



#### RISE ABOVE

Whether you witness or exhibit workplace bullying, learn how to fix and report it.



#### MEET THE AUTHOR

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## Are You the Bully in the Workplace?

**N**ews accounts and personal stories about bullying are being reported in increasing numbers. While often considered a middle- or high-school problem, bullying in professional workplaces is a common occurrence too and chances are you've witnessed it in action. According to a 2017 Workplace Bullying Institute study, 61% of Americans are aware of abusive conduct in the workplace and 68% described their opinion of workplace bullying as a serious problem. A staggering number of Americans—60.4 million—are affected by workplace bullying.<sup>1</sup>

In her 35 years in the profession, Michelle has worked in every paraprofessional position in veterinary practice. She began in hands-on animal care positions, but shifted to the business side when she realized a passion for veterinary business. The need for veterinary business knowledge was nationwide, which was the impetus for creating the Patterson Veterinary University program, which has educated many veterinary professionals since 2006. Michelle is currently responsible for the education and development of practices owned by the Encore Vet Group, a group whose focus is to elevate and empower the people providing animal care.



## BOX 1

## Bullying Behaviors

**Verbal Attacks****Do you:**

- Make threats, even vague ones (“you’ll regret that,” “see what happens if you do,” etc.)?
- Engage in arguments, verbal warfare, screaming, or harassment?
- Tease or mimic co-workers or subordinates?
- Name-call or create belittling nicknames?
- Insult co-workers or subordinates?
- Humiliate or ridicule others, privately or publicly, for any reason, such as making a mistake?
- Have overbearing opinions?
- Spread destructive rumors?
- Make false accusations?

**Exclusionary Tactics****Do you:**

- Tattle and gossip to influence others’ opinions of someone?
- Ostracize a co-worker or subordinate through exclusionary behavior?

- Refuse to make eye contact or glare at a co-worker or subordinate when they speak, offer suggestions, or give feedback?
- Give someone the silent treatment or show hostility with body language?
- Respond rudely or not at all?
- Leave a co-worker or subordinate out of conversations or activities?

**Sabotage Strategy****Do you:**

- Sabotage a co-worker or subordinate in an attempt to cause them to fail?
- Refuse to share information, knowledge, or best practices in an attempt to cause them to fail?
- Shun difficult cases, patients, or clients to set others up for bad outcomes?
- Blame others for bad outcomes even when you are involved?
- Avoid a co-worker’s or subordinate’s request for their help on patient or client interactions?

- Force a subordinate or co-worker to meet a higher standard?
- Take credit for others’ work?
- Retaliate after a complaint is filed?

**Intimidation Actions****Do you:**

- Use intimidation or pressure to get your way?
- Maintain a hierarchal pecking order where the opinions and ideas of those below you are not valued?
- Make subordinates or co-workers do things you wouldn’t do yourself or are unacceptable according to company policy, such as asking them to work overtime without pay or skip their lunch or break?
- Encourage others to use intimidation against a co-worker?
- Use social media to target co-workers?

Recognizing bullying behaviors has become easier because of the heightened focus on the issue. These behaviors include tactics such as verbal, nonverbal, psychological, and physical abuse, as well as humiliation. Not all bullying tactics are equal in force. Think of bullying as a spectrum of behaviors; on one end is the occasional, minor misconduct that consistently hurts feelings or damages self-confidence and on the other end is consistent extreme behavior that may be very emotionally damaging to the victim.

**SELF-AWARENESS IS KEY**

Education and awareness are necessary to recognize

bullying behaviors that may be taking place in your practice, so that you can either report the behavior or take corrective action. But what if you are the bully? Would you recognize it in yourself? While it seems easy to identify bullying behaviors in others, it is much more difficult to see it in yourself. What if you are exactly the type of bullying person you would readily condemn? It’s difficult because it means redefining how we see ourselves.

Look in the mirror and answer truthfully. Do you exhibit active or passive behaviors that could be viewed as bullying? Has anyone ever called you a bully? Do people describe you as mean-spirited, opinionated,



unwilling to listen to opposing viewpoints, or stubbornly strong-willed? Have you ever threatened, humiliated, insulted, or intimidated a co-worker or subordinate? If you answered “yes” to one or more of the questions, it’s time to recognize the offending behavior.

Before bad behavior can be corrected, it must be acknowledged. Review **BOX 1**, divided by category, and check any behavior that you have exhibited.

If you recognize bully-like behaviors in yourself, it’s time to take a good, hard look in the mirror and hold yourself to higher professional standards.



If you have checked even one box, you are guilty of some form of workplace bullying. If you recognize bully-like behaviors in yourself, it’s time to take a good, hard look in the mirror and hold yourself to higher professional standards. As a professional, your behaviors should not reside anywhere on the bullying behavior spectrum.

### BULLY, MEET EMPATHY

Ask yourself this: Could you handle what you dish out? Before you answer, “Yeah, I’m tough, no big deal,” consider being a new employee, 10 to 15 years younger with less life experience, and expected to carry oneself with ease and confidence in the workplace. Would that change your answer? It should; empathy is a critical emotion in stopping behaviors that may be viewed as bullying.

Generally speaking, people in the veterinary profession have a higher degree of empathy.<sup>2</sup> How can a naturally empathetic person act in a way that negatively affects others? The answer is that many bullies have developed a psychological denial mechanism that allows them to hurt others and be okay with it through self-justification of their bad behavior(s) or harsh words. The bottom line is that bullies often don’t realize that they are bullies.

### BULLY, MEET KARMA

Try to practice empathic interrelating with co-workers and subordinates; if you don’t, karma will likely take care of your behavior for you. Karma is a Sanskrit word in the Hindu religion and is the spiritual principle of cause and effect where intent and actions of an individual (cause) influence the future of that individual (effect). In other words, bad intent and actions lead to “bad karma” for the person. If your thoughts, words, or behaviors are negatively affecting others, at some point the world will reciprocate and others will behave in a way to negatively affect you. Your bullying will be reflected back at you in the lack of respect you get, the stress you carry, or the way you are perceived by co-workers and subordinates.

These are the negative outcomes related to your actions. They include being viewed as unprofessional, having poor interpersonal skills, not being a team player, being the initiator of unnecessary drama, not being considered for advancements (pay and position), or even termination with a negative mark on your career record. Leading or contributing to the demise of another—either emotionally, physically, or professionally—is a sign of personal weakness, not strength, and has a negative effect on the people around you and the culture of the workplace.

There are no winners in the bully-victim relationship. The victim is harmed, the bully is misunderstood by others while holding a false sense of power and strength, and the team can’t work together comfortably, which means clients and patients will not experience the highest level of service from the practice. The truth is, power and a desire to hold others back won’t get you very far in the veterinary profession. Empathy, self-awareness, and a desire to help others succeed will position you to be a trusted, caring veterinary professional, which opens many doors for professional growth. **TVN**

### References

1. Namie G. 2017 WBI U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey. Workplace Bullying Institute. [workplacebullying.org/wbiresearch/wbi-2017-survey](http://workplacebullying.org/wbiresearch/wbi-2017-survey). Accessed April 30, 2019.
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