

12 REASONS WHY IT IS GOOD TO BE A CHURCH BULLY

JANUARY 23, 2014 REV. ERIK PARKER

1. **Being a bully is the easiest way to get what you want.** Churches are groups where people usually have to work together, and work out how to live as a community. That means give and take, compromise and collaboration. Bullying, however, means you can get anything and everything you want. You can bend people to your wills and desires without giving anything up in return. And as a bully, you don't have to work with, consider or respect others. Bullying is the easiest way to get what you want.

2. **Bullies can offer anonymous feedback.** Churches are already pretty good at not requiring people to stand behind what they say. We send out surveys and feedback tools that remain anonymous. But bullies have it really great. They can send anonymous emails to leaders. They can give in-person feedback with the qualifier, "people are saying." Bullies never have to own the criticisms, and so are free to criticize anything they want to.

3. **Bullies often have gossip clubs.** Bullies are often supported in a small group that likes to keep up on the latest church gossip. This kind of group can meet for coffee during the week or lunch on Sundays or any number of places. As a bully, you can find allies who are ready to support you, who will offer behind-the-scenes support to your behind-the-scenes bullying. It is always easier to bully when you can be confident you are supported by, or acting on behalf of a club.

4. **People will worry that challenging bullies is unkind or unchristian.** The vast majority of church members worry that their behaviour could be perceived as unkind or unchristian. You know, Jesus never stood up to anyone and never challenged bad behaviour. So as a bully you know most of the time you can be confident that other church members won't stand up to you, lest they be thought of as creating conflict or being un-Christ like.

5. You can use your anxiety against others. Human beings don't like anxiety, we don't want to be worried or fearful if we can avoid it. Anxiety and fear are contagious. Use this your advantage. As a bully, if you can get others to take on your worries, your fears, your issues, your anxiety, most people (especially church people) will do almost anything to relieve you (and therefore themselves) of your fears. Use this to your advantage.

6. You can use the other's anxiety against them. As human beings we have often been taught that we have two responses to anxiety – Fight or Flight. Bullies know that this isn't true. There are 3 – Fight, Flight or Freeze. The best bullies know that freeze is the most common response. If you can make others anxious, you know that their first response will be to do nothing. It is pretty easy to bully people when they don't do anything or say anything to stop you. Make them anxious.

7. You don't have to be open or transparent. Bullies know this tactic well. It is much easier to bully from the shadows than in the open. Write anonymous letters and emails that you can deny came from you. Ambush your victims when others aren't around to catch you. Make life miserable for people in private, and be an angel in the open. Most people won't even know that you are a bully. Hide in plain sight.

8. You can play the victim card when caught. So what do you do when someone actually calls you on your bullying? Why accuse them of being the bully, of course! Most people will get so worried that they are bullying you that they will forget all about the fact that you were bullying them first. You never want to defend your own actions, so make other people defend theirs – play the victim card.

9. The stakes are low for you but high for others. One of the great things about being a church bully is that the stakes are pretty low. What could happen to you? Churches will rarely kick you off the membership list. Pastors have jobs to keep, leaders have to tend to running the place. As a bully the worst that could happen is people get annoyed with you, but really that's good for you (see point 6).

10. **You don't have to change.** Change is hard. Growing up and being mature is really hard. Bullying means you can stay the same. You don't have to accept new ideas or learn new things. You can just impose your will on others, make them do what you like, and complain if they don't. Don't change, be a bully instead.

11. **The congregational system (read: family system) will often work to keep you in power.** Great church bullies know that individuals might challenge them, but the system will work to maintain the status quo. Bullies don't change, and therefore don't challenge the system. Intelligent individuals will cease thinking straight in a group and will seek to silence those who oppose bullies (and therefore advocate change in the system) since it is easier to maintain the norm. Feel confident that almost all of the group behaviour in a church is there to support your bullying.

12. **You don't have to care about anyone but yourself.** This is the best part of being a bully of course. You can claim you are speaking for the wronged, the victimized, the silent majority or minority, but really it is all about you. That's the whole reason you can bully in the first place, because your issues come first. Your needs, your wants, your feelings, your ideas. You are numero uno, and thinking about others only gets in the way of taking care of you. So put yourself first and you will be a great bully.

All snark aside, bullying is a major issue in society, one that often seems to paralyze those in authority. Bullying happens because most bullies know to use our anxiety, our fears, and our emotions against us. Most of us would much rather just avoid conflict altogether, and it is much easier to give in to make the bullying stop than to challenge it.

Bullying in the church makes me crazy. I have zero tolerance for it, but I have watched as colleagues and friends deal with church systems / family systems where bullies are protected. Upsetting the bully would cause so much stress on the church, that their behaviour is permitted, condoned even.

EDIT: Some commenters here and on Facebook have mentioned that Pastors can be bullies too. I want to be clear that anyone can be a church bully. Regular members, pastors, bishops, leaders, etc...

It is time for the bullying to end. But it won't be easy. Standing up to bullies means recognizing our own anxieties and need to be liked. Standing up means risking being unpopular, it means risking the wrath of the system that protects the bullies. Standing up means knowing all the advantages that bullies have to lose (see the list above), and not underestimating how far bullies will go to retain their power and privilege. Standing up means that we all participate, even unknowingly support bullies, when our own anxieties about change prevent us from moving and growing into healthier ways of being.

Ending bullying means change. Change is hard. Sometimes it might land you on a cross.