



## INCIVILITY IN THE *workplace*

How **rude behavior** affects us, and what we can do about it

**W**hether it's an upset customer hurling profanities or a co-worker who routinely snubs us, incivility directly impacts how we do our jobs.

A study of business school alumni by Georgetown University researchers found that when people were subjected to incivility, 66% cut back their work effort, 80% lost work time, and 12% left their jobs. Incivility in the workplace can lead to higher turnover, increased absenteeism, and potential lawsuits, as the line between uncivil behavior and harassment is paper thin.

Whether the root of the problem is conflicting personalities, workplace stress, toxic team members, or opposing worldviews, incivility is on the rise. A 2016 survey by the Society for Human Resource Management found that 62% of people said they had been treated rudely at least once in the past week, up from 55% in 2011 and 25% in 1998. The study also found 70% of US adults agree incivility has risen to a crisis level.

### WHAT IS INCIVILITY?

In short, incivility is any type of rudeness, such as actions or statements that may make us feel uncomfortable, unhappy, or disrespected.

At times, incivility is blatant, like when someone uses profanity or makes a derogatory comment. It can also include less obvious **microaggressions**, *indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group*. A microaggression could be a comment that generalizes a person based on their age, gender, race, or sexual orientation. The person who made the comment may not even be aware they hold such a stereotype.

*Incivility, continued on back*



**ENCOURAGE THOSE AROUND YOU TO  
LIVE UP TO THE VALUES YOU WANT  
FOR YOUR WORKPLACE CULTURE.**

Incivility, from front

## WHAT CAN WE DO?

Incivility is like a virus. When someone experiences rude behavior, it reduces their self-control and can lead them to be rude to others, spreading the behavior. It can also have a ripple effect into people's personal lives, including how they treat their family members.

Workplaces should make clear what behaviors are discouraged (such as sarcasm, interrupting others, gossiping, temper tantrums) and unaccepted (obscenities, name-calling, ridiculing and humiliating others).

Individual employees also play a role in creating a culture of civility:

**Embody expected behaviors.** Look at your own actions. Are you polite to your co-workers? Do you lose your temper, slam doors, or use profanity? Do you know the names of the people you work with? This is especially important for supervisors, as leaders set the tone for an organization's culture. In some research, one-fourth of individuals reported that their boss is rude.

**Challenge uncivil behavior.** Encourage those around you to live up to the values you want for your workplace culture. Sometimes individuals don't realize they are offending others. When you experience or witness incivility, advocate for yourself and those around you. If you don't feel comfortable directly inserting yourself, ask someone who is better equipped to handle the situation.

**Encourage acceptance.** It's our responsibility to keep an open mind and allow ourselves to be exposed to other viewpoints. When in conflict with someone, make a genuine effort to identify the positive in that person and their perspective.

Promoting civility doesn't mean there will be an end to controversy, but in a civil work environment, disagreements are respectful. Teams are open to dissent and contradictory viewpoints. Workplace civility offers a safe, supportive environment of trust, respect, and collaboration.



## COUNSELOR CORNER

Kaitlin Doyle  
MS, LAPC, LPC, NCC she/her  
The Village Business Institute

**Civility** is treating others with authentic respect, being willing to participate in genuine discussion, and requires time and presence. Civility is making the choice to engage in respectful discourse when opposing views are expressed, speaking up, and being intentional and deliberate with the goal of promoting connection and understanding. Civility is active. It means engaging respectfully to cultivate an environment where every member is valued and respected. It's a necessary part of communicating effectively, building communities, and coming together for common goals. Civility allows us to navigate disagreement without damaging individual relationships or the strength of the group. An environment with civility is a place that has access to the strengths, creativity, and problem-solving skills of all its members. This allows a group, whether a workplace, family, or society, to reach higher potential.

What are some ways we can show civility? One way is to be considerate. Be aware of the way your words and actions impact others. If your actions or words negatively impact someone, take responsibility and practice self-restraint and anger-management skills if there is a conflict. This means being aware of your **triggers**, *things that upset you*, and managing your reactions so that you can respond in an appropriate way. Be aware of how you display respect in all areas of communication, including body language, verbal interactions, and listening efforts.

Another important way to practice civility is to be inclusive by respecting and recognizing individual differences. These differences help a group reach its full potential. Don't leave people out, and, if you do, acknowledge your mistake and apologize. Everyone deserves to feel welcome.

Rely on facts and avoid making assumptions, which can damage relationships. Approach problems with a solution-focused perspective first and foremost. It can be helpful to look at a problem from a broader perspective and consider what the concern realistically means in the overall scheme of things.

Lastly, be an example of civility. Act in a way that shows you respect yourself and others, and contribute to the environment you want to have. Be proactive when you see opportunities to improve yourself and interactions with others.

If you are experiencing incivility in the workplace or would like help contributing to a more civil workplace, consider meeting with a **Village EAP** counselor. Call **800-627-8220** and ask to use your Village EAP.