Companies would have heard about ‘workplace bullying’, especially in Australia where the Fair Work Commission (FWC), has begun hearing workplace bullying complaints since January 2014 (See the FWC's Anti Bullying Benchbook for information about the national workplace bullying legislation).

Should companies and organisations be worried? Most definitely!

While the FWC can make an order for workplace bullying ‘to stop’ once it’s satisfied that workplace bullying exists, and that it’s likely to re-occur without the intervention of various orders...the main concern of businesses should be that these morally corrupt deviants (workplace bullies), can financially ruin any company. It’s not just the potential that a single bully ‘target’ can still launch an incredibly damaging civil law suit against the company...it’s the fact that while the workplace bully remains in the workplace that ‘risk’ will never go away.

Know Bull! files reveal that in 100% of workplace bullying events, ‘deviant’ behaviours were also being perpetrated against other staff in the company (such as breaches of the Anti-Discrimination Act, Harassment, etc), and the company itself (fraud and theft).

From a statistical point of view...the further up the corporate ladder the workplace bully is...the greater the criminal offence. It’s not just the anti-bullying laws companies need to be concerned about...that’s only a fraction of the real cost (and risk), of keeping a workplace bully. The following is a small portion of ‘proof’ provided by a ‘target’ of a CEO workplace bully. If this CEO was in your company, what would you do? After all, under the ‘new’ anti-bullying laws you need to have plans in place to deal with these exact situations if and when they arise.
Know Bull! question:
At what point did you realise you were the ‘target’ of a workplace bully?

‘Target’ answer:
It was about 5 months before I left, and after I took a friend’s advice and began speaking with a lawyer. At our first meeting, the lawyer (Steve) was the one who said that I was a target of a workplace bully.

The truth is, I’m not a stupid person. But after hearing what Steve said I still had to do some research to find out what exactly workplace bullying was.

And as I continued reading, everything began falling into place. It was like I’d been doused with iced water and had suddenly woken up. The treatment, the harassment, the tearing down, how one day my work was considered great...only to find later that I’m facing so-called concerns about my work performance? None of it made sense to me at the time. I just kept putting in the hours, hoping that the value of my work would once again be recognised. That I’d once again be seen as the conscientious worker that I was. But no matter how hard, or how long I worked...I was constantly belittled and humiliated, and nothing was quite good enough. What I was reading about workplace bullying on my home computer was almost a carbon copy of how my working life had been the previous 3 months.

I began to berate myself. How could I be so stupid as to not see what was going on? But there were more questions than answers. Like, Why on earth would someone want to destroy me, and a career that I’d worked so hard for? What sort of person does these horrible things to someone with no apparent reason? What did I do to deserve this? And what kind of monster would threaten not only my financial security, but the financial security of my child as well?

First I was shell-shocked, then I was angry. And it took me quite some time after I left that workplace to even begin to wrap my head around what had occurred - simply because I left that job with PTSD, and a couple of other health issues.

I actually took Steve as my witness to the ‘ambush meeting’ that took place about a month before I left. I could tell after the meeting as I walked Steve to his car that something was clearly on his mind...he was utterly silent. Then he turned to me and said, “What I’ve just witnessed has left me shocked. Never have I seen workplace bullying to the extent that I just saw in that room. Promise me, please promise me that you won’t stay there. Run as fast as you can from this place, and never look back.”

At the time, I was actually too shell-shocked...it was years before they materialised. That’s how damaging and soul-destroying workplace bullying is.

Know Bull! question:
And when the answers came, what were they?

‘Target’ answer:
Well, I finally realised there was no way I could have anticipated at the time that I was going to be the target of a workplace bully. Actually...the term workplace bully is far too kind in my opinion...I prefer to call this particular workplace bully a psychopath...because that’s what he was. I couldn’t have known what lay ahead, simply because I’d never experienced, or
witnessed workplace bullying prior to this. I basically had no reference point. Like most people, I went to work...to work, and up until that point I guess I’d been lucky that I hadn’t come across or experienced workplace bullying. So when the workplace bullying occurred, I was totally unprepared.

Secondly, I realised that the question about, what had I done to deserve this...was redundant. The truth is, I didn’t do anything wrong. And this is where I found there’s a problem with understanding workplace bullying.

As a target, the workplace bully heaps all kinds of hurt and punishment on you. And as human beings we tend to associate any sort of punishment...as the result of doing something wrong...like when we were punished as children. So without realising it, we grow up with this notion that we only get punished...if we do something wrong. For example run a red light, and get punished with a ticket. But when it comes to workplace bullying...the same doesn’t apply. Because people do get punished by workplace psycopaths without having done anything wrong. Does that make sense?

And as an extension of that comment, I also realised that there would probably be many more questions than answers for some time, because you can’t apply a logical framework to a situation or series of events that are basically...illogical. And that’s what workplace bullying is...it’s illogical. There’s no sense to it...you can’t justify it...it’s illogical.

The thing is, when you leave a workplace where bullies are protected...not only do you leave with your career in tatters...you leave with a lot of unresolved issues and questions.

For quite some time you feel raw...very raw. Because you’ve been through one of the most horrific attacks on your credibility, your character, your nature, your good name, and the prospect of finding another job without a work reference covering the years you were employed with the company - diminishes your opportunity to find work, plus as I later found out, people leave their jobs emotionally and physically damaged.

And what keeps going around and around in your head is the statement...I did nothing wrong to deserve this. What makes the situation far worse, is that the workplace bully...the psycopath whose actions put you in this situation...is not, and is never likely to be held accountable for the all-out assault they’ve perpetrated on you. They keep their job...they go on to bigger and better jobs...they’re never made accountable. That’s the part that really stings! Believe me...you stay angry for a very, very long time. And the damage doesn’t end there either.

Know Bull! question:
What do you mean when you say the damage doesn’t end there either?

‘Target’ answer:
From my own perspective, I found that the effects of workplace bullying follows you. I don’t know if this is true for others who have lived through workplace bullying...but it was in my case.

Once you’ve been a target of a workplace bully, you become familiar with various behaviours and actions that workplace bullies use. In other words...you recognise the tactics that these psycopaths use to destroy others in the workplace. And once you recognise these tactics...if you see them being used in another workplace down the track...you’re instantly aware of what’s going on. You don’t intentionally look for them (the bullying behaviours)...but you instantly recognise them when you see them...you can’t help it.
Sometimes, if the workplace bully is using similar tactics to the ones that were used on you...what I found is that this triggers a kind-of recall...where you relive physically and emotionally the workplace bullying that you previously experienced. Sometimes, just witnessing someone else being subjected to workplace bullying is enough to make make relive your own experience. And this can happen time and time again. The effects of workplace bullying don’t stop simply because you leave the affected workplace. That would have to be one of the most erroneous beliefs about workplace bullying ever to exist.

Know Bull! question:
You mentioned that you stay angry for a very, very long time. Could you expand on that?

