

The Devastating Impacts of Everyday Workplace Incivility on Employee Health and Well-Being

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Agenda

- What is civility? What are uncivil workplace behaviors?
- How does incivility impact organizational effectiveness, the bottom line, and employee health and well being?
- What conditions are necessary to build a civil organization?
- What tools and strategies can we implement to engender true organizational commitment to civility and promoting employee health and well being?

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Civility is:

- 1) connected with citizenship, a community of citizens collectively;
- 2) behavior proper to the intercourse of civilized people;
- 3) ordinary courtesy or politeness, as opposed to rudeness of behavior;
- 4) decent respect, consideration;
- 5) an act or expression of politeness;
- 6) decency, seemliness

Oxford English Dictionary (2nd. ed.)

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Civility involves:

- Respect, courtesy, politeness (but more than manners)
- Citizenship and community
- Mutual, reciprocal behaviors (but not always)
- Skills and Practice:
 - Civil discourse
 - Interpersonal communication



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Uncivil Workplace Behaviors

- Low-intensity
- Deviant behaviors
- With ambiguous intent to harm the target
- In violation of workplace norms for mutual respect

Examples: Rude, discourteous behaviors that display a lack of regard for others

(Anderson, Pearson, 1999)

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Uncivil Behaviors



- Passive Incivilities (what we don't do, e.g., don't say "Good Morning," "Please," etc.)
- Subtle disrespect (non-verbal/para-verbal messages)
- Breaches of etiquette, common courtesy
- Pet peeves (e.g., microwave/copy machine issues)

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Uncivil Behaviors



- Gossip (e.g., water-cooler talk about absent third-parties)
- General rudeness (noisiness, disruption, disrespect, condescension, arguing, etc.)
- Inappropriate electronic communication (email, texting, blogs, Tweets, Facebook, etc.)
- Verbally abusive behaviors (foul language, defamatory and accusatory remarks, etc.)

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Uncivil Behaviors



- Privacy and ethical violations
- Culturally insensitive behaviors and remarks
- Harassment based on protected status
- Bullying

Note: These behaviors involve matters of degree

- In some instances, intent is less clear and impact is less intense
- Some matters can be addressed before they escalate (i.e., learning opportunities, counseling, etc.)

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Making the Case with Your CEO

Management Theory and Practice

- From “Industrial Age” =
“Command and Control”
- To “Knowledge Worker Age” =
Inclusive, Participatory

(Source: Drucker, Covey)



“Command and control” – potential adverse impacts:

- Boss’ behavior = harsh treatment, dismissiveness, insensitivity
- Management Inequities = negative reactions
- Feeling “caged in” = co-worker tensions
- **Incivility**



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Making the Case with Your CEO

Expectations of Younger Generations

- Older Generations = More accepting of uncivil environments
- Younger Generations
 - Expect teamwork, working with others, meaningful work
 - Loyalty not tied to company
 - Less tolerance for incivility

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Making the Case with Your CEO

Impact on Women and Minorities

- Discriminatory conduct has become “covert”
- Many forms of incivility suggest discrimination

(Cortina, 2008)



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Making the Case with Your CEO

Broken Windows Theory (Giuliani; Gladwell)

- Small infractions lead to more severe conduct
- Attention to smaller incivilities
=> No tolerance for larger, more overt behaviors



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Making the Case with Your CEO

Spiral Effect of Unattended Uncivil Behavior

- Party A engages in uncivil act, Party B responds, spiral begins and may escalate
- Boss (Party A) offends employee (Party B) = Party B engages in uncivil act toward co-worker or family member (Party C)

(Anderson, Pearson, 1999)



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Making the Case with Your CEO

Impact on Performance

- In survey of people reporting on rudeness at work:
 - 48% decreased work effort
 - 80% lost work time worrying about the incident
 - 63% lost time avoiding the offender

(Pearson and Porath, 2009)



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Making the Case with Your CEO

Impacts on Health

- Amygdala hijacking : One uncivil act → Stress → Flood of negative emotions → Physiological responses (increased heart rate, erratic breathing, etc.)
- Covert worse than overt: “Daily hassles” more likely to create bad feelings and impair work functions than major life stressors
- Impacts of stress-fueled rudeness:
 - Fatigue, weight loss/gain, headaches, gastrointestinal illness, high blood pressure, muscle tension, sleep disturbances
 - Cognitive dysfunction (motivation, confidence, concentration, etc.)
 - Emotional (anxiety, pessimism, depression, irritability, etc.)



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(Pearson and Porath, 2009; and sources cited therein)

Incivility: General Theme

- Traditional policy and procedural remedies are not always effective to address everyday incivilities
- Are there more efficient remedies available?

