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## When the Boss Is a Screamer



### DOES YELLING GET RESULTS?

When bosses or customers yell, employees tend to:

Experience a decrease in working memory (the ability to store and manage information temporarily)

Quit their jobs at higher rates

Avoid resolving conflicts, allowing them to escalate

Become less competent in performing tasks

Bring less creativity to their jobs

Speed up their work on simple, familiar tasks

## Shouting Is Less Tolerated in the Workplace, but Nasty Emails and Other Ways of Venting Take a Toll

BY SUE SHELLENBARGER

No one forgets a screamer—a boss who yells at workers, leaving them feeling powerless and constantly on edge, and sometimes reduced to tears when the explosion comes.

It is a figure Andrew Cornell vows not to become. He sometimes feels like yelling when employees at his manufacturing company don't meet his expectations. But he bites his tongue. "Yelling is a vestige of a past time, and I always regret it," says Mr. Cornell, chief executive of Cornell Iron Works in Mountaintop, Pa. Instead, he holds short, frequent meetings with employees having problems, rather than "waiting until the end, throwing a nuclear bomb and leaving blood all over the wall."

Indeed, the yelling boss appears to be quietly disappearing from the

workplace. The new consensus among managers is that yelling alarms people, drives them away rather than inspiring them, and hurts the quality of their work. Some bosses also fear triggering a harassment lawsuit or winding up as the star of a co-worker's cellphone videotape gone viral.

While underlings may work hard for difficult bosses, hoping for a shred of praise, few employees do their best work amid yelling. Verbal aggression tends to impair victims' working memory, reducing their ability to understand instructions and perform such basic tasks as operating a computer, according to several studies of cellphone-company employees and engineering students published earlier this year in the Journal of Applied Psychology. Workers who fielded complaints from hostile, aggressive customers were less likely even to

remember what the complaint was about, compared with workers who dealt with calm customers.

The workplace has become more civil, by many measures. When Lucinda Maine, chief executive of an Alexandria, Va., professional association, was dealing with family

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problems recently, "I did yell at some of my vice presidents. It's better than yelling at the receptionist, but yelling is never appropriate," she says. She quickly apologized to each one, then held an executive-team meeting to share

what she had learned: Keeping emotions in check at work when you're under stress at home takes "emotional intelligence," she says.

But how we fight at work now isn't always healthy. There is still plenty of anger and frustration.

Managers spend about 25% of their time resolving conflicts, research shows. The "not-so-good part" of the no-yelling trend "is that people are pushing things under the carpet," causing frustrations to seep out in other ways, says Jack Lampel, president of the A.K. Rice Institute for the Study of Social Systems in Rainier, Wash. One favorite way of venting, angry email, "serves as a relief valve, but tends to inflame conflict. It takes a very corrosive role in the workplace, for gossiping and undermining others," he says.

Melanie Brooks, the editor of Bangor Metro magazine, was annoyed last year when a writer failed to finish an assignment on time, forcing her to complete the job herself and miss a work event she'd been expected to attend. She fired off an angry email: "I got the missing information, but it nearly KILLED me. This is your job, not mine," she wrote, adding that she didn't want it to happen again.

Ms. Brooks, of Orono, Maine, thought the email was succinct, straightforward and better than dressing down the writer by phone.

But the next day, the writer called Ms. Brooks's boss and ranted about the email for nearly a half-hour, and the boss reproached her for putting her reprimand in writing.

Others use "silent yelling" to vent, says Sylvia LaFair, president of Creative Energy Options, a Sonoma, Calif., leadership coaching company. "They give a stone-faced look, shrug their shoulders, clench

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## Freshman Challenge: a Virtually Decorated Dorm Room

BY SANETTE TANAKA

Siobhan Spiak and Katie Harada have spent months discussing in painstaking detail the décor of the 185-square-foot dorm room they will share this fall at American University in Washington, D.C.

Together, they envision a bohemian theme: walls painted robin's-egg blue, floor-length mosaic-print curtains, large plush pillows, tribal-print tapestries and strings of hanging Christmas lights. They plan to use soft lighting and touchable fabrics in purples, blues and greens. Ms. Spiak wants to buy a four-poster canopy bed.

"The dorm itself is already so drab," says Ms. Harada, who is from Basking Ridge, N.J. "We want to make it more exciting since we will be there for eight months."

For inspiration, they've turned to social media: Ms. Harada browses Tumblr pages, while Ms. Spiak, who lives in Phoenix, adds pictures to her Pinterest board.

The roommates, Ms. Spiak says, disagree on only one thing. "There was a rug that Katie showed me that I just didn't like at all," she says. "To me, it looks like a bath mat, and

that's what I told her. Luckily, she agreed."

College students are increasingly decking out stark dorm rooms with designer-quality décor and the latest consumer electronics. Social media, design apps and shopping sites have been driving the transformations, making it easier to share ideas and make purchases with roommates from afar. Target's new uStyle online tool, for example, lets students create their own virtual room and share it via Facebook, Pinterest or email.

A growing number of retailers are creating specialized services for college students, such as online college checklists and videos of design ideas. Bed Bath & Beyond and the Container Store offer college gift registries. Target holds after-hours shopping events featuring dorm specials. And a number of retailers now offer direct-to-dorm delivery.

According to the National Retail Federation, freshman students and their families will spend an average of \$374 on dorm furnishings and electronics, making up more than a third of total spending for college goods. Freshman students and families are spending nearly 11% more

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**Roommate 1: Ready to Go**

Katie Harada with furnishings she's bringing from Basking Ridge, N.J., to her American University dorm room.



**Roommate 2: Long Way to Go**

One week before she joins Ms. Harada at American, Siobhan Spiak of Phoenix has purchased a spork, a multiuse utensil.