

Bullying, Harassment & Intimidation in the Shipping Industry



Value, Respect, Dignity...

In the multicultural and fast changing world of shipping, people of the same or different nationality, mentality and mindset who most probably have never met in the past, are required to establish in a short period of time a common communication channel, work together, cooperate on a daily basis, live on board, give orders and follow instructions.

In such working environments, offensive or hurtful behaviors amongst colleagues may arise whenever arguments take place or people surpass the set limits or simply because these types of behavior will make them feel 'dominant' against others.

These behaviors, otherwise called **Bullying, Harassment & Intimidation** having as a target to humiliate, embarrass or frighten the receiver, lead people to distance themselves from their routine in the working environment. The consequences of acting in such a way are devastating as people are afraid of 'bullies', they lose their interest and confidence at work, it becomes difficult for them to focus on their duties, and finally they start making mistakes which can be catastrophic for the safety management and operation of the fleet.

Traits such as bullying, harassment and intimidation are behavioral characteristics that appear in the maritime industry

These behaviors, have undoubtedly a negative impact on peoples' psychology, inner peace and performance at work and should be avoided.

Their impact should be thoroughly explained to both seafarers and shore based employees of a shipping company by highlighting the importance of maintaining a safe and efficient working environment in which all people are respected and valued.

The company should always maintain a clear and strict position against these types of behavior and zero tolerance towards them by implementing fair procedures dealing promptly with any complaints that may be raised allowing employees to feel they are in a safe environment and their privacy is respected.

All members of the shipping company whether they are shore based staff or seafarers must be respected and valued. They should be aware that there is zero tolerance against such behaviors and they can always report and seek for support from their superiors

What characterizes these behaviors?

Recent research has shown that those who experience any type of bullying, harassment or intimidation, do not report it because they think no one will believe them and they will not receive any support, or because they think they will be subject to reprisals or simply they are not in position to identify or recognize such behaviors at first place 'believing' or 'convincing' themselves that this attitude is normal.

Harassment

This may be characterized as any unwelcome and inappropriate conduct which, intentionally or otherwise, creates feelings of unease, humiliation, embarrassment, intimidation or discomfort to the person on the receiving end.

Bullying

This is a form of harassment in which a group of people or an individual may become frightened or intimidated because of negative or hostile behavior of others. Bullying often involves misuse of power or position. Bullies pick on people – whether junior, senior or of the

same rank - that they see as being weaker than themselves. It is frequently persistent and unpredictable. It may be vindictive, cruel or malicious.

Intimidation

It is an unlawful act of intentionally coercing or frightening someone to do (or to not do) something against their will usually by threatening violence.

The above behaviors are viewed as destructive and can affect the daily efficiency of a seafarers' work on board. Research has shown that victims of such conduct are likely to develop the same behavioral characteristics and symptoms suffered by 'abuse victims'.

If a crew member finds another person's behavior insulting or offensive or threatening, it is most likely that they are being harassed or bullied.

How can we identify a 'victim'

A victim can be identified through their behavioral changes.



- They might develop increased difficulties cooperating in tasks assigned to them on board. They may develop difficulties in completing tasks or their efficiency is noticeably lower than usual.
- Agitation and constant alertness are also traits that are found in victims followed by psychosomatic discomforts such as recurring headaches, stomach cramps, muscle pains as well as insomnia and stress.

It should be emphasized that a bully does not have to be someone of large physical build who shouts or taunts. They can be of smaller or weaker stature but nonetheless make individuals' lives miserable through unpleasant words or actions. Bullying or harassment amongst seafarers can be a subtle and insidious process leading the victim to doubt their own judgement later leading them to thinking that they are the one at fault.

Harassment and bullying whether it takes place at the office or on board the vessel or during communication between office & fleet is unacceptable

Reporting of bullying or harassment should be encouraged within the company in order for an investigation to take place after each incident and also deal with false accusations.

Shore Staff & Mariners

People decide to work in a shipping company or go to sea to earn a living, support themselves and their families and build a career which is interesting and at the same time challenging and enjoyable. Harassment and bullying quickly spoil an individual's working life. They cause stress, loss of self-esteem and confidence, and can lead to depression and mental breakdown.

The fleet

The safe and efficient operation of a ship depends on the ability of shipping professionals i.e. seafarers and shore staff, to co-operate and work together harmoniously and communicate with the office effectively. Good teamwork depends on mutual respect, trust, and the willingness of everyone on board and ashore to operate the ship in the most efficient way. Bullying and harassment poison relationships between individuals, damages teamwork, and discourages those who are the 'victims' from putting any effort into their work.

The shipping company

Apart from the ethical considerations, the bottom line is that such behaviors are bad for business. They result in reduced work performance, absenteeism and resignations, the possibility of legal proceedings and negative publicity. In many cases a bullied person identifies the bully as the company's representative, further worsening relations and leading to greater conflict.

What could be done?

- A victim of such circumstances will usually not speak out about their ordeal. Speak up if you notice someone being bullied.
- Take action if you are able to identify any type of bullying.
- The way you treat other people inspires them to do the same. Do not be a bully yourself and protect potential victims.
- Make sure a culture exists on board where people talk to each other and not about each other behind each other's backs.
- Approach the victim and encourage them to confide in you or a fellow crew member that they feel more comfortable with.
- Interview people at regular intervals in an effort to identify unpleasant behaviors.
- Try and understand the 'bully' and their behavior.
- Encourage people to seek help and support through the Complaints Procedures.
- Promote Value, Respect, Dignity & Anti racism



- Contribute to drawing up a common personnel policy or common agreements that prevent bullying.
- Maintain a clear policy and procedures against such behaviors.
- Record keeping by the shipping company of any such incidents followed by an investigation does have a positive effect.
- Implement and follow a strict no tolerance policy on board and at the office.
- Managers of the company & ship Officers should be very good role models. Inform the people that they can come to you as a manager if they are facing any problems.
- Encourage teamwork and seek for relevant training.

Making 'prevention' a habit



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