

Member's Quarterly

Spring 2019 Edition

Feature

Embracing Civility

You lead the way

Complaints of harassment, discrimination, bullying, violence and disrespectful workplaces are now a major concern for employers. As we cope with the escalating situations, I found the word "incivility" is becoming frequently used.

What does incivility mean? Let's look at how the Institute of Civility describes it. Civility is about more than merely being polite. Civility requires a deep self-awareness being characterized by genuine respect for others. Civility involves the tremendous efforts of remaining present even with those with whom we have inherent and perhaps fierce differences. It is about continuously being open to hearing, learning, teaching and changing. It pursues mutual ground as a start point for discussions when differences occur while at the same time being aware that differences are heartening. It is persistence, grace and strength of character.

Recent research has expanded our practical understanding of incivility by identifying behaviours which employees have deemed disrespectful. The most frequently occurring forms include: neglecting to turn off cell phones; talking behind someone's back; doubting someone's judgement, using demeaning or disparaging language, gestures or behaviours; communicating with the intent to belittle or degrade, eye rolling, giving the silent treatment and using sarcasm; gossip and slander; paying no attention or ignoring someone; taking credit for someone else's work or ideas; intimidation by intentionally using fear to manipulate others. It may also include yelling, invading personal space, throwing or slamming things and losing one's temper, sabotaging by setting someone up to fail or intentionally creating a situation to make another person look foolish or incompetent. This also may include hate-ism by deliberately pointing at a victim based on age, gender, race or sexual orientation.

Many examples include: blaming others rather than accepting responsibility; checking email or texting during a meeting; using email to send a confusing message to avoid facing the person, which may be misunderstood and misinterpreted; not saying "please" or "thank you"; not listening and talking over or down to someone.

The cost of incivility is high. It is not only about money! There is research to support impacts on performance through lost time and absenteeism, lack of creativity, less helpfulness and less likely to assist another employee. The impact of teams is on the level of energy, emotional engagement and performance. The conduct reaches into our physical health. It also impacts our customers and commitment to the organization and willingness of employees to stay with their companies. These all affect the bottom line.

How do we address these issues? It all starts with us as individuals. We must manage ourselves. If you throw a ball at the wall, it comes back. This works with people too. If you are mean or disrespectful, it comes back. People will be mean and disrespectful with you.

How can you be kind and patient all the time when life is so stressful and just plain hard? You do it by embracing civility!

Civility requires self-awareness. With self-awareness, you can control your attitude, manage your moods and choose behaviours that do not negatively impact your life or disrupt those around you.

Can you...

- Feel and express annoyance, irritation or frustration without hurting others— and then let it go?
- Accept and even appreciate that other people have needs and opinions which are different from your own?



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- Encourage and enjoy the successes of others?
- Recognize when someone else feels irritated, upset or frustrated and keep yourself from reacting impulsively in response?

As leaders, we need to model. Leo Tolstoy said "Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing themselves." Employees look to leaders for guidance and someone to aspire to. What are they seeing? Watch your language and put away your smartphones when engaging with your employees. Be mindful of the perils of emails and other electronic communication. Choose your method of communication carefully, be it by phone or face to face meeting. Take immediate and corrective action when warranted. Rude and disrespectful behaviours emerge quickly and often without warning. As the leader, you need to respond at the moment. By delaying a reaction or action, it sends out mixed messages to the offender as well as the entire team. Take all complaints seriously, realizing that coming forward by the individual is difficult and they need to know they are supported.

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