

From the pages of the bullies and the bullied



ILLUSTRATION: EHSANUR RAZA RONNY

You may think that the phenomenon of bullying is only present at educational institutions, but in reality, you will find bullies no matter where you go. This inexplicable inherent need (?) of some people to unmask a vindictive stance of provocation to another is something many would never understand.

Wherever one ends up in life, groupings and politics are bound to happen, and with that, this experience will most certainly come up unless you are blessed with an impossibly friendly work environment. But even when these problems are present, nobody ever explicitly talks about such things, be it the bullies, the bullied or an omnipresent third-party: the silent observers of the scenario.

Bullying is never usually a one-off event, which if happens would class as harassment. Mostly taking place in a private setting, bullying is intended to incite distress, anxiety or to merely assert domination of one party over the other. Sometimes, it so happens that the bullies just want to get their way with something and at other times, the events are termed by them as just “friendly banter” or idle pastimes.

“When suddenly one fine morning a couple of guys who I thought were my friends

started bullying me on a matter as trivial as being the line-manager’s favourite, I found it difficult to understand what was happening to me, or why they were behaving the way they were. Not sure whether to objectively term it as “workplace bullying,” I was scared and worried to talk about it to another colleague and make this out to be a bigger deal than it was,” says Nehal Chowdhury*, a software development intern.

Similar stories have been shared by a number of students and employees, who have encountered bullying that made a lasting impact on their way of viewing the world around them. Walin Ahmed*, currently employed as a short-term consultant at a bank, shares his experience from the days when he faced institutional bullying. “I first came face-to-face with bullying back when I was a university student. My friends verbally abused me, that made me undermine my confidence and capability. The worst part of it was that they apparently did it just for the sake of doing it, without a motive. These repetitive events eventually damaged my sense of belongingness to this institution and its people. A place where healthy competition isn’t practiced, and nobody is there to hear

you out, is a place where I never felt at home.”

In several of the workplace bullying cases, the victims hesitate to voice their stories of abuses due to a lack of job security. Prevalent imbalanced power dynamics between the employer and employee provides an even more welcoming ground to abuse this relationship.

“I was an ambitious, young hard-worker when I joined my first job,” says Faisal Khan, brand manager at a reputed corporate. “A few months into it, my boss started bullying me, often in front of my peers. Back then, it never even occurred to me that I was being bullied. I thought he was just taking jabs at me for not being able to perform as per his expectations. But when it didn’t stop even after I put in extra effort and improved my performance, his crude words got to me and made me demotivated. I started getting increasingly anxious about going to work every morning, and lost confidence in my own abilities.”

Workplace bullying knocks the self-esteem right out of even the most resourceful and confident of people, belittling them so that they are less trusting of their instincts and judgement and are consequently left unfit to work. A report in 2015 came up with a

research that showed that job insecurity contributes to a climate that’s severely conducive to negative behaviours. A rising gig economy, possibility of lay-offs, and unavailability of HR support and policies make workplaces all the more vulnerable to bullying culture.

But what have the bullies got to say about these? On talking to a recent graduate from a reputed university currently employed as an engineer, he admits to have bullied his close friends from time to time, “To just blow-off some tension every now and then. I never intend for my words to harm anybody, because I don’t say these in a serious manner in the first place.” But you wouldn’t know how the receiver is construing your words as, would you? To which he says, “If they just come up to me and communicate their feeling of discomfort, then I would definitely stop.”

This is what is often the most effective and at the same time, the most daunting step to undertake to put a stop to bullying. Confronting the bully about how you truly feel about the words being used against you, may go a long way to ensure they don’t make a comeback. Acknowledge that there is a problem with the other party, instead of blam-

ing yourself, your confidence, or your work. Then document the incident, strategise, and do not hesitate to undertake necessary actions.

As for companies who wish to put an end to such employee grievances, besides having strict organisational policies that punish bullying behaviours, reward-mechanisms can be put up for the ones who are brave enough to come forward with bullying complaints or problems and are able to point it out to the management’s eyes. The workplace culture definitely needs to be one that allows employees to approach higher-ups as and when needed, because only then will the employees feel at home in a workplace.

*names have been changed to ensure discretion

REFERENCES

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Can debating help you in your career?