‘Target’ answer:
It’s the injustice that leaves you angry. All I know is that what this person did...the actions that he perpetrated...were criminal in nature...make no mistake...it was an assault. And even though workplace bullying has only recently been classified in Australia as a criminal offence, it doesn’t belie the fact or negate the seriousness of the crime he committed. He was never held accountable. And where’s there’s no accountability...resolution is extremely difficult. When a society can’t, or won’t hold its criminals accountable for the crimes they commit, if they’re actually rewarded for their behaviour as workplace bullies are...then we’re likely to see more of the massacre-type situations...where a target obtains a weapon and then shoots up his/her workplace, or school...including the bullies.

It’s undeniable...workplace bullying changes you. And sometimes you have to dig deep and try to remember the person you were before the workplace bullying came into your life. I try not to focus on the anger. But I also think as long as there’s injustice...a little of that anger does remain.

Would I like to see the workplace bully dead? Yes...most definitely...and I’m sure most targets would say the same. Would I ever seek this bully out to harm him? Luckily for him or any other workplace bully...No...because it’s not in my nature. But, having said that, if I came across an overturned boat and the bully was bobbing up and down in the water gasping for air...would I save him? No. I’d more than likely see the situation as an ‘act of divine intervention’...then I’d probably hang around long enough for the bubbles to stop. Does this make me a bad person? No, I don’t think so, just human.

Know Bull! question:
You’ve mentioned the workplace bully. Is there anything you recall from early on that might have indicated he was a workplace bully?

‘Target’ answer:
No, not in the slightest. But as I mentioned, up until then I’d neither experienced or witnessed workplace bullying. I didn’t know the signs. Perhaps I was lucky...or maybe I was just naive. Of course I knew that bullies could exist in the school setting...but I never dreamed...not even for an instant that I would come across them in the workplace. But after knowing what I do now, there were certain personality traits of the CEO that did stand out from outset.

I could understand why the organisation hired him in the first place. The organisation was an older organisation, a bit formal I guess you could say, and the average age of associates was around the mid-late fifties. Even at my first job interview with the company I would describe the CEO predominantly as...charismatic. He did a fair degree of ‘name-dropping’, was egotistical...and seemed to know a little about a lot of things. He was appointed to his role about 4 weeks before I was.

After working with the company for a few weeks, and directly with the CEO, I discovered that his knowledge of most things was only superficial at best. He was glib...if you scratched the surface there really wasn’t much in the way of substance. But, he used his charm, or charisma if you like...to essentially fool people...especially the governing body into thinking he knew what he was doing, when in actual fact, he didn’t.

So I could see why the governing body appointed him. From a distance the CEO appeared as knowledgable, charming, politically-connected...and represented the go-getter they were seeking to modernise their aging organisation. In other words, they bought into the con.

It was probably around 12 months in...that I had a pretty good idea of how much he really didn’t know. The bulk of the work fell on myself and the 2IC. Between us we managed various Boards and committees in addition to the requirements of our official jobs. The 2IC was a former work colleague of the CEO...that’s how he was appointed to the organisation. He (the 2IC)
was fairly unassuming, quiet, he occupied himself mostly with IT issues in the office, and a charity organisation he belonged to. Character-wise, he was the total opposite to the CEO.

The organisation itself was a membership organisation, and was in decline. The governing body wanted the organisation rejuvenated in order to arrest that decline. The CEO had essentially, up to this point, been simply promulgating that drastic and far-reaching changes were going to occur. He hadn’t actually done anything...just talked. But none-the-less his talk had created a great deal of resistance, simply because he failed to take into account the demographics of the membership. The membership essentially saw the CEO as a steamroller, and it worried them greatly. By default, when I began meeting the members of the Boards and Committees I was entrusted with...my appointment was seen as the flunky from head office, who was appointed by the steamrolling CEO. I certainly had my work cut out for me. The members of these Boards and Committees weren’t just any average people...they represented the top layer of business throughout Australia...and they certainly weren’t idiots. But I also knew what I was doing. So by the time the accolades starting coming within a few months of my appointment...I had gained the trust and respect of all Board and Committee members bar one...who later turned out to be a protector and enabler of the bully CEO.

Meanwhile, back at the head office the Strategic Plan to accommodate the governing body’s wishes, had to be developed. Now while I expected that a CEO may not have a complete working knowledge of the entire Strategic Planning process...I expected that he would at least have a general overview. Nothing could have been further from the truth. And while the 2IC seemed marginally more competent than the CEO...he too was overwhelmed and out of his depth. Which meant that the overall Strategic Plan...and other associated plans and strategies engineered to lift the organisation from decline...by default became my responsibility. That’s when I realised that my appointment was not so much based on my ability to perform the functions of the role I was given...but on the gravity of a number of strategic planning successes contained within my resume. So prior to every meeting the CEO had with the governing body...I had to coach him...sometimes for hours. But not just on the progress of the strategic plan...I also had to anticipate likely questions that may arise...and the appropriate responses. I provided data, detail and content. He was often away from the office...interstate, or just not available...and it became necessary for me to spend time at his desk drafting, correcting, and responding to detailed correspondence from the governing body, etc. There were many occasions where he’d call me from interstate, or wherever he was...requesting me to access his computer and take care of various business. That’s how I knew he spent his workday mostly viewing porn and other things.

When he left his office he’d never turn his computer system off...he just left it in stand-by. So the moment I moved the mouse his computer would spring to life...and quite often there’d be numerous, open webpages with incredibly confronting pornographic images. I never knew if he simply forgot to close the webpages, or he just didn’t care. But he was into some really revolting things involving animals, or young children and teenage girls...yes, he was a paedophile as well.
And I’m *not* just talking about the occasional dirty picture. There was reams of it. And I wasn’t the only staff member that had the misfortune of seeing these images. Consequently, our network had to be constantly scrubbed clean due to viruses and trojans that these files undoubtedly contained.

On those occasions when the CEO *was* in the office...and if he *wasn’t* entertaining his mistress in there...he was spending hours of work time viewing these images and videos. The date and time stamps in his computer history showed this time, and time again.

**Know Bull! question:**
Weren’t you concerned when you gathered the proof about the bully, that you might be breaching privacy legislation?

**‘Target’ answer:**
Of *course* I was. But by that stage I’d hired a lawyer who was familiar with workplace law, and he’d already informed me in no uncertain terms that the goal of the workplace bully was to have me dismissed. And that considering that...my best option was to gather as much proof as I could...in order for the law firm to initiate a dialogue with the organisation regarding the removal of the CEO from the workplace. The intention was...to kill 2 birds with one stone...to keep me in employment, *and* to remove the CEO who presented a *risk* to the organisation that needed to be managed. After all, the organisation was paying a substantial 6-figure salary, car, and various other perks to *keep* this CEO.

I *did* raise the question of privacy with my lawyer, because any proof that existed would have been contained within the CEOs computer. But I also *didn’t* want to obtain the proof if the only way I could get it...was through illegal means. And that’s when I found out an interesting piece of information.

I was assured that *if* the CEO had granted me prior permission to access his computer and emails...then technically I *wasn’t* breaching privacy legislation. It’s *not* something I would care do again...but as I was informed, I needed *sufficient* proof that not only established the workplace bullying occurring, but *how* the CEO actually spent his days as well. The proof that I collected was only a *very* small portion of what was contained in his computer. But it was enough to outline his activities and the time he spent on these.

