Civility and Respect in the Workplace

Civility, Respect, and Engagement

1. **Civility** is an essential behavior of all employees in all organizations. These are the interpersonal "rules of engagement" for how people relate to each other, their customers, and their stakeholders; the fundamentals of courtesy, politeness, and consideration.
2. **Respect** connects everyone at a personal level. It reflects an attitude developed from deep listening and understanding, cultural and personal sensitivity, and compassion. It honors all the participants in an interaction by creating a safe place to have difficult conversations, and leads to an environment of honesty and mutual trust.
3. **Engagement** is the result of respectful relationships within an atmosphere of trust.

"Civility costs nothing, and buys everything."—*Mary Wortley Montagu*

What is uncivil behavior?

Uncivil behavior can include

1. Failing to acknowledge another person's presence
2. Using abusive language
3. Gossiping
4. Discounting employee contributions
5. Bullying and intimidating coworkers
6. Sabotaging individual and team efforts
7. Discriminating against a particular individual or group
8. Practicing insensitivity against coworkers' needs and values
9. Practicing poor etiquette in dealing with correspondence

Reasons Why You Should Be Civil

1. There's no escaping other people! Cliché as it may sound, no man is an island.
2. There are many benefits to practicing civil behavior. Some of the benefits of civility to an organization or an individual employee are even proven by empirical research (less absenteeism, increased productivity, better morale, healthier employees).
3. It's the right thing to do. If anything else, civility is recommended because it's the right thing to do.

Additional Reasons to Practice Civility

1. Every person, regardless of age, race, or contribution, deserves to be treated with respect.
2. Civility resonates with many of the positive values of society, including tolerance and mutual support—it's the humane thing to do.

3.   Civility creates a conducive working environment as well as a stable and productive organization.

True or False?

If you are good at what you do, you don't need to bother with being civil to other people.

FALSE

How does civility set the stage for effective communication with a person perceived to have a differing personality or views?

If you act with civility toward a person with a differing personality or views in your workplace, you will be able to constructively discuss what your perceptions are—productively. Reacting in anger and/or being defensive will merely close down all channels of communication. Civility helps make a person feel acknowledged and appreciated, which makes them more open to feedback.

Demonstrating Respect

1.   Always give a formal acknowledgment of another person's presence, regardless of that person's position within the organization.
2.   Every person deserves to be given attention when they're communicating.
3.   Respect your coworker's property.
4.   Respect the right to individual beliefs.
5.   Respect diversity within the team or department. Diversity means that you'll have people of different religions, political beliefs, abilities, traditions, and values working in the same organization.
6.   Use your coworker's time wisely. A little-known way you can practice respect in the workplace is by respecting your coworker's time.

Costs and Rewards of Civility

While incivility can be perceived as harmless behaviors, they can significantly affect the organization's morale. Incivility has direct impact on worker productivity, quality of products and services, and employee retention, among other things. Civility, on the other hand, can improve all these areas considered as relevant in the running of a successful organization.

Incivility and the Costs

Costs of incivility include

1.   High employee turnover
2.   Poor productivity
3.   Stress at the workplace and home
4.   Health costs
5.   Lawsuits and settlements
6.   A steady decline in an organization's values and culture

On the other hand, rewards of civility include

1. **Employee satisfaction and engagement**—Workers' strong positive emotions correlate reliably with organizational success, and workers' positive emotions include a sense of being treated with respect.
2. **Improved company or product branding**—Civil behavior among employees can be a plus to an organization's reputation—and in the business world, a good name can be everything.

Four Causes of Incivility

1. **Lack of self-restraint**—Incivility, in any context, can be easily avoided, or at least controlled, if individuals will actively practice self-restraint.
2. **Anonymity**—Studies have shown that people have less inhibition when they know that they can't be made accountable for their actions.
3. **Stress**—A considerable amount of incivility in the workplace can be traced to both personal and work-related stress.
4. **Pursuit of individualism in the society of equals**—Some people have the attitude that it has to be each man for his own and that expressing oneself in the most authentic way possible, whether civil or not, is a right and an entitlement.

How to Overcome It

1. Create, communicate, and enforce policies regarding civil behavior in the workplace.
2. Provide continuous education and training on civility.
3. Practice regular self-assessment.
4. Increase accountability and transparency in the organization.
5. Examine the root cause.

Forgiveness

1. Understand that holding on to negative feelings (grudge) is not healthy for you.
2. Humanize the offender.
3. Remember your own transgressions. Know that you can choose to forgive even if the other person won't admit their fault.
4. If you want to work on your forgiveness of another person, actively find ways to rid yourself of anger and resentment.

Benefits of Resolution

Resolving conflict can result in the following:

1. **Analyzing cause and effect**, which points to what needs correcting, and builds options.
2. **Identify feedback.** It's important to know what works and what needs to be eliminated or improved upon in order to make the workplace more conducive to productive and happy

employees.
3. **It creates a culture open to change.** When you are actively analyzing root causes of uncivil behavior in your organization, you communicate a positive attitude toward implementing changes that is the best for everyone.
4. **It prevents small issues from escalating into big conflicts.** Research has consistently proven that small issues, when left unattended, can escalate into a bigger issue.

Burroughs-Glover, L. (n.d.). *Civility and respect in the workplace* [PPT Presentation] (B. Schuette, Ed.). Washington, DC: United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Natural Resources Conservation Service. Retrieved October 19, 2018, from https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/