

Constructive criticism or bullying?

The difference between constructive criticism and bullying is quite ambiguous, when a colleague or manager tries to provide feedback concerning an employee's performance for example, the line is blurred, with the recipient believing any critical feedback is bullying.

In order to both handle constructive criticism and know when you're being unfairly picked on, you need to know the definition, and differences, of each.

Constructive criticism is valid and well reasoned opinions or advice, but whilst it may include negative comments, its intention is to help you improve your work or skills. It is not intended to have a detrimental effect on the recipient's moral.

The fact of the matter is; you will experience constructive criticism. Everyone does because no one is perfect. Don't take it personally; its helping you improve

When receiving constructive criticism, take in everything that is said. If you're still not sure about what you're doing incorrectly, use the criticism as motivation to become better.

Constructive criticism will focus upon:

- Actions and behaviour focusing on what the employee has done or not done,
- Facts, with specific examples of behaviour that has been inappropriate and an explanation of why it was inappropriate,
- Future improvement, for example requiring the employee to do something differently or make changes.

Bullying on the other hand is a form of verbal or physical abuse which is mean spirited and offers nothing to solve any problem or offer solutions for a situation.

Whilst constructive criticism is necessary to learn, bullying is not, if you feel you are being bullied, firstly speak to another member of staff, ask do they feel bullied? If someone else also views it as bullying it is bullying, secondly speak to the person (if you feel strong enough) whilst it may be intimidating, explain to them, the way their criticism is being received, explain that you would like

to know specifically what you're doing wrong or how you can improve.

If the situation doesn't get better, or they don't offer advice, speak to your SoR representative, Regional Officer or TUIR@SoR.org.

Bullying or Destructive criticism may involve

- Aggressive behaviour, such as yelling and shouting,
- Personal insults and put downs to the recipient,
- Allocating the blame rather than responsibility (What did you do now? For example,),
- Focusing on how awful the situation is, rather than on future improvements or rectification of the problem

Effects of Bullying and Harassment:

For the organisation:	For the individual:
Rising levels of absenteeism	Sleeplessness
Premature ill-health and retirement	Lethargy
High levels of staff turnover	Loss of appetite
Reduced productivity for victims and colleagues	Migraines/severe headaches
Cost of potential litigation	Mood swings
Damage to any reputation	Skin problems
	Anxiety
	Stress
	De-motivation

The above list is not meant to be exhaustive; more information is available on the Andrea Adams Consultancy website at:

<http://www.andreaadamsconsultancy.com/>

The Department for Work and Pensions equality team has developed a framework to make clear distinctions between the two management styles.

Firm but Fair manager	Bullying or Harassment
Consistent and fair	Aggressive, inconsistent and unfair
Determined to achieve the best results, but reasonable and flexible	Unreasonable and inflexible
Knows their own mind and is clear about their own ideas, but willing to consult with colleagues and staff before drawing up proposals	Believes they are always right, has fixed opinions, believes they know best and not prepared to value others peoples opinion
Insists upon high standards of service in quality of and behaviour in the team	Insists upon high standards of service and behaviour but blames other if things go wrong
Will discuss in private any perceived deterioration before forming views or taking action and does not apportion blame on others when things go wrong	Loses temper, regularly degrades people in front of others threatens official warnings without listening to any explanation
Ask for people’s views, listens and assimilates feedback	Tells people what is happening, does not listen

There is no specific legislation in the United Kingdom which specifically deals with the contentious issue of workplace bullying; however, there are a number of laws which action can be taken under:

- **The Equality Act 2010**, (provides protection from discrimination, harassment and victimisation on grounds of sex, race, disability, sexual orientation and religion and belief) In Northern Ireland the Equality Act is not in place, Discrimination Acts still apply,
- **Health and Safety at Work Act 1974** (The Act places a legal duty on employers to ‘ensure so far as is reasonably practicable the health, safety and welfare at work of all their employees’ Incidents of bullying and harassment could be deemed to damage employees health and welfare,
- **Protection from Harassment Act 1997** (The act states that a person must not pursue a course of conduct which amounts to the harassment of another, and which they know or ought to know amounts as such. As

a result of a recent ruling by the Court of Appeal, employers can be held vicariously liable for incidents or harassment by an employee.

Other relevant legislation includes:

- Crime and disorder Act 1998,
- Criminal Justice and Public Disorder Act 1995,
- Employment Act 2002,
- Employment Rights Act 1996.