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