**Know Bull! question:**
Can you briefly explain the proof that you gathered?

**‘Target’ answer:**
To begin with, there was the historical screen capture of the CEOs internet and email history over the preceeding couple of weeks. I also included the same screen and email capture of my *own* work computer as a comparison of what I was doing as well during this time.

There were quite a few pornographic images, that linked to the websites in the CEOs computer history. There was also a record
of the various porn website cookies that resided inside the CEOs computer and that bore the name of his computer on the network...so there was no doubt which computer the questionable images and videos had been accessed from. Further...images and websites that were accessed on business days and during business hours...which also included date and times stamps as proof...were also printed off.

When the CEO wasn’t accessing pornographic material at work...he had a couple of other areas of interest that kept him occupied. Firstly, he spent some of his time conducting business on behalf of a local political party he belonged to.

He fancied himself as a bit of a politician. On the occasions where his political party was required to conduct business interstate...he would schedule a workplace visit to the same city or town to see some random industry person. This way, it was his 9-5 employer that footed the bill for travel and accommodation to his political party destinations and meetings. He averaged around 15-20 trips per year where the employer paid for his political party interests...and he flew no less than business or first-class. The bully spent quite a bit of time travelling, on the phone, on emails, and time off work premises...to indulge his political hobby. So email evidence of this was also included.

The other thing that took up the remainder, and the bulk of his time...was his mistress.
He was generally on the phone to talking to his mistress, or he was emailing his mistress, or he was out of the office visiting his mistress...or she was in the office visiting him. And like the pornographic material...there was plenty of electronic proof to choose from.

Know Bull! question:
How much time would you estimate that the CEO spent on his own pursuits?

‘Target’ answer:
About 95% of his work time was spent on things other than work. His work-related activities mainly included things like telephone calls, or brief emails to members of the governing board and bodies. It was superficial stuff. But he had the ability to look busy...and I believe that’s what fooled the governing body. For example, he was on the phone so often with his political pursuits and his mistress...that it was often difficult for various senior members of the organisation to get in contact with him...so they naturally assumed he was very busy...and he was...but not with things related to work. And as for the extra hours he was well-known for putting in at the end of the day...while the governing body assumed he was working hard...he was actually spending time with his mistress, or viewing porn.

Plus, his PA also perpetuated ‘the con’. For example, his PA would offer to take and pass on messages to the CEO when he was tied up with a meeting in his office. But what his PA failed to say was that the CEOs meeting was generally with his mistress, or someone related to his political pursuits.

But I have to admit, there was the odd occasion where the CEO appeared to be doing work-related tasks, especially when it came to a pet project he had...which was to develop a software program that was intended to generate sales for the organisation. The only thing is...the software was developed from Intellectual Property that was stolen from a competitor, and it was the CEO who engineered the theft of that IP. The competitor had invested around $1 million in research and product development by then. So when I think about how the organisation has been selling this product internationally...for at least the last 10 years...at around $1000 per licence, per user...I shudder to think of the total cost of this fraud...and the outcome for the organisation if the background of this software ever came to light.

Know Bull! question:
How did you find out about the theft of this Intellectual Property?

‘Target’ answer:
From someone who was actually took part in the theft and the subsequent development of the software. Without going into it in too much detail...the competitor was conned into revealing their research and beta product...non-disclosure documents were breached...information was stolen and the product duplicated and amended to suit the organisation’s needs. As for the person...
who told me...he was basically a decent person who found himself in a terrible situation. What he’d done at the insistence of the CEO...had been eating away at his conscience for over a year by that stage. At the time he felt compelled to confess what he’d done...and he desperately needed someone to talk to...who he could also trust. The truth is, I was probably the only person in the head office who could be trusted with that kind of information...and to keep his confidence as he requested. By this stage I was probably about 6 months from leaving the organisation, and well aware of just how manipulative and deceitful the CEO was. Even his Resume was a fabulous piece of fiction...which I became aware of when he added a 4-week stock market appreciation course...as a Bachelor of Economics.

Know Bull! question:
At any point, did you think the governing body of the organisation was aware of the theft that led to the development of this software?

‘Target’ answer:
Yes. There were others involved in the theft...so they obviously knew. And I’m inclined to believe that a couple of members of the governing body...who later proved to be the bully CEOs protectors and enablers...may have been aware as well...but not all of the members of the governing body.

Know Bull! question:
Were you able to identify the trigger event that started the workplace bullying?

‘Target’ answer:
I think there were a number of trigger events, and I’m inclined to believe they mainly had to do with the successes I was achieving for the organisation. I’ve already mentioned one Board where noticable shifts became evident...but at the same time I was having successes in other areas of the organisation as well...and it was noticable. As a result I was often singled out at AGMs and various Board meetings where my contributions and successes were publicly highlighted. As far as I was concerned...I saw this as an appreciation for my hard work...and I was grateful that my efforts were valued. But it wasn’t long before I noticed that the CEO remained stony-faced throughout and after these occasions...he wasn’t pleased at all. But he wasn’t the only one that wasn’t pleased...his PA shared the same reaction. It wasn’t until the very end that I realised that the workplace bullying actually started with the PA...and that she and the CEO had joined forces at some point during the workplace bullying.

Know Bull! question:
What led you to this conclusion about the PA?

‘Target’ answer:
Right from my very first week with the organisation, I just got this feeling that things weren’t quite right with this PA. It’s hard to explain. She’d often make comments that just seemed...off...if that makes sense.

At first I’d question myself...whether I was hearing her correctly or not...but after a few occasions I realised her comments were masking some type of agenda...but I didn’t know what at the time. Of course much later on she was instrumental in removing me from the organisation...when she levelled and justified a slew of horrendous lies and accusations at me during an ambush meeting that was engineered by the CEO. For her efforts, the CEO rewarded his PA with an all-expenses-company-paid trip to China, among other things.

If anyone who later views this interview...takes only one thing away...I hope it would be the following.

When you get that very first feeling that something isn’t quite right...where you find yourself questioning if you heard that person correctly...pay very close attention. If that off comment or action isn’t followed up later with a similar event...you’re probably OK. But...if there’s a second comment or action...and a third comment or action...no matter how trivial they might seem...mark down the date that the very first off comment or action took place. Because that will be the exact day and time that the workplace bullying began.

A lot of people think that workplace bullying starts with a big bang...but it doesn’t. There’s often far more subtle things going
on long before workplace bullying gets to the point of public humiliation. Workplace bullies increase their bullying behaviours by degrees. If they get away with the very first off statement...they try again...except their statements and actions get stronger and more damaging with every bullying behaviour that follows.

My best advice is, when you hear that very first off statement...don’t dismiss it. And don’t bother questioning whether you heard them correctly or not. You either have a hearing problem or you don’t. And if you don’t have a hearing problem, know this...you heard exactly what was said. Your immediate action should be to respond that very instant...don’t let it slide.

If you have to gather your thoughts...just ask them to repeat what they said...or say something like “I’m not sure if I’m getting your meaning, can you please explain?”

