

Insight

An e-newsletter for leaders from your Aurora Employee Assistance Program

Civility versus Incivility in the Workplace

What is civility? It is more than just being nice to one another. Civility encompasses learning how to connect successfully and live well with others. Civility includes common courtesy, politeness, mutual respect and fairness. It means demonstrating good manners through effective self-expression and good communication with others.

On the flip side, incivility is often described as rudeness, disrespect or insensitive behavior. It can take many forms, ranging from ignoring people to mocking, teasing and belittling them. One thing is clear. **Incivility in this country is on the rise.** It's fueled by factors such as widening political divides and "less-than-social" behavior on social media platforms, as well as interactions in the workplace.

Why is civility important?

Jim Taylor, a psychologist at the University of San Francisco, said, "Civility is something far more important than simply how people conduct themselves with others. Rather, civility is an expression of a fundamental understanding and a respect for the laws, rules and norms (both written and implicit) that guide its citizens in understanding what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior."

Civility and incivility

Treating coworkers in a civil manner — everything from listening intently during a meeting, to simply saying hello to coworkers when you see them — has a tangible impact on workplace productivity and corporate culture.

Why should workplace leaders be concerned about incivility? Incivility impacts employee morale and increases stress, ultimately affecting work performance. It can



damage an organization's corporate culture and destroy relationships among colleagues. Over time, incivility may lead to the permanent loss of good employees and create a toxic workplace.

The impact of today's technology on incivility

The increased use of technology can lead to greater disconnections and rudeness between human beings. While electronic communication allows us to easily connect with each other, technology also makes it easy to voice frustrations, hurl insults and criticize others from a safe distance. In our digital age, negative electronic messages and social media putdowns are easily delivered to others, primarily because it doesn't happen face-to-face.



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Characteristics of Civility and Incivility



Examples of civility are:

- Being courteous and helpful to others. Saying “please” and “thank you” goes a long way toward creating a culture of civility.
- Sharing a spirit of collegiality.
- Thinking before speaking. Using respectful and “non-violent” language when talking to others.
- Being respectful of diverse views and different groups.
- Showing an openness to others without hostility.
- Disagreeing with others in a respectful way.
- Approaching conflict with a desire for resolution, rather than an opportunity to prove others wrong.
- Speaking in tones of voice that are appropriate for the circumstances.
- Focusing on the common good, rather than on individual goals. Sharing facts, rather than beliefs or personal opinions.
- Offering positive feedback to others to reinforce thoughtful civil interactions.

Examples of incivility are:

- Using language perceived as being aggressive, sarcastic or demeaning.
- Engaging in disrespectful non-verbal behaviors (e.g., eye-rolling, loud sighs or looking bored).
- Sabotaging a work project, damaging a co-worker’s reputation or taking credit for someone else’s work.
- Withholding important customer/client information.
- Routinely arriving late to meetings.
- Checking email or texting during meetings.
- Ignoring or interrupting someone who is speaking.
- Making rude, misogynistic, homophobic and personally insulting remarks (either verbally or in writing).
- Losing one’s temper or yelling at someone in public.
- Demonstrating rude or obnoxious behavior.
- Physically “cutting off” or jostling another person (pedestrian, cyclist or car driver).
- Making verbal or physical threats of violence.

One final thought

The increase of incivility in the workplace (and throughout our society) **can be contagious**. Anyone can easily catch it and spread toxicity, without giving it a second thought. Thankfully, **civility’s ability** to spread can be just as powerful. Each person who demonstrates a small act of kindness, consideration and mutual respect is helping to ensure a culture of civility and contributing to a healthy, productive society.

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