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Do You Recognize the Signs That You're a Bullying Boss?

How to spot the warning signs and change your ways

This summer, Knowledge Capital Consulting in Sioux City, Iowa, had a chance to make \$120,000 in six weeks... but the company flubbed it. President John Paul Engel takes the blame.

"I put too much pressure on the team, and work went from a fun adventure to a chore," he says. "I sent emails to the team urging them to work harder. I asked them to work on the weekend to try to make up short falls. I adopted some of the negativity [and] complained about lack of motivation of my team to others outside the team."

In short, he was a bully. They talk about bullying in high school halls, but it happens in business, too. Here's how to recognize bully tendencies in yourself and what to do about it.

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Warning Signs of a Bully



Are you a bully? Here are the signs, as described by David Martin and Kathy Quinn from executive-coaching firm David Martin & Company in Cincinnati:

Do you...	
	do 75 percent or more of the talking?
	usually have the last word in a conversation or in email?
	rarely get suggestions from your team members?
	see team members leave at the first opportunity?
	yell and behave aggressively, intimidating with your voice or body language?
	withhold important information, then spring it in front of others, making people look foolish?
	throw others under the bus?

Some other common bullying signs, according to Rick Brenner, principal of Cambridge, Massachusetts-based Chaco Canyon Consulting:

Do you...	
	assign degrading tasks or duties to targeted subordinates solely (or almost solely) to vex the subordinate?
	abuse your authority to prevent discovery of your own bullying activity?
	demand excessive hours as punishment for supposed poor performance?
	destroy work products that are deemed inferior, demanding that they be "done again right"?

If any of this sounds like you, it's time to do a reality check, assess your bullying, and begin remediation.

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Remediation Steps for the Recovering Bully Boss

All is not lost. Consider these steps to changing your ways:

1. Help others feel safe.

"Bullying bosses disguise their harshness as 'brutal honesty,'" explains Joseph Grenny, co-author of *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High*. In contrast, effective leaders find a way to be both honest and respectful. "They do both by starting a high-stakes conversation by assuring the other person of their positive intentions and their respect. When others feel respected and trust your motives, they let their guard down and begin to listen, even if the topic is unpleasant."

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2. Show respect.

Rather than put yourself above your employees, "the better way is to think of people as your equals, people who share a common mission. You could ask rather than demand. Replace, 'Jill, you're working on Saturday!' with, 'Jill, we're really behind on the project. Do you think you could come in on Saturday and help me catch up?'" says Walter G. Meyer, author of *Rounding Third*, a book about teen bullying. Respect means showing discretion. "We all make

mistakes, and they should be discussed privately, not screamed down the hall."

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3. Get help.

Bullying is more than just bad behavior. It can have deep roots in fear and insecurity—issues you're unlikely to fix on your own. Counselors, coaches and therapists can help. "If you have any doubt about your own behavior, you've probably already transgressed, and you need a coach who can dish tough love to get you back on track. You can't fix yourself on your own. Trying to do so is like do-it-yourself brain surgery," says Brenner.

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