If they do repeat the statement...good...but don’t be surprised if they choose not to.

If it turns out that the off statement was just the result of clumsy sentence structure...you’ll find the person will explain. Further, they won’t be offended either, particularly if they think they’re increasing your knowledge.

But, if they choose not to repeat the sentence...or they appear a little awkward after you’ve asked them to explain...then this could be the only opportunity you have to stop the workplace bullying before it starts to get real nasty.

What I’ve learnt about workplace bullies, is that these very first off comments are the bullies version of a coward’s punch. They’ll hit you from the side...they’ll hit you from the back...but their goal is that you don’t get a chance to respond. And the truth is...most of us don’t...simply because their comments are so far out of left field...we’re basically left dumbstruck.

But...your goal is to make a response...that’s why you ask them to repeat or explain. The workplace bully detests being asked to explain. You’re going to have to make some sort of comment...but it’s how you do it that could make all the difference.

You don’t have to say anything threatening...but you do have to adopt body language that screams ‘alpha’. You might lower your voice yet make it firmer...you might stand if you’re sitting, or move closer into the bully...stare them straight in the face without flinching. It’s not the words you say that’s important. Body language...nonverbal communication is the single most powerful form of communication, even more so than words and voice. Use it to let the bully know you’re not to be trifled with.

Then do yourself a favour and start keeping a bully diary from that moment on. Sorry...I just needed to spit that out.

Know Bull! question:
Can you provide examples of the PAs coward punches?

‘Target’ answer:
Yes...but I have to admit some of them are pretty weird. But when you think of the goal of a coward’s punch as leaving you no room for a response...then they kind-of make sense in a weird way. Ultimately, they’re only useful for the intial pummelling...as a means to soften you up for what’s really coming.

The first one came when I’d only been in the workplace for about 3 days. The PA stopped outside my office...looked around...and then said...”this is the office that I wanted.” She paused for a moment...then left. And this is how the coward’s punch works.

They hit you with an out-of-left-field comment...they hang around just long enough to make sure you’re dazed...then they leave. Seriously, how are you meant to respond to something like that?
The next one came about 2 weeks later. By then I’d assessed the PA as the main office gossip. She’d spend her spare time going between a few desks and chatting for awhile. She only stopped at my office door when she had something to say. This time she said, “You know...I was supposed to be your assistant, but I didn’t want to. I wanted to be the CEOs assistant, so that’s how you landed up with Joan.” Pause...then she left.

This PA would often organise lunch at a local cafe for the remaining women in the office. I was never invited. She’d sometimes stop past my office after these lunches. It usually went something like this, “We had a lovely lunch today...I’m sorry we couldn’t invite you, but we organised to meet up with a friend you don’t know, and we thought it maybe be awkward for you.” Pause...then she’d leave.

On another occasion, about 2 weeks later, I don’t think this was so much as a coward’s punch, but she wanted to make a point none-the-less. I was getting a coffee in the tearoom when the women in the office returned from a lunch out. “So”, says the PA in front of the other staff, “where have you worked with the CEO before?” My reply, “I’ve never worked with the CEO before”. “But the CEO has worked for Company X in the past...didn’t you work with Company X as well?” My reply, Yes, I’ve worked for Company X before...but it’s a pretty big organisation...the first time I met the CEO was when he interviewed me...right in this very building.” “Oh” said the PA, “it’s just that I was told you worked with the CEO before.” My reply, “Someone’s obviously misled you”.

Around about the 2 month mark, the PA stopped at my office door again. “You know...you weren’t the first choice for this job...a man was the first choice. But even though he was the best one for the job they didn’t hire him because he had MS...and they thought he might have spent a lot of time off sick. That’s why you were hired.” Pause...then she left.

Like I said, what can you say? Of course the coward punches continued for awhile, along with other nuisance things, like booking my transport to land at the airport during peak hour with only minutes to get to Board meetings by taxi, and making sure any accommodation I had while interstate on meetings...either had just a fold out bed; was so far away from the meeting rooms I’d have to take a packed lunch to get there; or was in close proximity to, or overlooked the kitchen waste bins...that was a favourite.

Know Bull! question:
When did the workplace bullying escalate?

‘Target’ answer:
I’d say that would have been when I refused to cover for the CEO.

Know Bull! question:
Can you explain further?

‘Target’ answer:
The CEO spent the bulk of his time either with, or communicating with his mistress. I knew this was occurring, because I’d see her entering the building during and after hours...my office overlooked the front door. Besides, when he’d ask me to access his computer while he was away...he’d usually have various windows open...including emails. Put it this way...it was impossible not to know.

It was about 9 months before I left, and the PA had now become firm friends with the CEOs mistress. It was the PA that asked me to cover for the CEO.

The PA’s interests outside work included her children, and her volunteer work as a phone answerer at an organisation called xxxxxxxx...which is a crisis support and suicide prevention hotline. I’d known about the PAs... But she never joined xxxxxxxx as a means to help people...it just provided another avenue to satiate her voracious need for gossip. And that’s exactly what she did. On occasions too numerous to remember she would laugh and joke about the people who had contacted her on the crisis line the previous evening. She’d reveal the most intimate details of callers...she thought it was hilarious...and frankly it made my stomach turn.
affiliation with xxxxxxxx for awhile. But she never joined xxxxxxxx as a means to help people...it just provided another
avenue to satiate her voracious need for gossip. And that’s exactly what she did. On occasions too numerous to remember she
would laugh and joke about the people who had contacted her on the crisis line the previous evening. She’d reveal the most
intimate details of callers...she thought it was hilarious...and frankly it made my stomach turn.

But the PA had convinced the mistress some months earlier to also become a volunteer with xxxxxxxx. So when the mistress
would visit the office, there was now 2 of them laughing and joking about the misfortune of others.

It was after one of these sessions between the PA and the mistress that the PA stopped at my office door again. By now the
CEO had the building altered to provide his PA with an office of her own, and she could no longer see who was entering and
leaving the building.

“You know how your office overlooks the front door...I want you to buzz me if the CEOs wife drops in during the day”.
“Why would I do that?” I replied.
“Because the CEO might have his lady friend visiting.”
“And which lady friend would that be?” I replied.
“You know damn well who! Just do it!” the PA snapped.
“I’m sorry...but I can’t and I won’t...and that’s the end of it.” I replied...But it wasn’t the end of it.

Things began vanishing from my computer...like the complete file of a publication that was due to be delivered to the printers.
Then there was minutes from a Board meeting that disappeared prior to distribution...an agenda from a scheduled meeting that
went missing...and a database that became inexplicably corrupted. I had no option but to physically key-off my compter when
I finished work for the day. But the damage had already been done and I was soundly hauled over the coals by the CEO for
missing crucial deadlines on the projects that were affected by what I now called the Houdini files. I suspected who was behind
this mayhem...but I had no proof...so I just had to wear it. But, I was still unaware this behaviour had a name...workplace bullying.

Then about 2 months later, in December, the CEOs wife did show up at the office unannounced...after hours around 9pm...and
the mistress had already arrived about an hour earlier...and hadn’t left. It was a nightmare situation.

