

Megan Hills interviews
Rhonda Coles,
Think Learn Succeed Associate



The great ‘bully buster’

“Aggressive, demanding and obnoxious.” This was Rhonda Coles’ description of a female colleague’s behaviour when Rhonda first began her career as a social worker. “Sure, everyone has their bad days, but this was ongoing. This was bullying.” Perplexed, Rhonda sought advice from another colleague who said, “Give her something of what she has given you.” Being a mirror for a moment helps bullies to see themselves, and to realise that you are not an easy target.

“So I ‘bit back’ in a very similar style to her, and stated clearly that I did not appreciate her behaviour. The bully tried to blame it on other people and circumstances, but I held firm and her approach flipped. We actually became good friends after that.”

“Bullying behaviour comes from low self-esteem,” Rhonda explained, now a corporate trainer and expert in managing workplace conflict. “Still, bullying is psychological abuse and needs to be addressed as soon as it’s identified.”

Rhonda’s top three tips on how to tackle a bully:

1. Confront them If you are the one being bullied, try to be firm and assert that this behaviour is not acceptable.

2. Involve Others If an independent approach feels unsafe, then have your manager and/or human resources manager present for a meeting with the bully (the person being bullied should still address the behaviour, not a supervisor, otherwise the bullying is likely to escalate afterwards).

3. Stop the bully turning into the victim When confronted, a bully is likely to ‘explode’ with indignation and throw the blame onto someone else. Alternatively, the bully might give a surprised reaction and use submissive behaviour to portray themselves as the victim. Ask the bully to take responsibility for their own behaviour and have them suggest what they can do to change this situation.

What Rhonda Coles says about TLS

“I sat in on one of Eleanor Shakiba’s conflict management programs and found that she has a very generous approach to hearing what another person’s needs are. At the same time she has an excellent sense of boundaries. Eleanor always ensures there is a strategy in place to manage a potentially difficult situation.”

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