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Two Conditions for a Civil Organization

1. Adopt a “Self-Regulatory” (Organic) Mindset
2. Adopt “Self-Regulatory” Practices

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1st Condition: The Self-Regulatory (Organic) Mindset

- Move beyond:
 - Strict compliance (“must” do to avoid liability)
 - Ethics is enough (“will” do because it’s right)
- To an Organic Mindset
 - “Want to do” – innate desire to create a dynamic organizations
- Organizational Members
 - Embrace responsibility for managing their behaviors and responding to others’ uncivil behaviors
 - Avoid “anything goes” mentality where there is no accountability

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2nd Condition: Adopt “Self-Regulatory” Practices

Typical Responses to Bad Behavior

- Implement policy, procedures to address specific offenses
- Progressive discipline
- Negative ratings/remarks in performance reviews
- Impose sanctions as outcome of formal investigatory and adjudicatory processes

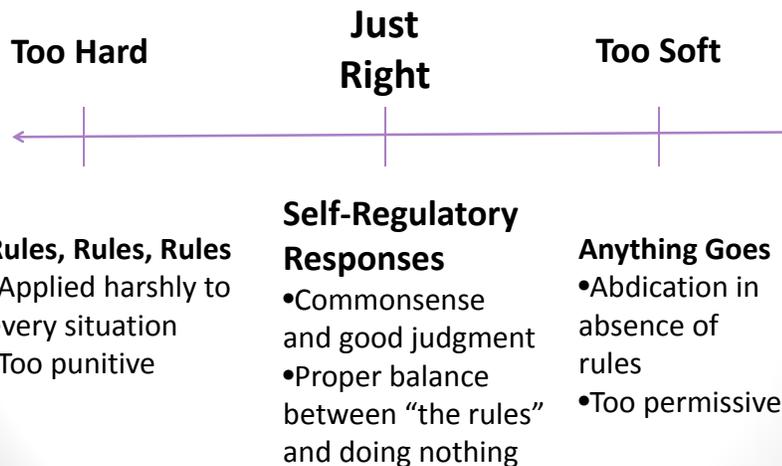
Theme:

- Reliance on policy and procedure
- “Enforcement” mentality

Question to ponder: Is civility “enforceable?”

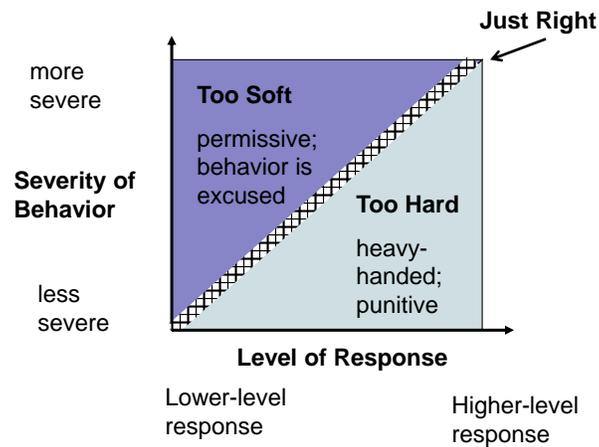
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The Goldilocks Theory for “Enforcing” Civility



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Choosing the Right Response



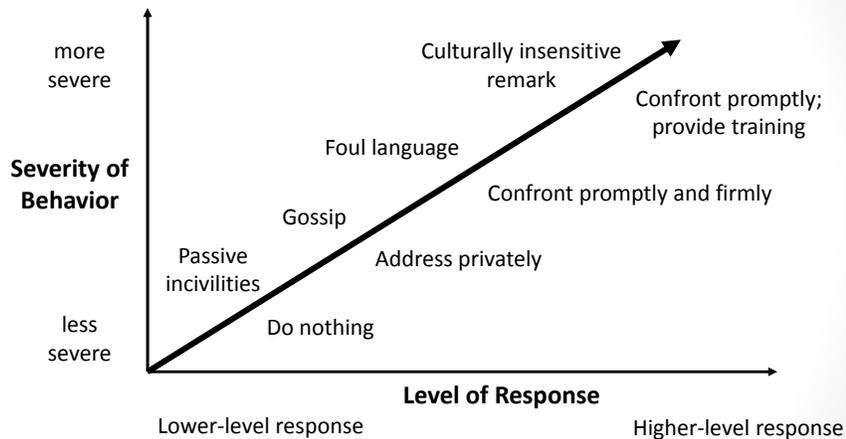
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“Self-Regulatory” Responses

- Do nothing
- Establish “house rules” and discuss situations as they arise
- Offer support and counsel to help person change behavior
- Impose social consequences
- Confront behavior in supportive manner and insist on change
- Seek help from manager who intervenes
- Seek third party to counsel, mediate
- Provide training focused on scenario discussion & problem-solving

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Every Incivility Requires a Response



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Organizational Strategy #1: Recruit a Civil Workforce

- Commitment to basic premise: No tolerance for employees who can't model civility ("no jerk rule")
- Nothing good comes from ignoring this premise
 - Worst situation: when the "jerk" is the leader
 - Management literature reports the adverse impacts of "jerks" in the organization
 - Rule also applies to "superstars"

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Evaluate Selection Standards for Leadership, Citizenship, etc.