I could have just let the CEOs wife walk down the hallway...and then deny later that I even knew the mistress was in the
building. But no matter how much of a creep I thought the CEO was...I couldn’t justify doing that to his wife. So I called her
into my office before she had a chance to walk down the hallway, and engaged her in idle chit-chat for a few minutes about the
family and her plans for Christmas...that sort of thing. Then I said to her, “Just hang on moment...and I’ll let hubby know
you’re here.”

So I buzzed the CEO in his office to let him know, and I continued talking with his wife for a few extra minutes...and then
apologized for detaining her for so long. I then went outside to get some fresh air, as the situation had given me an instant
headache.

Those minutes were enough time for the mistress to slip out the of the CEOs office via a glass door that led into a courtyard.
From there she was able to walk undetected, along the exterior side of the building. While I was standing on a landing outside
the mistress emerged from the passageway beside the building. Unaware I was even there, she adjusted her clothing, crossed
the road and headed towards the carpark.

Then in early January, when everyone else was on Christmas leave, the CEO came into the office and I decided to have a
private word with about the mistress situation that had occurred just before Christmas.

Know Bull! question:
What occurred during that private meeting?

‘Target’ answer:
I actually wasn’t expecting anyone to come to the office...after all it was Christmas holidays. But I decided to get the jump on
some work and thought I’d take advantage of the quiet. When the CEO arrived he just went straight to his office. I could tell
by the internal phone system...he’d pretty much got on the phone straight away. When he finished with his call I went to his
office and said to him, “we need to talk about what happened before Christmas.”

I basically said, that while his private life was his own...I didn’t appreciate finding myself in that situation. I also mentioned
that I’d been fielding calls from a couple of the interstate offices and others regarding the CEOs private life...and considering
that the organisation was part way through a planned growth phase...that he needed to exercise a little more discretion in what
he did. I also said that while others in the office were happy to run interference for him, in order to hide his indiscretions...I didn’t consider it should be a part of my job description, and that I would appreciate not having to go through the same thing in the future. Then I left, saying that I still had some work to complete. He didn’t say anything, and left the building about 20 minutes later.

**Know Bull! question:**
What happened next?

**‘Target’ answer:**
Instead of opting for discretion...the CEO chose retribution. Within a few days, (8th January) when everyone had returned to work, the CEO summoned me to his office first thing in the morning. He said he’d had a chance to re-think my work performance...and he’d concluded it was lacking, and that he was deciding whether or not I should be dismissed. To support his claim he referred to the situations that arose from the *Houdini* files. He said he needed to discuss the matter with one of the Chairman (the bully enabler), and he would advise me of the outcome.

Amongst the proof that I later gathered, I found that even while the CEO was plotting my demise...he still had time to shoot an email off to the mistress. This is how he was...anything of a work nature was simply seen as a minor irritation to how he would normally spend his day.
Even such menial things as having to make or receive phonecalls was seen by the CEO as an irritation that had to be tolerated.

On the afternoon of the 8th January I was presented with a formal written warning of my dismal performance...which was basically a list of some of the Houdini files. This document stated that my work was great, and I had numerous achievements...but, I needed to be placed under a performance plan none-the-less. The gist of it was, that if I wanted to keep my job I had to agree to a number (14 in total) of extra Benchmarks...on top of my normal work load.

I noticed the document had been dated the 7th January, and it was word perfect...which means it had been prepared by the CEOs PA the previous day. But what struck me, was that list contained reference to the vanishing minutes not being distributed on time as one of the indicators of my poor performance.

The CEO was unaware these minutes had gone missing...only the person who caused them to vanish from my computer knew that. And the minutes would have indeed been late in distribution...if I hadn’t copied them to disk to work on at home. There was never a complaint about the late distribution of minutes...because they still went out on time thanks to a backup file. But the PA obviously assumed they were distributed late...and that’s why this item appeared as an indicator of my poor performance. And there was one additional thing that confirmed the CEO and the PA were a bullying team...and it had to do with how perfect the language, spelling etc was...not only in this formal notice...but in subsequent communication distributed about this warning to the governing body. Even the way the email was laid out was perfect and not the work of the CEO, but his PA.

“Tardy” or “tardiness” was not a word the CEO used. Besides that...he struggled daily with spelling, sentence structure, and syntax...he was almost illiterate...and this was evident even in the emails to his mistress.
And that's how workplace bullies work. They tear you down with all manner of false and contrived claims and accusations about underperformance...then they promote that so-called underperformance as far and wide as they can. Because their goal is to destroy you professionally. Even when there's absolutely nothing to hang those claims on...they create them..

**Know Bull! question:**

What were the benchmarks you had to achieve to remain employed?

**‘Target’ answer:**

It wasn't a plan to improve my performance...that much I can tell you. Neither was it signed by the CEO, or on official letterhead.

---

7 January

**Targets Name**

---

**RE: PERFORMANCE OF DUTIES**

There are a number of issues, which need to be formally addressed regarding your position as Targets position. Your efforts to achieve this and this are well recognized and you have achieved a lot however, basically you’re not good enough and your performance needs to be managed.

Specifically this is where you stuffed up

* here
* here
* and here

As a benchmark the following performance objectives are to be met:

- record contents of phone calls made and received every day, and submit daily report
- submit daily report on the minute-by-minute breakdown of your work day
- per day provide a complete log of emails received, and submit daily report
- per day provide a complete log of emails sent, and submit daily report
- provide daily log of information you provided to a caller or email, and justify.
- keep daily log of work related expenses for meetings etc, submit in daily report. You will be invoiced these costs at the end of every month
- daily report
- daily report
- daily report
- daily report
- daily report
- daily report
- all leave is cancelled until further notice
- If any of the above is not possible then detailed reasons are to be provided in writing to the bully and the bully enabler/protector

A demonstrated inability to meet the above benchmarks will be considered very seriously and place in jeopardy your role as targets position and targets position which considering your achievements to date would be most regrettable.

---

Chief Executive Officer
It was a list of essentially time-wasting tasks. For example, I had to collate a spreadsheet of incoming and outgoing calls (2 separate lists)...in addition to writing down word-for-word the contents of all the phonecalls I received or made...and that included my words as well as the words of the caller. Then I had to type these conversations into a daily report, and along with the spreadsheets of telephone numbers...I had to put this on the CEOs desk before I left work for the day. Incoming calls were registered as they came in via reception...and the list I provided was checked for accuracy.

I also had to provide a complete log of the emails I sent and received during the day...2 separate spreadsheets had to be provided for those. If I responded to any of those emails, or I requested anything in an email I sent to someone else...I also had to provide the exact contents of my reply or request...this was also 2 separate lists that I had to compile and place on the CEOs desk daily. On top of that...I then had to copy my responses into a separate document...and justify why I gave that response. This was also due on the CEOs desk daily...before I left work.

The same was also required of phone calls. If information was requested...I had to provide a document of the information I supplied...which was pretty much a duplicate of the word-for-word record I had to type out...but in this document I had to justify why I gave the information I did...the same as the emails. And, this had to be submitted daily.

