

# DIGNITY, RESPECT AND JUSTICE IN THE WORKPLACE

Year: 2009

WHEREAS, it is the mission of the AFT to bring together all members to assist and support one another, to promote democracy, human rights and freedom in our union, in our nation and throughout the world. It is our responsibility to struggle for justice; and

WHEREAS, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes “...the inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family as the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world...”; and

WHEREAS, we the members of AFT believe that we deserve dignity, respect and justice in our workplace; and

WHEREAS, workplace bullies deny their victims dignity, respect and justice by displaying rudeness, contempt, duplicity and condescension, and by being dominating, belittling, dictatorial, intimidating, dismissive and threatening; and

WHEREAS, Franklin D. Roosevelt stated that one of the essential human freedoms is freedom from fear. Bullying and emotional and psychological abuse create a culture of fear in our workplaces. Fear of retaliation and retribution leaves our members too intimidated and terrorized to fight for, or even assert, their contractual rights, thus undermining the union’s ability to defend them. Bullies in management often attack people with the most seniority or confidence as a tactic to drive them out, which establishes a fearful environment; and

WHEREAS, bullying is one strategy management condones or manipulates to achieve their objectives and promote an anti-union atmosphere. Their continual denial that this abuse takes place and protection of bullies denies people their dignity, respect, justice and promotes union busting; and

WHEREAS, bullying and emotional and psychological abuse becomes institutionalized violence when management condones its use. Management may point to value statements or policies to show that they support dignity and respect, but there is seldom any means of enforcement or consequences for the bully or management; and

WHEREAS, we define bullying as a pattern of coercive, insidious behavior used by one person to gain or exercise power and control over another person and creates a harmful work environment. Bullying exceeds what the victim considers to be appropriate and reasonable in the performance of their work such as rude, degrading, contemptuous, or offensive remarks – and may include emotional or psychological abuse; and

WHEREAS, we define “pattern” as the nature of the behavior, not the specific form of the behavior. Therefore, repeated unreasonable behavior may be a pattern of diverse incidents, often escalating over time, e.g., verbal abuse on one occasion, personal property intentionally damaged on another occasion, and subsequently being unreasonably threatened; and

WHEREAS, we define emotional and psychological abuse as undermining an individual’s sense of self-worth and/or self-esteem. This may include but is not limited to constant criticism, diminishing employees’ abilities, name calling or damaging employees’ relationships with their co-workers, bosses or students, causing fear by threats, intimidation, humiliation,

ridicule or being held in contempt, or destabilizing people by making fun of convictions, tastes or political choices and isolating them from friends or support networks; and

WHEREAS, bullying and emotional and psychological abuse occurs between people of any gender and sexual orientation, and all racial, economic, education and religious backgrounds; and

WHEREAS, bullying and emotional and psychological abuse not only affects those who are abused, but also has a substantial effect on co-workers, friends, family members, other witnesses, and the community at large. Someone who is bullied and attacked at work begins to adopt that behavior pattern and spread the disease; and

WHEREAS, the consequences of bullying and emotional and psychological abuse in the workplace may include increased absenteeism, low morale and loyalty, loss of accumulated wisdom, experience, efficiency and productivity, open hostility, high turnover, increased passive aggressiveness, malicious compliance, post-traumatic stress disorder and violence, and poor public image. A person who feels they are not respected loses respect for their co-workers, bosses, even the institution they work for, which in turn causes them to lose their self-respect; and

WHEREAS, the benefits of workplace civility include increased levels of job satisfaction, efficiency and productivity, lower turnover and greater trust in management. This positively influences an individual's own sense of self-respect, dignity and honor, which improves job performance:

**RESOLVED, that the American Federation of Teachers and its members deem bullying and emotional and psychological abuse and their use in union busting unacceptable; and**

**RESOLVED, that the American Federation of Teachers and its members continue to work for and promote dignity, respect and justice in the workplace; and**

**RESOLVED, that the American Federation of Teachers develop a statement of opposition to bullying, emotional and psychological abuse; and**

**RESOLVED, that the American Federation of Teachers publish examples of relevant contract language and encourage members to consider incorporation of such language in further contract negotiations.**