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## Nipping bullies in the bud

By Chelsea Mes  
June 26, 2008 10:00am

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BOSSSES aren't stepping in early enough to deal with office bullying, a leading workplace psychologist says.

Bullies often feel justified in flying off the handle and treating co-workers with contempt because they believe they're dealing with incompetent or lazy people.

A case in point is celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay, who attributes his potty mouth to so-called "muppets".

"I don't mean to swear, it's just the muppets I have to work with sometimes," he told Channel 9 last week when responding to politicians' complaints about his swearing.

"We have a good day where things run to total perfection but throw a donkey in the mix and, yeah, you're in the s\*\*\*."

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### Have you encountered a bully at work? Tell us below

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But Macquarie University psychologist Dr Julie Fitness says yelling, screaming and using anger to get across your message won't help anyone's performance, regardless of whether you think your colleague is doing a half-baked job.

#### Communication breakdown

Dr Fitness says research shows the causes of workplace anger varied depending on whether someone was a boss or a subordinate.

"Employers reported they most often got angry at what they perceived to be incompetence, or the stupidity, or the laziness of people beneath them," Dr Fitness said.

But she said employees often have a very different view of the situation.

"What people reported made them feel really angry was when they believed they were being unfairly attacked and humiliated and treated really badly by their employers."

"They often felt very aggrieved and felt like they weren't listened to - and that the employer often didn't really care about their point of view."

### **Bosses need to act**

In most situations, if someone's giving you grief, your first port of call in trying to sort it out is a chat with your boss. But Dr Fitness says you can't always rely on the boss to sort it out for you.

A CareerOne/CoreData survey conducted last year found nearly three-quarters of Australian workers had experienced bullying at work. Nearly 80 per cent thought bullies got ahead at work.

"When you talk to people about their experiences in the workplace, there's such a lot of intimidation and bullying that goes on that is not nipped in the bud," Dr Fitness said.

"There are workplaces where people feel that it's acceptable that certain people can lose their temper - and abuse other people, and it's put down to 'that's just the way they work'."

Dr Fitness said it was "completely inappropriate" to act that way in the workplace, giving Ramsay's style of management a thumbs down.

"It creates a terrible atmosphere for other people, it creates a lot of anxiety, people feel intimidated, and it's a really bad climate."

### **Don't use the F-word**

Dr Fitness said the key to dealing with workplace anger was taking a step back and exercising some empathy, rather than flying off the handle.

"If you're angry, or you perceive that somebody's incompetent or stupid, it's quick and easy to yell at somebody and swear at them or give them a piece of your mind, but that's not how you resolve situations or help people improve their performance," she said.

"You actually need to be a little bit more patient than that and you need to listen to their side of the story."

Dr Fitness said there were many circumstances you don't necessarily know about that could be affecting their job.

"It's just so easy if you have the power in the workplace, to feel that you can go around and express your anger and expect people to do what you want," she said.

"But you may be generating a lot of simmering resentment in people who don't feel they've been listened to."

### **Harden up**

Ramsay tends to disagree with suggestions a workplace should be a calm, assertive environment.

"The minute you start running the kitchen like it's some form of limp d\*\*\* society, trust me, get out," he said.


"I want to run a proper kitchen with a pair of bollocks, not stand there and wish everybody a Merry Christmas and pat them on the back every time they do a good job.

"It's high pressure, high energy and, more importantly, real - that's how we keep it every day," he told Channel 9.

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