In fact anything I had to collate, write, or prepare in relation to those benchmarks had to be submitted daily to the CEO, and when he was absent from the office for any length of time...I had to put them on his PA's desk instead.

There were more reports, logs etc that were required...these are just to give you an idea how futile these Benchmarks were.

Of particular note, my admin assistant was re-assigned...and the receptionist was forbidden from assisting me. They were both threatened with disciplinary action if they were ever caught doing so.

From that point on I also had to bear financial responsibility for flights, taxi's etc related to attending various board and committee meetings, plus other organisational events such as conferences and AGMs. Even though the organisation paid up front for most of the flights, accommodation, conference registration, etc...I was still required to keep a daily log of these expenses. At the end of each month I was given an invoice of these expenses, which I was expected to pay. And on those occasions where I incurred work related expenses on the organisational credit card...for after hours functions related to any of the Boards or committees, such as farewell dinners...I was also invoiced those as well.

Finally, all my leave was cancelled. But I’d already been denied annual leave for the 2 previous years by this stage.

This performance review and subsequent benchmarks were what prompted me to hire a lawyer.

Know Bull! question:

Why didn’t you leave this organisation?

‘Target’ answer:

Don’t think I didn’t try. Even before these benchmarks I was working about 60 hours a week...and that was with the support of an admin assistant and a receptionist. By the time these benchmarks were added...and support staff were removed...I was working a minimum of 125 hours a week...and very often 48 hours straight. Most of the time I was so exhausted...I neither had the strength or the time to even write a job application let alone get out the office door for an interview.

On the few occasions during the following months when I managed to get interviews...I was so run down...there was no way I could’ve hidden it. I basically had to stay employed until I found another job...and that meant meeting the requirements of the so-called performance benchmarks...since that’s what my continuing employment was contingent on.

I was only just meeting the benchmarks when the first month had lapsed. And I was still contending with the PAs sabotage as well. Since she could no longer get access to my computer she began getting a little more creative. Like withholding correspondence that arrived for me in the mail...and then scheduling meetings on my behalf with various industry specialists...and then not telling me about them. Consequently people were left waiting for me at designated venues...without an apology or a call.

All it took was one person to complain to the CEO. I suspected he knew what the PA was doing, and more likely he sanctioned, or even instigated it. By the end of the first month I began getting calls from Board and committee members, saying the CEO was polling them and others in a bid to have me removed from the organisation...for a unprofessional conduct. Some of my board members resigned immediately in response, and others tendered their resignations to become effective at the end of the financial year.

This just made my resolve stronger...as far as I was concerned...I was not going to be forced to quit. So I typed up an official complaint about the CEOs conduct...and put it on his desk...with a post-it note telling him to sign an acknowledgement of receipt on the 2nd page.
Know Bull! question:
What was contained in your official complaint?

‘Target’ answer:
I took a copy of the original after the CEO signed it. I stood in his office the following morning and demanded that he sign it...and put the original on his personal file. I doubt he did...but I was only interested in his signature acknowledging receipt. The truth is, he was shocked...he didn’t see this coming. I think he was expecting I’d just roll over and play dead after what he’d been doing.

bully name
Chief Executive Officer

address block of organisation

7th February

bully
I am writing to you in my official capacity as target’s job title, to express both my dismay and disgust at the inappropriate comments you have been making as of late, regarding my capacity and effectiveness in my role with the organisation name.

When I requested to speak with you ‘unofficially’ on 4th January regarding your various ‘activities’, I did so out of concern for potential damage to the profile of organisation and with the best of intentions to protect the board possible ‘fallout’.

As I indicated then, how you conduct your private life is your own business. However, when your private life becomes the focus of interested party’s attention, as target’s job title I have no option but to react. In fact, I would be remiss in my duties as if I didn’t address either potential or real issues when they arose.

Further to this, and as I emphasised again during our unofficial talk, the strategy name and corporate re-focussing has drawn the attention of people and various industry organisations. Considering this, and as outlined in the strategy which I prepared on date of strategy during strategy phase crucial months.

Ultimately, it’s your prerogative to disregard my advice regarding discretion. But, your actions to publicly demean my role and discredit my effectiveness as target’s job title to both the governing body and the board as an apparent result of our ‘unofficial’ talk— is totally out of line.

I indicated to you quite clearly in August and November last year that I do not welcome, nor do I appreciate harassment of any kind. Nor did I take too kindly to your retaliatory remarks on the 7th January regarding the tenuous nature of my employment, and your intention to have me dismissed.

Regrettably, I now find myself in a position where I must insist you discontinue your present course of behaviour — namely harassment, intimidation and threats, before I am forced to take this matter further. And by this I mean informing governing body at the earliest opportunity, of liaison with mistress and penchant for downloading porn on company time and equipment.
Know Bull! question:
In your official letter of complaint you emphasised prior harassment. I get the distinct impression you were talking about a different kind of harassment...would I be correct in saying that?

‘Target’ answer:
Yes. That was in reference to prior sexual harassment. There was 3 instances involving the CEO. The first incident I pretended I didn’t hear him. The second incident we were both at a work function interstate. On that occasion he’d consumed a certain amount of alcohol. I suggested he go to his room and sleep it off. The third instance was at the office...after hours. He was sober that time and I didn’t mince any words. I said No outright, and remarked I would rather gnaw my own arm off. He left me alone after that.

Know Bull! question:
Did the workplace bullying stop after you issued your letter of complaint?

‘Target’ answer:
It appeared to on the surface...but I knew I was just buying myself a little time...hopefully enough to find an alternate job. My lawyer was urging me to sanction communications with the governing body of the organisation regarding having the CEO removed, as I’d already gathered the evidence against him by early February.

And while there was a good chance there was sufficient evidence to have him removed...there was still the PA...and the bully enabler on one of my Boards...plus at least one other enabler I suspected on the governing body as well. So I was looking at 4...maybe 5 in total. Removing 1 workplace bully was a distinct possibility...but not 4 or 5. Besides that, I didn’t know who I could and couldn’t trust in the workplace.

That’s why I opted to buy as much time as I could...so I could leave. Anyway, I got the distinct impression that while the letter of complaint had certainly rattled the CEO...he was just biding his time and waiting for the right opportunity.

I continued to meet the benchmarks for the next 3 months. The PA was still trying to sabotage my work, but she was now running out of ideas. Meanwhile the CEO used every opportunity to demean my work and performance behind my back. Board and committee members kept me up to date whenever they heard anything negative.

By the middle of May I was chronically exhausted all the time. Even though I was still, but barely meeting the benchmarks...I’d become very forgetful. I regularly forgot where I parked my car, lost my keys and often left my wallet at home. I didn’t even feel safe to drive to work anymore. How I didn’t have an accident was beyond me. When I did manage to get a few hours sleep...I didn’t sleep well at all, and I’d been living on daily painkillers since January due to constant migraine headaches. Most days I didn’t have the time, or the strength to even eat...I barely weighed 46 kilograms.

