

INCIVILITY

...and just plain rudeness

*Have you noticed fewer people saying please or thank you, or even holding the door?
It's not your imagination; latest studies have shown that incivility is on the rise.*

What exactly is incivility? How does it differ from other forms of mistreatment?

The key difference is the concept of ambiguous intent. In a typical case of interpersonal mistreatment (eg verbal aggression, emotional abuse, violence), there is a perpetrator and a victim. Using verbal aggression as an example, the perpetrator may shout at a victim. However, in a case of incivility, this clear intentionality is not present. For example, an employee says *hello* to a co-worker and the co-worker does not respond in kind. The co-worker might be considered rude to the employee but may not have meant any harm.

Incivility can manifest in 3 major ways—

Interpersonal Incivility - when one person is directly uncivil towards the other.

Cyber Incivility - is uncivil behavior exhibited in computer-mediated interactions, including emails, texts, and social media communications.

Victimless Incivility - the rude behavior does not immediately impact another person.



Research on Rudeness

A 2012 poll of 1,000 American adults found that two-thirds of participants believed that incivility is a major problem. In a 2011 survey of workers, researchers found that 50% reported being treated rudely at least once a week, up from just 25% in 1998. Additionally, research over the past ten years has shown that between 75% and 100% of employees have experienced some level of incivility from their coworkers, supervisors, or customers/clients.

Examples of incivility in the workplace can be something as simple as not re-filling the coffee pot when it's empty. It may seem minor, but over time can have huge negative impacts on individuals. Incivility can also spread. For example, if someone is rude to you, you might be rude back, creating a spiral of incivility and possibly even escalation to overtly hostile acts such as verbal aggression or violence.



In the latest issue of Monitor on Psychology, the decline in civility is examined at length. Psychologists and researchers are finding that rudeness does more than just make life unpleasant, it can have a substantial impact on our well-being. It can also affect the bottom line in organizations, with sales performance decreasing, and rises in absenteeism, according to a 2012 study. The key to creating a positive, productive, and engaging culture within the workplace is listening, understanding, and responding to concerns about behavior quickly, and ensuring that leadership sets the tone for meaningful and respectful interaction.

Civility & Cyber Space

It has become common for many people to vent their frustration through online sites instead of dealing with the situation at hand. This increases the prevalence of cyber-bullying and online incivility. While many people report feeling *calm* and *relaxed* after ranting online, if they make a habit of venting anger in this way, it becomes a go-to mechanism for dealing with anger in all circumstances.

What can be done?

The work of Dr. M. P. Leiter of Acadia University shows that it is possible to reduce rudeness in the workplace. Leiter has used an intervention called Civility, Respect, and Engagement in the Workplace (CREW) in Canadian hospitals. CREW was developed by a Veterans Health Administration team to improve civility and functioning in Canadian hospitals. In a 2012 study of nearly 2,000 health-care providers in Canada published in the Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, Leiter and his co-authors found that the CREW intervention led to improvements in civility, reductions in the amount of incivility people experienced from their supervisors and decreased distress.

Though research investigating civility interventions is relatively new, there are recommendations that might be effective in building a respectful work environment. One of the most important factors in maintaining a civil work environment is to have a strong example set by management. Managers and supervisors should model civil behavior, helping create a culture of civility and respect. If managers frequently violate social norms for courtesy and respect, employees will often take this as a cue that this is acceptable. Additionally, during the recruitment stage, HR should place emphasis on the importance of civility when selecting a candidate. Once the candidate is hired, expectations for civility should be clearly communicated.

*If you're having trouble dealing with uncivil or rude behavior,
contact your EFAP for assistance.*

**For confidential assistance
Brown Crawshaw 1.800.668.2055
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