

SASKATOON — Pam Bowman was always the problem at work. They said she was stupid, unreliable, unprofessional and disliked. She couldn't even boil water properly.

RICHARD MARJAN/Saskatoon StarPhoenix **Pam Bowman (left) and Monica Kreuger participated in the Powerless to Powerful Conference.**

A victim of workplace bullying, Bowman spent about 15 years facing increasingly hostile treatment from co-workers, leading to serious health problems, the collapse of a career in veterinary technology and a seemingly endless fight for her right to a safe and healthy workplace.

“It was just chronic stress. It was like going into a war every day. What was going to happen next?” she said in an interview this week.

Earlier this year Bowman reached a settlement with her former employer, freeing her to move on to a new, entrepreneurial phase in her life. She now plans to start her own business to help people facing workplace bullying and help employers understand the consequences of such an activity.

“It’s a serious health and safety issue and it’s not as benign as people would like to imagine,” she said.

“It’s a really horrible situation all around for everybody, it’s not productive and from a business point of view, it’s really bad.”

Statistics suggest workplace harassment affects one in three people.

Saskatoon’s Business and Professional Women’s Club recently organized a conference where experts addressed the emotional, economic and legal consequences of workplace bullying.

“The intent is to create an awareness to be very supportive of individuals, family, society and businesses, especially, in tackling this so that we can make everything better — to provide awareness and tools so that it is not an issue that remains the elephant in the room,” said Bowman.

For Monica Kreuger, a BPW member and event organizer, the issue of bullying in the workplace is not just a women's issue — it's a matter of personal health and safety.

“The devastation that creates ... to the community and to the workplace is one thing, but I've just been stunned as to the devastation it creates to the individual,” Kreuger said.

Kreuger, an advocate for entrepreneurialism, says the responsibility for preventing workplace bullying lies with the people behind the business.

“When we create our own workplaces, which we do as entrepreneurs, we need to put the right things in place to make sure everyone who works with us has a healthy workplace,” she said.

“We might not even see it happening, but we need to know, we need to have a process in place to make sure it stays healthy.”

Kreuger hopes the conference brings the issue of workplace bullying to light in Saskatoon.

“If you had any disease where one in three people suffered we would have a solution, we would have research dollars at the table, we would have drives to raise funds to create solutions to the problem — we would have that in place, but we don't,” she said.

Bowman hopes her story will help employers, victims and bullies realize the effect workplace bullying can have on business.

“This could have very easily been dealt with when it was little, but it got to be a monster,” Bowman said. “So if everybody can come together when it's little, it benefits everybody, especially businesses.”

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