

Companies Wake Up To the Problem Of Bullies at Work

By JOHN SIMONS

One of the first things visitors notice when they enter the Irvine, Calif., offices of Bryan Cave LLP is the granite plaque etched with the law firm's 10-point code of civility.

The gray slab, displayed in the firm's reception area, proclaims that employees always say please and thank you, welcome feedback and acknowledge contributions of others. Such rules may seem more at home in a kindergarten than a law firm, but Stuart Price, a longtime partner, says they serve as a daily reminder to keep things civil at work.

Incivility—and its more extreme cousin, bullying—is becoming a bigger problem in workplaces. Nearly two-thirds of Americans reported that they were bullied at work last year, up from roughly half of workers in 1998, according to research conducted by Christine Porath, a management professor at Georgetown University's McDonough School of Business. These people reported they were “treated rudely at least once a month” by bosses or co-workers in the past year—which Prof. Porath defined as being bullied.

Bullying costs companies in ways large and small, cutting into productivity and turning off customers, management experts say. Workplace behavior is under the microscope after recent allegations of sexual harassment in Hollywood, technology and media. Some companies have found, as a result of investigations into harassment claims, that bullying and boorish behavior are more common than suspected.

Managers know there can be a fine line between a tough boss who gets results and a bully. According to one rule of thumb that human-resources consultant Fran Sepler tells

her clients, feedback focused exclusively on improving an employee's conduct or quality of work will rarely be seen as bullying. “It's okay to set high standards and reinforce those standards,” Ms. Sepler says.

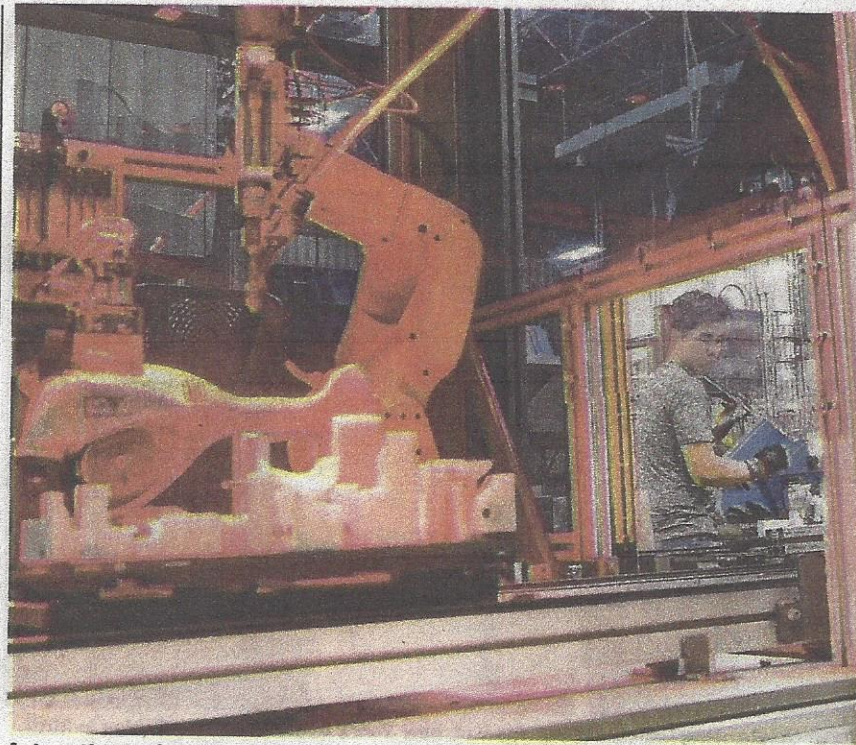
Prof. Porath's research indicates the toll bullying can take. In one study, an experimenter belittled participants, who then performed 33% worse on word puzzles and generated 39% fewer creative ideas in a brainstorming task.

Work environments with large numbers of young employees, significant power disparities or where a few stars bring in a lot of business all are conditions that can give rise to bullying, a 2016 Equal Employment Opportunity Commission task force report on workplace harassment concluded. The task force recommended employers set up systems where employees can report bad behavior, sometimes via a third party.

Riot Games Inc., maker of the popular League of Legends computer game, has taken an active approach to rooting out bullies. Worried that incivility in its games might scare off players and even tarnish its workplace, managers analyzed the chat logs of more than 1,800 employees who played its most popular game.

The company says it found a link between employees who exhibited toxic game play and those who had been fired in the previous year. Riot Games now asks job candidates for their in-game identities during recruiting, and considers applicants' game-playing conduct when making hiring decisions.

Before Bryan Cave posted its civility code, “we may have been doing things that we later agreed were not civil,” Mr. Price said. The code has emboldened people to speak up when rules are broken, he said.



Automation is changing some jobs. A worker and a robot collaborate to make chain saws

A Future Without Jobs?

Artificial intelligence and automation will create new roles

By VANESSA FUHRMANS

With robots on the march, many tech visionaries foresee a world with far fewer jobs. The advance of artificial intelligence and automation, they say, will make much of the work people do obsolete.

Some entrepreneurs such as Tesla Inc. founder Elon Musk predict so little human work will be left that a universal social-safety net will be needed to maintain economic order.

But a sunnier employment picture can be painted. At least 21 new job categories may soon emerge from technological and other societal changes, says a new report from IT-services and consulting firm Cognizant Technology Solutions Corp.

With titles such as “genetic diversity officer,” “virtual store sherpa” and “personal memory curator,” these roles aren't science fiction, the study's authors argue. Rather, they are identified as

jobs many employers will have to fill within the next decade.

“It's easier to understand what types of jobs are going to go away,” says Ben Pring, director of Cognizant's Center for the Future of Work, who with two other Cognizant executives wrote the 2017 book “What to Do When Machines Do Everything.” The idea behind the report, he says, was “to craft a credible narrative of what we're going to gain.”

Other studies have concluded that artificial intelligence and automation can create jobs. Many companies building AI systems have found that humans must play an active role in both building and running them. In retailing, store jobs lost to e-commerce have been replaced by jobs in fulfillment centers.

But defining the jobs of the future can be tricky,

creation depends on much businesses in their workforces, the for certain products vices, and decisions workers, says Michael economics professor university of California, ley, and chairman of ter on Wage and Employment Dynam

Still, he says he di with the grim no-job that some envision. an employer would replace all of their w with robots to make cars, someone needs able to buy those cars by robots for the bus function.”

Several of the jobs Mr. Pring and his coll envision involve help companies manage a intelligence and auto There is what the stu “data detectives”: wo who dig into their en data stockpiles and g