- Broadly:
 - Review and revise expectations for all employees
 - Communicate expectations through employee handbooks, onboarding, training, etc.
 - Look for consistency and uniformity
 - How are managers evaluated? How do managers ensure civil behaviors of employees?
- Narrowly:
 - Incorporate in all job descriptions and postings
 - Higher-level positions should have explicit leadership and civility-related standards

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Search for Technical Proficiency and Good Character

- Involve more than hiring manager
- Use multiple evaluators
- Bring in individuals outside team to look specifically for civility-related characteristics
- Involve HR, equity, diversity advocacy offices, etc. to advise and/or serve in selection process



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Organizational Strategy #2: Include Civility Content in Training

Compliance Training Should Help Managers:

- Distinguish between situations involving policy and situations allowing for “self regulatory” responses
- Know when to confer with HR and when to address matters on their own
- Understand “broken windows” concept: address incivilities to minimize more egregious behaviors
- Engage in active learning opportunities: role-plays, scenario discussions, skills practice, Q & A, etc.
- Develop solutions, not knee-jerk policy responses

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Skills-based Civility Training

- More than “dos” and “don’ts”
- Create awareness of issues and help employees develop skills
- Focus on scenario discussion and problem-solving
- Incorporate civility principles in existing modules for conflict management, customer service, team building, etc.

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Organizational Strategy #3: Build Conflict Capability

This involves:

- Putting into the hands of employees the skills, tools and strategies to address their own conflict situations and communication challenges
- In order to:
 - Support early intervention to address conflict and avoid escalation
 - Minimize reliance on formal internal resources which often limit opportunities to address relationship issues
- Why? Employees are their own best advocates

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Building Capacity to Resolve Conflict Occurs Through:

- Skill-based training specifically focused on conflict-related issues and topics
- Coaching employees through conflict
- Building capacity among more than “specialists” to help others with conflict situations (e.g., in-house mediators)

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Organizational Strategy #4: Manage or Exit “Jerks”

1. Make standards clear at the outset
 - Employees should understand
 - Appropriate behaviors
 - Consequences
 - Avenues for recourse and support
2. Incorporate standards into performance management
 - More than annual review
 - Cycle of activities: 2-way communication, coaching, feedback, etc.
 - Technical proficiency + Civil conduct = Performance



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Exiting “Jerks”

- Take advantage of probationary period
- Be unerringly objective, consistent, fair
- Warn of consequences, then impose when line is crossed
- HR must advise and back up manager
- Ensure against procedural loopholes, inconsistencies, unclear mandates

Remember: Every incivility requires
a response



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A Few Other Organizational Strategies

- Watch for “Command and Control” Procedural Traps that don’t allow for flexibility
- Routinely discuss crucial civility issues with team
 - Before, during and after incidents
- Create and live by organization-wide values statement for civil conduct (i.e., not policy)
- Allow for “second chance” options
 - Utilize compassion and forgiveness to restore otherwise good employees, and avoid discipline when possible

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Thank You!

Questions?

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Daniel B. Griffith - Bio

Daniel is associate faculty for Indiana University and teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in leadership, conflict management, alternative dispute resolution, diversity and HR management. He is the founding Director of the Office for Intergroup Dialogue and Civil Community which supports organizational efforts to foster civility and civil discourse, as well as facilitate dialogue and increased understanding between and among diverse social identity groups. He previously worked as a civil rights attorney and in roles in human resources, training and organization development, and affirmative action/equal opportunity compliance.

Daniel is principal author of *The Conflict Survival Kit: Tools for Resolving Conflict at Work* (2nd ed.) and co-author of *Supervisor's Survival Kit* (11th ed.), both published by Pearson Education, Inc. He also contributes monthly articles on management and workplace topics for HigherEdJobs.com, an on-line career and recruitment resource. He is a licensed attorney and registered civil mediator in Indiana. He is also a consultant and trainer on management, HR, diversity, and conflict resolution issues for non-profits, government agencies, colleges and universities, and professional associations.

Daniel received his J.D. degree from IU Robert H. McKinney School of Law and a Bachelor of Arts degree from DePauw University. He is a Senior Professional of Human Resources (SPHR) and a Senior Certified Professional with the Society for Human Resource Management.

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