The Leading Edge

Does your management style make you a bully?

It's important to keep an eye out for employees who harass and intimidate others. But what happens when the bully is you? **More...**

How to keep your Generation X employees engaged

Do you have employees from Generation X on your team? Or maybe you're a member of Gen X yourself. These tips can help with talent development and retention. **More...**

Five ways to create a more flexible work culture

Flexibility comes in all shapes and sizes. See how you can bring more to your team. **More...**

Does your management style make you a bully?

Workplace bullies have been shown to lower morale, increase turnover, lower productivity and reduce innovation.[1] But what happens when the bully is you?

Workplace bullying defined

Workplace bullying is different from the bullying you may remember as a child. Adults don't push their coworkers into lockers or steal their lunch money. So what is it?

The Workplace Bullying Institute defines it as "repeated, health-harming mistreatment...that is threatening, humiliating, or intimidating, or...prevents work from getting done."[2] It may include things like:

- Blaming
- Taunting
- Giving repeatedly unpleasant projects to the same person or group
- Ignoring contributions
- Sabotage

Signs you could be a bully

As a manager, you might be results-driven and ride your team hard. Businesses often value demanding, no-nonsense personalities and reward them with promotions. In fact, the Workplace Bullying Institute estimates that 72 percent of bullies are in management roles.[3]

You can see how it's easy to cross the line from "tough" to "bully." And so you might find yourself in a position where your workers view you as a tyrant while you remain unaware of their concerns. So, consider these red flags:

- You criticize others when you don't like their decisions
- People never seem to disagree with you or come to you with problems
- You only like people who agree with you
- People seem scared when you get upset
- You enjoy feeling like you have control over others

A new leadership style

While tough, demanding management styles may get things done in the short-term, it can hurt your ability to grow a collaborative, productive team. If you suspect that your methods may cross the line, you can develop new habits. Here are some steps to think about:

- Take an honest look at your behavior and how it impacts others
- Acknowledge the actions that need work
- Ask for support and feedback from a trusted colleague, mentor or counselor

With some insight and hard work, you can create a workplace culture that's positive, innovative and bully-free.

[1] Bullying Statistics. www.bullyingstatistics.org/content/workplace-bullying.html. Accessed October 2016.

[2] The WBI Definition of Workplace Bullying. Workplace Bullying Institute. www.workplacebullying.org/individuals/problem/definition. Accessed October 2016.

[3] Why U.S. Employers Do So Little. Workplace Bullying Institute. www.workplacebullying.org/individuals/problem/employer-reaction. Accessed October 2016

How to keep your Generation X employees engaged

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Though different sources show slightly different ranges, Generation X includes people born between about 1965 and 1980. Perhaps because they're likely to have seen their parents lose jobs to downsizing, many Gen X-ers have learned not to put all their career eggs in one basket. They often enjoy continuous learning and seize new opportunities. They may get branded for "job hopping" when really they're just following a unique development path.

Of course there's no one-size-fits-all solution for keeping every member of any generation engaged. But there are approaches that tend to resonate well with members of Generation X. Why not give some or all of them a try and see for yourself?

Encourage work/life balance. Members of Generation X often want to make work/life balance a top priority. And that means they may not be big fans of long commutes, relocating for a job, 50 hour work weeks or checking work e-mails on nights and weekends. They like to engage with the world outside of work.

Add flexibility to your team's culture. It's easier to achieve work/life balance with a little flexibility. That could include more choices when it comes to work schedules, working from home and the ability to take time off guilt-free.

Offer development opportunities. Gen X-ers often like to face new challenges and learn new things. Try suggesting training programs, short-term projects or department exchange openings. Help your team recognize experiences that can aid in their career development.

Choose influence over control. Many Gen X-ers aren't likely to be impressed with authority. Sometimes they even rebel against it. Be sure there's a good reason to play the boss card before doing so. It could end up harming your rapport in the long run.

Treat your people like people. Your team members want to feel valued. Members of Generation X can bristle at policies that detract from their work/life balance or seem illogical. They often feel stifled by "no exceptions" decisions. Many members of Gen X value freedom and autonomy. This also means they prefer not to be micromanaged.

Show your team the meaning in their work. When possible, let your team see how they're making a difference. Even if it takes a bit of time away from the work itself, this can be a big morale booster for all generations.

Help them grow their networks. Many Gen X-ers are savvy with technology and comfortable networking in person, on the web or through your company intranet. Introduce them to others who can act as mentors. Learning from people in other business areas could lead to new ideas and improvements for your own team.

It's true: Each member of Generation X has his or her own unique set of needs, preferences and values. To figure out what works for your employees, try some of the suggestions above or use them as a starting point for a team discussion.

Knowing what your team members value most is the first step toward finding new and better ways to keep them engaged, no matter what generation they belong to.

Five ways to create a more flexible work culture

You've probably heard a lot about workplace flexibility in recent years. Whether your employees are asking for it or you've read about workplace trends, flexible workplaces seem to be on the rise. Consider that nearly 70 percent of Human Resources leaders offer flexibility to help attract and retain talent.[1]

In the end, flexibility is about creating space for people to be fully human. If you treat everyone on your team as if they matter, they're likely to work harder and stay with you longer. Flexible workplaces may include the ability to:

- Work outside regular business hours
- Schedule compressed work weeks (e. g. two or three 12 hours shifts, four 10 hour shifts, etc.)
- Work remotely, either while traveling, from an office in another city, state or country or even from home
- Get time off approved for important life events, vacations and holidays
- Work extra hours to make up for an absence or partial workday

You can always be more flexible

Granted, not every job and not every company can accommodate most or all of the above flexible work styles. But flexibility comes in all shapes and sizes. And every team can benefit from the simple decision to value flexibility in whatever form works for the work that needs to get done. Your attitude and expectations play a vital role in your team's perception of flexibility. Here are some ways you can help create a culture of flexibility:

1. Encourage time off. Do you ever feel annoyed or stressed when team members take time off? Be sure not to let it show. Subtle resistance to time off requests may send a signal to your team that you care more about the work than the people who get it done. It's ideal to send the exact opposite message. Encourage your team to use all their available paid time off. What's best for them in the long run is also best for the quality of their work.

2. Cover for each other. There will always be days when one or more of your team members can't take care of everything you'd like crossed off the list. There will even be days when they can't work at all. Set an example of pitching in and helping meet your customers' needs when you don't have all hands on deck. If you're consistent about it, this sends the positive message that you'll do the same for everyone on your team.

3. Support life goals. Is one of your team members going to school on nights or weekends? Or maybe someone has a baby on the way and you're worried about how to serve her clients through her maternity leave. Be sure to show your team their lives matter to you. Even if you don't yet know how, trust that you'll find a way to make everything go smoothly and encourage your team members' pursuits.

4. Always assume the best. Is someone late? Maybe he or she is helping someone else on the way to the office or meeting. Does a team member not want to take "no" for an answer about a specific time off request? He or she may have a good reason. It might be best to see if you can make an exception.

5. Encourage work/life balance. Work is an important part of life. But so is play. So are outside pursuits. And so is downtime. Try to align your team's culture with the ability to have a life beyond the workplace, too.

You might feel sometimes as if being flexible with your team gets in the way of the work. Be sure to keep in mind that it's good for your team's morale and long-term wellbeing to have some flexibility. It's really all about showing your team you value them as human beings.

[1] The 2015 Workplace Flexibility Study. Available at: www. workplacetrends.com. Accessed October 26, 2016.

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