Civility & Respect in the Workplace

Office of Human Resources
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Would you excuse me a moment?... someone's trying to get my attention.
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• As a society, people often treat each other as objects and opportunities rather than as human beings worthy of **dignity and respect**. It takes self-awareness to recognize that **we have personal power to control our actions and reactions to people and situations.**
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- When almost every task is deemed urgent, past the deadline, or a mandate from management, courtesy is often the first casualty.
- One study found that 60% of employees believe that co-workers’ annoying behaviors negatively impact the workplace and, as a result, 40% reported that they are looking for new employment.
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- 781 of 1100 workers surveyed (71%) had experienced workplace incivility in the previous five years. And, that rudeness was from co-workers and superiors. (Lilia Cortina, *The Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*)
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• Differences in communication styles, educational background, culture, race, gender—even management styles—can create unnecessary friction within a work group.
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• Civility is behavior that:
  – Shows respect toward another
  – Causes another to feel valued
  – Contributes to mutual respect, effective communication and team collaboration
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• **Incivility**
  
  — *Incivility* is social behavior lacking in good manners, on a scale from rudeness or lack of respect to threatening behavior.

  — A distinguishing feature of *incivility* is its **ambiguity** and that its **intent to harm or injure another** is not obvious.
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- Incivility, rudeness, and bad manners at work hinder productive communication and destroy workplace relationships.
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- Have you ever been baffled by someone’s behavior?
  - What was that all about?
  - What did I do to make her so mad?
  - What’s wrong with the boss today?
  - Why did my co-worker just snap at me?
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- What actions may constitute a lack of civility and respect?
  - Verbal Abuse
  - Physical Abuse
  - Sexual Harassment
  - Negative Behavior(s)
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- Verbal Abuse
  - Profanity
  - Demeaning comments
  - Racial or ethnic jokes
  - Threats or intimidating language
  - Yelling, devaluing, discouraging
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- Verbal abuse
  - Condescending language or voice intonation
  - Impatience with questions or phone calls
  - Being reprimanded in front of others or criticizing others in public
  - Insulting the intelligence of a co-worker
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- Verbal abuse
  - Argumentative behavior.
  - Sending nasty and demeaning notes (e-mail)
  - Unreasonable requests
  - Exclusion from relevant meetings
  - Name calling
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• Physical Abuse
  – Throwing objects
  – Outbursts of rage or violence (hitting the wall, drawing back as if to strike someone).
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• Sexual Harassment
  – Comments or jokes related to gender
  – Touching someone without their permission
  – Pictures or cartoons regarding gender or sex posted in the workplace
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• Negative Behaviors
  – Scape-goating
  – Backstabbing
  – Complaining
  – Perpetuating rumors
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• Negative Behavior
  – Behavior whose purpose is to control, humiliate, denigrate or injure the dignity of colleagues
  – Being expected to do another’s work (clean up after them)
  – Behaviors which undermine team cohesion, staff morale, self worth and safety
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– Unethical or dishonest behavior
– Repeated failure to respond to a call or e-mail
– Cultural or gender biases
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- There is a cost for lack of civility in the workplace:
  - employees who experienced uncivil treatment reported lower job satisfaction
  - employees withdrew from their jobs through repeated tardiness and unnecessary sick days
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- employees reduced their commitment to the organization
- employees experience anxiety about the incident or future interactions
- employees decreased their effort at work
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• **Increased lawsuits and claims**
  – Several reports cite increased harassment or wrongful termination claims due to inappropriate communication or a perceived ‘hostile environment.’
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• Increased problems with recruitment & retention
  – In a time when retaining and recruiting top-notch talent is tough, alienating employees can be very costly. Studies show that many people who quit jobs cite no recognition and/or poor communication from managers or coworkers as problems.
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- Lost productivity
  - Data shows that employees are absent more and spend more workday time worrying or talking with other workers about perceived incivility instead of working.
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• Loss of Customer Service
  – Employees who are fearful or stressed don’t perform to their potential when working with customers. Some actually vocalize complaints regarding their situation to clients.
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• Achieving civility
  – Start with yourself - Be part of the solution
  – Say what you mean, and mean what you say. There's no substitute for authentic communication.
  – Take responsibility for your choices and actions.
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- Accept the consequences of your **inappropriate** choices and actions.
- When things go wrong, resist the urge to assign blame. It's the system that usually fails, so fix the system, not the people.
- Greet everyone with “hello” and a smile.
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- Stick to deadlines - Promise only what you can deliver. If what you deliver falls short, explain why.
- Return messages promptly.
- Be on time and prepared for meetings
- Pay attention in meetings and do not constantly check your personal electronic devices for emails, text messages, etc.
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– Give credit where credit is due - when credit and compliments come your way, spread them around to all who helped. And if you think you're solely responsible for that honored achievement, think again.

– Respect co-workers time and need for privacy.
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- Keep your cell phone turned off or in silent or vibrate mode whenever possible.
- Use an appropriate volume of speaking when talking in the office, at meetings or on your cell phone.
- Avoid multi-tasking when you are talking on the phone or on a conference call.
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– Say please, thank you and/or I am sorry.
– Communicate in a professional and courteous manner in all forms and at all times.
– Demonstrate acceptable etiquette and manners.
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- Before acting, consider the impact of your words and actions on others.
- Create an inclusive work environment. Only by recognizing and respecting individual differences and qualities can our organization fully realize its potential.
- Widen your social circle. If you always go to lunch with the same group, invite someone new.
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- Self-monitor the respect that you display in all areas of your communications, including verbal, body language, and listening.

- Understand your triggers or “hot buttons.” Knowing what makes you angry and frustrated enables you to manage your reactions and respond in a more appropriate manner.
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– Adopt a positive and solution-driven approach in resolving conflicts.
– Resist the urge to jump to conclusions about people and their motives. Go to the source, get the facts and then decide, especially before acting on assumptions that can damage relationships.
– When you take a stand and later realize it's the wrong stand, be honest enough to say so.
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- Include others in your focus by considering their needs and avoiding the perception that you view yourself as the “center of the universe.”
- View today’s difficult situations from a broader and more realistic perspective by considering what they mean in the overall scheme of things.
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- Involve more people in weighing options and making decisions. There's incredible brainpower all around you, so why not put it to work?
- Gandhi had it right: We must be the change we wish to see in the world. Start small – in your own department - be the difference.
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- Become a bridge builder and role model for civility and respect. Act in a manner whereby you respect yourself, demonstrate respect for others, and take advantage of every opportunity to be proactive in promoting civility and respect in your workplace.
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• Resources for further reading
  - Rude Awakenings: Overcoming the Civility Crisis in the Workplace, Giovinella Gonthier
    ISBN: 079315197X
  - Choosing Civility: The Twenty-five Rules of Considerate Conduct, P.M. Forni
    ISBN: 0312281188
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- Questions