It was during one of those forgetful moments, that I made the crucial error of leaving my wallet at home again. Normally I would have just left it there. But that day I had a board meeting interstate...and I was responsible for paying for 5 taxi trips for myself and other board members. The cab that was booked to take me to the airport was due in 30 minutes...and I lived 20 minutes away in the opposite direction to the airport. The accountant was the only other staff member in the building at the time...so I asked if she could hold the cab for me if the driver arrived before I returned.

I considered waiting for the cab driver and getting him to detour via home before going to the airport...but if he was running a little late...like they sometimes did...I would have missed my flight, and the meeting. As per usual, the PA had booked me on the latest flight she could...guaranteeing that I’d be racing to get to the meeting on time as it was. But the accountant was convinced that I couldn’t make the 40 minute return trip in traffic...and still get to the airport on time...and insisted instead that I draw out petty cash to cover the cab charges. While I was returning the petty cash the following morning, the CEOs PA wandered into the accountants office. I assumed she’d just dropped by to gossip, so after handing the accountant the money, I promptly left.

Know Bull! question:
And is that when the right opportunity presented itself to the CEO?

‘Target’ answer:
Yes, partly. The CEO had been away during the week tied up with meetings about his software pet project. So in the interim
I had to deliver all the daily requirements of the benchmarks to his PA. The day the CEO returned, he had his PA deliver me a report that was due to be completed in 2 days for a meeting with the governing body...and a notice of a formal disciplinary meeting...that was scheduled to take place the next afternoon. The notice also stated that I was permitted to take a witness in with me if I chose to. There was no reason given for the meeting, hence no agenda, nor who would be in attendance. So I called my lawyer and asked if he could attend with me.

I was surprised to see the 2IC standing in the doorway of the boardroom when I arrived, and I asked him why he was there. He said he’d been asked to take minutes of the meeting, and then he said “I hate that this is happening”. So I asked him, “then why are you going along with it?” He responded, “I don’t have a choice”.

Aside from the CEO, and the 2IC, a member of the governing body was in attendance as well. This man was the one who I’d earlier suspected as being the CEOs... bully protector and enabler. When my lawyer arrived...I simply introduced him as Steve, my friend...who was there as a witness.

Then the meeting took its true course. I was in attendance to be given a second formal warning...for failing to meet a number of the benchmarks that were a requirement of my continued employment. Then the CEO proceeded to berate me on a number of points saying that I was unprofessional, that I was incapable of completing routine administrative duties, that there were numerous complaints from associates, and staff members, that I failed to submit certain items relating to the benchmarks, etc. After about ten minutes I asked him if he could provide specific examples for me to respond to. He couldn’t...he just kept generalising. Then I asked him for specific names of those who had complained...he said he couldn’t...because it was confidential.

I was quite annoyed by this stage, and said to the CEO, “if you have no proof of these allegations, then I refuse to stay and listen to this garbage.” Then he responded, “there’s a witness”, and he instructed the 2IC to fetch the PA. The PA then proceeded to say that I had failed to submit a number of benchmark requirements...meaning the daily reports...and that I had done so on a number of occasions while the CEO was absent during the week. I knew I hadn’t missed any of them...so that was an outright lie. The CEO paused and said, “and then there’s the more serious matter of you stealing from petty cash”.

I literally felt my jaw drop, and blurted out “that’s a lie”. The CEO said that his PA was a witness and she was prepared to sign an affidavit to that effect. I replied, “I suggest you speak with the accountant and find out the truth for yourself”. The PA piped up and said, “I’ve already spoken to the accountant and she confirmed that you did steal from petty cash”.

Then the CEO slid a statement of claims across the table and told me to sign it.

The CEO paused and said, “and then there’s the more serious matter of you stealing from petty cash”.

I literally felt my jaw drop, and blurted out “that’s a lie”. The CEO said that his PA was a witness and she was prepared to sign an affidavit to that effect. I replied, “I suggest you speak with the accountant and find out the truth for yourself”. The PA piped up and said, “I’ve already spoken to the accountant and she confirmed that you did steal from petty cash”.

Then the CEO slid a statement of claims across the table and told me to sign it.

At that point I was just gob-smacked, but I had no intention of signing any document saying I was guilty of something when I wasn’t. So I stood up, picked up the statement of claims from the table, screwed it into a ball, and said to the CEO, “here’s a suggestion for your statement...you can stick it up your arse”, and I threw it at him, and left the room.

After walking Steve back to his car, I returned to my office. I was so angry that I slammed my office door behind me. It was the first time I’d ever closed my office door...let alone slammed it shut. But at least everyone got the message to stay well clear of me for the remainder of the day...and they did.
Despite what had occurred that afternoon, I still had a report to finish for the meeting with the governing body the following day. I was also expected to attend that meeting. Just as I was completing the report around 11pm, I suddenly felt very unwell. I put it down the earlier meeting...and the fact that I hadn’t eaten all day. I thought if I ate something when I got home I’d be alright...but I still had to pick up my daughter from a video shop where she worked casually a few nights a week.

**Know Bull! question:**
Did you realise at the time you were gravely ill?

**‘Target’ answer:**
No. I’d been under so much strain for so many months...I had daily migraines...I was exhausted...and I still didn’t join the dots about the relationship between workplace bullying and a decline in physical and emotional health until after I’d actually left the organisation. I basically spent the previous 9-10 months in survival mode. It’s weird...I know.

All I can put it down to, is that when you’re under that much pressure...when you live under constant threats about your employment and you’re fending off assault after assault on your good name, your professionalism etc...you seem to revert to an almost primordial state...flight or fight response. Standing my ground...is just in my nature. Like most people I couldn’t afford to lose my job...that’s why I fought for as long as I could. But when the deck is stacked against you as it is with workplace bullying...you don’t stand a chance.

All I know, is that I was in quite severe pain, by the time I’d made the 20 minute drive to pick up my daughter. When I arrived I just slid into the passenger seat and asked my daughter to drive straight to the hospital. The next 9 hours are a bit blurry.

I remembered moments in the car...where I was in a lot of pain. I don’t recall arriving at Accident & Emergency...but I remember my daughter and someone else putting me in wheelchair to get inside. Next thing I remember I was lying down. I don’t know where this was...but I had heart monitor tabs attached to me. I recall feeling so extremely cold...that I was shaking violently. I remember struggling to talk to my daughter because my teeth were chattering. My next memory is being covered in heated blankets, and being wheeled somewhere. That’s pretty much it until I was woken by an erratic beeping noise above me. I didn’t know where I was...but the room was dimly lit. There were a number of beds and they faced towards where the nurses were sitting behind a desk area with a low glass screen. They weren’t very far away. That’s where the light was coming from. I remember getting tangled in wires and this thing beeping irratically above and behind my head whenever I moved. I drifted in and out of sleep until it was daylight.

When I was properly awake, I asked a nurse if she could call my workplace to let them know I wasn’t going to make it to the meeting that day. After speaking with the CEO she came back to my bedside and said, “Your boss would have to be the nastiest prick I’ve ever come across. He said I had to deliver a message to you, and that message is: if you don’t discharge yourself from hospital and get into work...you won’t have a job to come back to”. She then said “there’s no way you can go into work today”. I told the nurse that I really didn’t have a choice, and asked if she could call my daughter to pick me up.

