

Ethics-Bits & Pieces

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What to Do If an Employee Is Being Treated Badly?

When you see another employee being treated unfairly or badly, you face an ethical dilemma. It may be tempting to turn a deaf ear to the situation and pretend that it never happened rather than deal with the repercussions of being the work "snitch." Knowing the rights of employees and the laws that protect them, however, might empower you to take the necessary action in such a difficult position.

Determine the Violation

Before taking any action against an employer or a fellow worker who is abusing or discriminating against another worker, you should attempt to determine the exact nature of the violation of the worker's rights. This will play a role in helping you ascertain which company department or which government entity you need contact to alert the proper authorities regarding the nature of the situation. This may involve a little covert activity and research on your part, but you can also go directly to the employee who is being treated poorly and learn what, exactly, is going on.

Empowerment

The employee who is being treated poorly has the ultimate responsibility to take action on his own behalf, but if you know what is taking place, you can become a source of counsel and empowerment for that employee. This is one way to take action without necessarily getting directly involved. Letting the employee know that he

is not alone to fight the battle may give him the impetus he needs to move forward and report the bad behavior.

Documentation

Employees who are being bullied in the workplace should document their experience with their employer. If you witness someone being treated badly and have approached her regarding the situation, you can both document every instance in which the employer or fellow worker treats the employee badly. You will need to build a case against the employer or fellow worker that you can report to higher authorities.

Reporting

If the abuse you witness in the workplace is by one employee to another, you can report it to management or your human resources office. If the boss is the one doling out the abuse, then your approach needs to be a little bit different. In these instances, you should contact a government agency responsible for governing actions in the workplace, such as the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission or the U.S. Department of Labor. These agencies can direct you regarding what specific rights you have and what courses of legal action you can take.