Of all the things Bangladeshi students have been excelling at, debating is among the most notable. Recently, Independent University Bangladesh (IUB) and Institute of Business Administration, University of Dhaka (IBADU), contested the finals of United Asian Debating Championships 2018 in Indonesia, turning the final into an all Bangladeshi affair. In addition to being a moment of national pride, it is worth mentioning that this activity can do wonders for you as an individual and your self-development.

Firstly, even before getting to your CV, remember that debating is an activity that combines two things; impressive presentation skills and quick thinking. Both

of these things are great assets to have during any interview or recruitment process. Given that most recruitment drives are becoming more and more activity driven, being able to talk smoothly and think quickly will set you apart from the get go. Years of university debating will set you up nicely for that.

I spoke to Rawnak Zahen Wasi, a recent graduate of IBA and someone who recently joined British American Tobacco Bangladesh. Rawnak is an accomplished debater, being one half of the IBA team that became Asian Champions at the Asian British Parliamentary Debating Championships 2017 (ABP) in Thailand. In his words, debating has a number of uses.

“While its one overarching activity, a number of things go into it,” Rawnak said. “Firstly, if you are a successful debater, you are obviously someone who can develop a competitive attitude and be a hard worker. But additionally, debating can include things such as coaching and organising, both of which give you different skill sets.”

During his University days, Rawnak trained the Bangladesh National Team for World Schools Debating Champions (WSDC) alongside training schools such as Mastermind International School and Rajuk Uttara Model College. “It showed that administrative bodies

trusted me to train their students, which shows that you are someone who is not just skilled individually, but can help others grow. This can set you apart as a leader and organizations look for leadership skills quite a bit these days.”

It is worth noting that debating success can come at two levels; national and international. Achievements at International level can set you apart as someone who is capable of competing with and overcoming international competitors. This is a unique advantage of doing something at an international stage as few other activities let you judge yourself at an international level.

Debating can also include organising. Most universities organise debate competitions, generally known as Inter-Varsity Debate Tournaments or IVs. The holistic organising experience requires balancing budgets, man-power, guests, time, administration etc to create a complete experience. Basically, challenging your management skills. The several high-pressure situations that you can encounter during the organising process will give you solid training for professional situations.

Additionally, being in and around the debating circuit gives you a chance to network with similarly driven people from other universities and institutions, alongside with debating alumnus from your own university, who are likely to be well positioned in the professional sector. While this is not something you can put in your CV, knowing smart people always helps.

The benefits from having a sustained stay in debating are manifold, ranging from essential professional skills to a diverse CV. It’s probably worth a shot to drop by your university debate club and see what it’s like to talk your heart out for seven minutes. You might just find a new calling that also boosts your CV while you’re at it.

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Making a DIFFERENCE

Bangladesh is rapidly moving towards middle income status by 2021. Our businesses definitely offer immense opportunities for the growing economy and this diversity needs a stage for the stories untold. See Bangladesh make its mark on the global map as Making a Difference brings you our proudest success stories from across the country.

Fostering creativity in your company

Corporations generally paint a pretty bleak picture of themselves. The companies and their employees are seen as uptight, serious, formally dressed robots who crunch numbers all day long and follow orders blindly. But the times are changing, and millennials like companies that encourage creativity and out-of-the-box thinking.

While corporate jobs probably don’t need their employees to be as creative as, say, a graphics designer at a digital agency, they do require some level of creativity. One of the major tasks in corporate jobs is problem solving, and being creative about it is almost always a good idea. Here are some little steps you can take to encourage your employees to be more creative in their day-to-day work.

CREATE A REWARD MECHANISM

Give your employees a little pat on the back whenever they figure out a new way to solve problems, or if they discover a way to get things done quicker. Encourage healthy competition because that gets the creative juices flowing.

ENCOURAGE COLLABORATION

Cross-functional teams always come up with innovative ideas. Debates and discussions among employees help them bring brand new, foolproof ideas to the table.

ENSURE WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Tiredness is inversely proportional to creativity, so make sure your employees don’t get burned out. Going to work should not feel like a chore to them,

rather they should enjoy the work. Give them the right challenges, and reward them for it. But do not let them bite off more than they can chew.

