

7 tips for standing up to bullies at work

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Some behaviours can't go overlooked, argues this opinion piece. Here are seven tips to keep in mind when dealing with sexual harassment and bullying.

[Harvey Weinstein](#), Matt Lauer, Kevin Spacey and – in our own backyard – Don Burke. The list of high profile, powerful men falling from their pedestals thanks to the courage of those standing against them, is long and getting longer. But what's especially shocking about many of these cases is how long their disgraceful behaviour was allowed to continue.

The CEO in charge of *Channel 9* at the time of Don Burke's alleged offending David Leckie is only now speaking out against him. In an astonishing admission Leckie described Burke as "a dreadful, dreadful piece of work" and a "really dirty old man". It demands the question, why didn't Leckie or his predecessor Sam Chisholm – who described Burke as a "grub" and a "disgrace" – do more to stop him?

It is unquestionably the role of organisational leaders to create a work environment that is free of risks to health and safety. That includes one in which women are able to go about their work without fear of sexual harassment or assault. The harsh reality is though David Leckie and Sam Chisholm are far from the only CEOs to have allowed sexual predators and bullies to get away with wreaking havoc.

Standing up

We can't afford to sit back and wait for leaders to do the right thing. We all need to speak up and take a stand against workplace harassment and bullying of any kind. Here are some of the most important things any of us can do when we witness or experience inappropriate behaviour at work:

1. *Take responsibility.* Assume responsibility for not only your own health and wellbeing but also that of other people you work with. Care when someone is being mistreated and make it your responsibility to take a stand.
2. *Pick your battles.* Let's face it, some less than ideal behaviours can be glossed over. However, others need to be strongly challenged. Never accept behaviours that are having a serious detrimental impact to you or others. Sexual harassment and bullying fall into that category.
3. *Speak up.* Let people know how their behaviour impacts other people. As tempting as it may be, staying silent is never a good choice when the wellbeing of people is being undermined. It can take a great deal of courage, but it's critical that you find the strength to voice your concerns.
4. *Be direct.* Honesty is critical to building awareness and influencing the behaviour of a bully. Clearly communicate what behaviour needs to stop and request that happen immediately. Avoid lowering the standard of your own behaviour – don't yourself become rude or aggressive.
5. *Focus on tough love.* In some instances, your 'push back' will help the perpetrator to understand their behaviour is wrong and harmful. That's only likely to happen if you are honest about your concerns, but also deliver your feedback respectfully.
6. *Ask for support.* If you don't feel comfortable or able to challenge a bully directly, ask for support from your manager, a colleague or HR. It can be difficult, but it's important you don't leave bullying unaddressed for fear of confronting the issue.

7. *Seek help externally.* If you have no one to turn to at work, or if the organisation you work for does not take your complaints seriously, consider looking for help elsewhere. One option is to lodge an application for an order to stop workplace bullying with The Fair Work Commission.

Turning a blind eye to the types of [workplace bullying and predatory behaviour](#) we have seen reported in the media is inexcusable. No amount of money or business opportunity can justify the inaction we have seen from far too many leaders.

It really isn't too much to ask, that those people who behave disgracefully are held accountable. If you find yourself fighting a losing battle, it's time to ask yourself if your organisation is led by the type of people you want to work for.

At the end of the day if destructive or unlawful behaviour is allowed where you work, it's time to move on. Look for an employer who is committed to honouring their duty to protect you and your colleagues from harm.