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# Shutting down workplace bullying

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Kay Fittes  
CEO, High-Heeled Success

Many women experience workplace bullying during in their careers: an employee, peer or even a boss you puts you down, criticizes you in meetings or sabotages your success.

According to [Kieran Snyder](#), a linguist and blogger who conducted a 2014 workplace study in interruptions during workplace conversations, men interrupt women three times more often than other men.

While interruptions alone may not be bullying, one only has to look as far as the spring election debates to see the effect that interruptions, disrespect and incivility can have on a person's reputation and self-esteem.

Men can be bullied at work, but women are especially susceptible. And sometimes women bully other women, too. Regardless of who starts it, we all know this: Women need to feel empowered to navigate conflict at work.

The best way to fight office bullying is to confront it when it occurs. Here are seven ways to prevent and stop bullying at work:

**1. Recognize what is happening and respond immediately.** If your instincts tell you are being sabotaged at work, listen. Women tend to think their coworkers will be their friends. Sometimes that is true and sometimes it is not.

**2. Confront or challenge the bully.** Be smart and strategic, not reactive or vindictive. Do not allow poor behavior to go unchecked.

A bully seeks a victim, so as long as the bully knows he or she can intimidate you, harassment will continue. Once a bully believes you will go toe-to-toe with them, respect for you will rise.

**3. Start with a look and one word.** A direct look, raised eyebrow and the "death stare" will serve you well. Sometimes off-color jokes or negative references can be stopped with one word such as "Really?" or an incredulous look. Monitoring smiling here is absolutely critical — especially for women. Smiling while delivering a riposte undercuts the message that you are displeased or insulted.

**4. Try a little humor.** Was the comment made to you or about you demeaning, sexist, trivializing or just unprofessional? Sometimes you can use humor to defuse a situation and turn a foe into a friend.

**5. Create alliances at work.** Identify who the power players are and be friendly with them. These friends will back you up when you need them, just as you will for them.



Provided  
Kay Fittes is CEO of High-Heeled Success, a women's business coaching and career consultancy she founded and leads.

**6. Develop strong body language and communication skills.** Be clear with your boundaries and make certain you are focused on business. Be assertive so you don't act or sound like a potential target.

**7. Attack bullies with aplomb.** Avoid the highest level of response, which is to contact the human resources department or pursue litigation. Litigation will take an emotional and financial toll that your career may not survive. It may offer the prospect of good news financially, but the chances of winning are not necessarily good.

For women who need more information, I will host a workshop on "Kick Conflict to the Curb: Steps for Coping with Conflict at Work" on March 5 from 9 a.m.-4 p.m. at the Crowne Plaza Cincinnati in Blue Ash. Focus of the workshop is on recognizing, preventing and stopping bullying in the workplace.

*Kay Fittes is CEO of High-Heeled Success, a women's business coaching and career consultancy she founded and leads. For information on the bullying workshop or other events, go to [www.highheeledsuccess.com](http://www.highheeledsuccess.com) or call Fittes at (513) 561-4288.*