There was a Minister standing at the nurses station, and while I was gathering my clothes together he came over to talk to me. He asked what I was doing. I told him what the CEO had said, and that I wasn’t sick enough to be in hospital. He replied, “you’re in the intensive care ward, and they don’t put people in here by mistake. If you’re here, it’s because you’re very ill”. I said I’d made up my mind...that if I didn’t go I would definitely lose my job. And he replied “if you work in a place that has caused you to become so ill that you’re admitted to intensive care...then that’s a job you can afford to lose”. He asked me to consider staying long enough to the a doctor, and have a heart x-ray, as the equipment was already on its way. I agreed, and after that I met my daughter in the reception area, where I discharged myself.

**Know Bull! question:**
Did you go into work after that?

**‘Target’ answer:**
Not straight away. I asked my daughter to drive me home where I could have a chance to talk with her, and think. It was only after I spoke with my daughter...that I realised the terrible toll the previous night had taken on her.

She said everything had happened so quick...that she was frightened she was going to lose me. As it turned out it, within less than 1 hour of leaving work...I’d gone into shock...was pending a heart attack...and was admitted to intensive care. My daughter had wanted to stay with me, but nursing staff said I was too ill, and she should go home and they would call her if my condition changed. She was too frightened to sleep...in case she missed a call.
The Minister who had spoken to me earlier that morning was right...this was a job I could afford to lose. Nothing was worth the pain my daughter endured when she thought she might never see me again. I typed up my resignation and I asked my daughter to drive me to where the meeting with the governing body was being held. As I handed my resignation to the CEO I said “I’m too ill to go into work for the next few weeks, so you’re just going to have to cope with it.”

I asked my daughter to take me home. Just as we were about to leave the room, my daughter stopped and returned to the table where the CEO was seated. And she proceeded to verbally tear into him. She told him he’d nearly killed her mother...she called him a few choice names...and if I recall correctly I believe she threatened to hurt him as well. I could understand where she was coming from. She’d had a terrible shock...and she was angry.

I only returned to work, almost 4 weeks later...to gather a few personal things, and collect my severance pay. It was the 30th June. Up until then I’d had various medical tests, and was diagnosed with PSTD, glandular fever, and was healing from stomach ulcers. For someone that was 41 years old...I was in pretty bad shape.

Know Bull! question:
How did the CEO react when you went in?

'Target' answer:
He wasn’t there when I arrived. So I dropped into the accountant’s office. After signing relevant paperwork relating to my resignation, the accountant provided a document with a breakdown of the money that was owed to me. She then gave me a cheque for a few thousand dollars.

While I was in my office sorting out files I needed to hand over to my former assistant, the CEO returned. So I went to his office to return my keys for the building. It was then he told me that I wouldn’t be getting any formal reference to leave with, and nor would he provide any telephone reference on my behalf either. I made no response and returned to my office to make farewell calls to some of my Board and committee members.

As I was getting ready to leave, the accountant came to my office. She hastily handed me an envelope and left without even looking me in the face. Inside the envelope was 2 separate invoices signed by the CEO. One invoice was for costs on the organisational credit card for flights and accommodation relating to a board meeting and a conference in February, while the other was a memo invoice to cover the cost of employing a temp to replace me. They’d be drawn up earlier in the week...and due to be paid on my last day. Both invoices totalled the entire amount of severance pay...plus a few cents more.

I left with no job to go to...no references...no money to support my daughter and myself...and in very bad health. My career had been destroyed, and the sacrifices my daughter and I endured over the years so I could make a better life for us...counted for absolutely nothing. And remember...I didn’t do anything to deserve this.
Did you ever calculate the cost of the workplace bullying?

‘Target’ answer:

No, but I would have to say it would’ve been enormous. Even after I finally left the workplace, my lawyer was urging me to take civil action against the workplace bullies and the organisation. He said it wasn’t only the fact that I ended up so ill...but how I was instructed to discharge myself from an intensive care ward, or I’d lose my job. There was lots of proof...not only what I’d supplied, but hospital proof...and the proof of the lawyer when he was a witness at the ambush meeting...and there was additional medical information like a diagnosis of PTSD and blood tests showing glandular fever. And there was numerous breaches of employment laws and health and safety regulations as well.

At the time, my lawyer said there was sufficient proof to put the entire organisation out of business...permanently. And he had the backing of his colleagues to support that opinion. But I was far too ill to even contemplate the pressure of a law suit such as that. So I asked him to store all the proof and mark it as “not to be destroyed”. It may even exist to this day.

But, I wasn’t the only one that bore the cost of workplace bullying. Because I was so physically ill...I couldn’t work for the following 6 months. My daughter who was in her final year, left school and got a full-time job in a pub...to support us financially. She had planned to go to university the following year, but couldn’t because she didn’t complete her schooling.

Then there was the organisation itself. Who knows the cost of those coerced, or forced into doing the bidding of the workplace bullies? What threats did they have to endure? These people compromised their values and core beliefs...more likely out of fear...and not wishing to see themselves on the receiving end of similar treatment to me.

And further to that...the organisation would have paid millions over the course of the CEO’s 4-year employment...and what did they get in return? You only have to look at the proof from his computer to figure that out. If hadn’t been so unwel...I’d say his cost to the organisation...would have definitely been a law suit.

And then there’s the cost of the stolen software... the costs of workplace bullying continue to mount many years after the workplace bully may have left.

The software has been sold internationally for around 10 years, at around $1,000 per licence, per person, per year. Even if there’s only 1000 licenses issued per year...and I believe there’s more...just do the math.

And how do you calculate the future that my daughter has lost? Or the fact that I was under such severe stress that my immune system collapsed...and never recovered. I developed an autoimmune condition in the years that followed...Type 1 Diabetes. And that was despite no medical history of Type 1 Diabetes in either side of my family. Can workplace bullying be so physically damaging that an immune system collapses? You’d want to believe it. Before the workplace bullying I had excellent health...after it, I didn’t...I never recovered physically.

Are there any final comments you’d like to make?

‘Target’ answer:

Yes. What I experienced was workplace bullying and mobbing...it was top-down from the CEO, his supporters and enablers...and it was bottom-up from the PA and her enablers. One bully’s actions were covert, while the other was overt. The workplace bullying took place for no other reason than envy on the part of the PA, and fear of being exposed as inadequate on the part of the CEO. What bully targets need to realise...is that bullying is about the inadequacy in others...not in themselves. People need to get educated about workplace bullying and the damage it can do. If people find themselves in a bullying situation at work, the best advice I can give is what my lawyer Steve said to me... “promise me that you won’t stay there. Run as fast as you can from this place, and never look back.”. But in the interim...start a bully diary, and gather the evidence.

There is a postscript to this workplace bullying. About 3 years after I left I received a phonecall from my previous assistant. She said her last day at the organisation was that very day...and she wanted me to know that she’d spent her last week cleaning up my personal file as best as she could...since the CEO had added numerous false statements and documents to the file after I’d left.