

Anger and Shame: Emotions of Bullying

Book: The Bully at Work: What You Can Do to Stop the Hurt and Reclaim Your Dignity On the Job

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Sometimes there are situations at work where you might get agitated and once you are home you feel emotionally drained and exhausted. Workplace bullying may be a factor. Bullying brings out strong feelings, often anger.

In a chapter on *Anger and Shame: Emotions of Bullying* Gary Namie and Ruth Namie explain that anger is not the real problem about bullying but it may serve as a mask to cover difficult emotions, which can include hurt, disappointment, jealousy, fear, shame, frustration or guilt. The authors propose that the emotional reaction of the person bullied, “the target”, serves the bully and allows that bully to duck responsibility.

Workplace bullying is common and creates an unbalanced workplace for everybody. The target’s most common reactions are transferred and presented as anger and anger is the target’s enemy.

The authors (p. 198-199) present indicators of anger:

- *flushed skin*
- *shallow breathing*
- *clammy skin*
- *rapid breathing*
- *tearfulness*
- *loud voice (if normally quiet)*
- *jitters*
- *light-headedness*
- *tensed muscles*
- *loss of concentration, and*
- *bulging veins.*

Anger can also be turned inward and become self-destructive, and may include

- *overeating,*
- *excessive drinking,*
- *excessive workers,*
- *trouble working and functioning adequately at home,*
- *blame self for everything that goes on around you, and*
- *rage at your partner or children?*

The authors discuss the importance of being constructive with anger. The goal is to let go of the anger. Acknowledging the anger and the emotions that come up is what creates a new person with a new perspective on managing the anger issues.

Gary and Ruth Namie (2003, p. 205) offer some suggestions for coping with anger:

- *Re-establish your boundaries.*
- *Use active listening to communicate your willingness to understand any problem.*
- *Exercise by running, walking, working out, swimming.*
- *Talk to friends, family, a professional, or all of them to sort out your feelings.*

“When you take responsibility for your feelings and emotions, you are released from the bond that ties you to the bully and the ongoing feeling of inadequacy. You choose to take care of yourself, rather than use the bully’s actions to dictate the destructive pattern of mistreatment.” (Gary Namie & Ruth Namie, 2003)

Another bullying dynamic is shame. Sometimes shame can well up and overwhelm the target of the bullying. It is very important to realize that shame is not guilt. In this chapter Gary and Ruth Namie explain the difference between shame and guilt and give ways for how people can work through the suffering and can heal from shame.

*“Guilt is what you feel when you make a mistake.
Shame is felt when you believe you are the mistake.”*

Shame usually shows itself when someone believes that something is really wrong with oneself and it gives this person the feeling of being inadequate, bad or defective. Targets tend to take on this feeling of shame and carry it with them.

There are ways to heal from shame. When a target recognizes a bully’s behaviors it is helpful to:

- *Contact past co-workers and ask them to remind you of your past good work with them.*
- *As you listen to the positive feedback you get, take time to let in the message that you are a good and competent worker.*
- *Identify the shaming messages you have internalized and the hurtful events you have experienced.*
- *Separate what is unreasonable and untrue from who you are.*

It is most important that your own self accepts who you are, and that the conflict and feeling of shame is not about you. The sooner you can acknowledge and accept that the bullying is not about you, the sooner you will heal from shame and let go of the feelings of anger and shame that come up when you interact with the bully at work.

Namie, G. & Namie, R. (2003). Anger and Shame: Emotions of Bullying. *The Bully at Work: What You can Do to Stop the Hurt and Reclaim Your Dignity On the Job* (pp. 197-207). Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, Inc.