



Ashley Kate  
HR & Finance

# HR Director Boardroom Notes

June 2020

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EVERSHEDS  
SUTHERLAND



National  
Deaf Children's  
Society



# INTRODUCTION

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Ashley Kate HR & Finance along with Eversheds Sutherland (International) LLP have been coordinating HR Director Boardroom events for over 10 years now. Each year we invite influential HR Directors to talk openly around topics pertinent to the HR Community.

The idea behind this format is to bring HR Directors together in a boardroom to discuss and debate the topic presented; Partners of Eversheds Sutherland (International) LLP chair these meetings.

This year, for obvious reasons, we had to adapt our program of both Employment Law Updates and HR Director Boardroom events to an online video platform. The first of which took place at the beginning of June.

Louise Slattery Deputy Director of People at the National Deaf Children's Society led the presentation welcoming questions and discussion around her key topic.

“How do companies recover from multiple highly publicised misconduct and potential bullying cases and what lessons can HR learn from this, regardless of sector?”

Following are the notes from our HRD Boardroom. If you are interested in joining in on one of these or events, or would like to be considered as a guest speaker, please do get in touch, email: [solutions@ashleykatehr.com](mailto:solutions@ashleykatehr.com)

# DISCUSSION TOPIC

How do companies recover from multiple highly publicised misconduct and potential bullying cases and what lessons can HR learn from this, regardless of sector?

Presented by Louise Slattery, Deputy Director People at the National Deaf Children's Society



# IN THE PUBLIC EYE



**Save the Children** bosses accused of 'downplaying' bullying and sex scandal against former executives by Charity Commission



Headlines earlier this year relating to claims of bullying in the public and third sector.

It is reported that Priti Patel will not face any action following these claims. There are now calls from the Labour party for the report to be publicised, as this person is in the public eye is this right?

How do you think your leaders would handle something similar?

Support

Learn from  
mistakes

Role Model

Protect

Audit

## WHAT IS HR'S ROLE IN THIS SITUATION?

Respond

Mitigation

Crisis

Management

Recovery

# WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL REPERCUSSIONS WHEN MATTERS ARE MADE PUBLIC?

Loss of trust (internally and externally).

Loss of productivity amongst staff.

A surge in number of claims of bullying/harassment from existing or previous members of staff.

Loss of income as people take their business or support elsewhere.

Loss of valued and highly skilled staff.

Unable to attract new talent .

# CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Leaders, HR, Internal Comms and PR teams need to work closely together to get ahead of the 'jungle drums' to make this right for staff.

Respond quickly, be as transparent and honest as possible, be consistent and stick to the known facts both in internal and external comms.

Reiterate to staff that a zero tolerance approach is taken to bullying, harassment in the workplace.

Provide an opportunity for staff to ask questions of senior leaders – either as a FAQ document or a live Q&A (as daunting as this sounds, this is highly recommended but leaders must be well prepared to answer uncomfortable questions or be able to say “I don't know the answer to that right now but I will come back to you all on that when I do”).

Keep trustees (or equivalent) informed of how you are responding to the issues being publicised.



# HOW CAN ORGANISATIONS START TO RECOVER?

Check relevant policies – are they fit for purpose? When was the last time you updated them? When did you last train your HR team and managers in implementing these policies?

Share learnings or updates with staff – but not just as a one off.

Consider conducting a pulse survey with staff (through an external organisation if possible) and temperature check how they felt the organisation handled the situation and/or an opportunity to ask whether



staff have felt bullied/harassed now or in the past (this will tell you if there is a culture of bullying within the workplace)

Keep talking about the culture you want and work with leaders to role model the behaviours they want to see within the organisation.

# IN PLAIN SIGHT REPORT

The Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO) with the support from Centre for Mental Health, recently published a report called 'Inplain sight' which sought to inform an understanding of how charities might inadvertently facilitate an abusive culture.



The report was in response to the rise in public, political and sectoral concern about the possibility of misconduct taking place within charities in England and Wales, including bullying behaviour.

## In Plain Sight: Workplace bullying in charities and the implications for leadership

# TACKLING BULLYING IN THE WORK PLACE

The following approaches were recommended in the ACEVO report to tackle bullying in charities;

- Evaluating workplace culture by allowing their organisational culture and internal policies, systems and practices to be externally evaluated, and to commit to recommendations made.
- Evaluating organisational partners
- Promoting workplace health and safety to address the possible environmental stressors which can give rise to workplace conflict.
- Promoting workplace mental health and wellbeing
- Working better with conflict – there was found to be a tendency in the non-profit or charity sector to emotionally avoid ‘difficult’ discussions in the workplace

# KEY TAKE-AWAYS

- Undertake an audit of your internal culture.
- Take on board any learnings and share these with your leaders and staff.
- Start doing something about it immediately by reviewing your processes, procedures and training.
- Keep talking to your staff and train your managers on dealing with conflict and difficult conversations in the workplace.
- Actively engage with and respond to Glassdoor reviews or other external review platforms.

# FACTS & FIGURES

Taken from a recent CIPD report on 'Managing conflict in the modern workplace' (Jan2020)



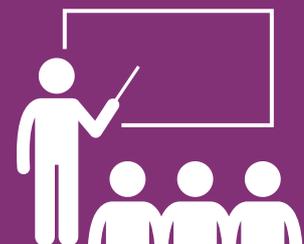
A quarter of employees think their company turns a blind eye to workplace bullying and harassment

15% of workers have experienced bullying in the last three years, while 4% say they've been sexually harassed at work and 8% have experienced other forms of harassment.



Four in 10 (40%) of those who've been bullied or harassed say their manager was responsible, while a third (34%) of employers said one of the top barriers to effective conflict management is that managers don't have the confidence to challenge inappropriate behaviour.

Only two fifths (40%) of line managers say they have had people management training, leading the CIPD to urge organisations to properly train them, including how they prevent and tackle conflict.



# USEFUL FURTHER READING

ACEVO In Plain Sight Report:

<https://www.acevo.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/In-Plain-Sight.pdf>

CIPD Report 'Managing conflict in the modern workplace':

[https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/managing-conflict-in-the-workplace-1\\_tcm18-70655.pdf](https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/managing-conflict-in-the-workplace-1_tcm18-70655.pdf)

Charity Commission Investigation Report into bullying at Save the Children, Page 10-15:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/870390/The\\_Save\\_the\\_Children\\_Fund\\_Save\\_the\\_Children\\_UK\\_Inquiry\\_report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/870390/The_Save_the_Children_Fund_Save_the_Children_UK_Inquiry_report.pdf)



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