
* Stay respectful and professional.