The Costs of Incivility

Peter Metzner April 2023

Many have studied the costs of incivility in the workplace, including the Gallup Organization, Inc. Magazine, Harvard, Georgetown University, Ohio State University, Thunderbird School of Global Management and Colorado State University to name a few. The percentages below are a compilation of the most recognized costs of incivility. (Compsych Corporation)

Recent surveys of multiple organizations found; when asked, *"What affect does incivility in the workplace have on your work?"*

 47% said they intentionally decreased the time spent at work.

 38% said they intentionally decreased their quality of work.

12% said they left their jobs because of incivility in their organization. Creativity also suffered, performance and team spirit deteriorated, and customers turned away. Note: More recently, since the pandemic, this percentage seems to have increased significantly.

Incivility Defined

Incivility is behavior lacking in good manners. It can range from rudeness, being critical, judgmental, angry, or condescending, a general lack of respect to aggressiveness, bullying and threatening behavior. Incivility may not always be obvious.   Its intent to harm or injure another is not always discernable - even to the person behaving badly. People who are behaving in a negative or hostile way may not even be aware they are doing so or aware of the impact of their behaviors. Justifications may include "I am just being direct – Why are people so sensitive? Why am I the only one who cares? People are lazy, incompetent and only here for a paycheck that's why I am so angry! "

Potential Causes of Incivility:

 Increasing dependence on virtual work and technology. With virtual work, in addition to many feeling isolated and stressed, it's harder to understand intent without seeing body language or facial clues that we pick up while meeting face to face.   This can make it harder to realize others positive intent and justify negativity, reactivity and a negative assessment of other's motives.

 Workload issues: With work that requires a high degree of careful focus, capacity for attention is diminished. When overworked or feeling depleted, it is more difficult for many to self-regulate their emotions or behaviors.

Organizational Causes:

Workplaces with Undefined Values or a lack of Accountability. Organizations that lack clarity and especially accountability on the types of behaviors that are expected and valued. - When values and civil behaviors are not included in the mission or values statement of an organization, employees can act in their own perceived self-interest rather than being mindful of their impact on others.

Lack of Trust with Management and Colleagues.

We only trust people we feel care about us and are coming from good intentions. If there is rampant distrust in an organization – stress levels are heightened, guarded and defensive behaviors seem to increase and silos -us versus them thinking may occur. .

Lack of Accountability. If managers or leadership does not hold staff accountable for incivility; motivation, engagement, commitment, communications, and retention are negatively impacted - valued employees may leave the organization.

 Mental Fatigue (Including burnout, anxiety, depression & stress) It takes mental energy not to give in to base urges, react negatively or in a hostile way when frustrated. The more worn-down people are the greater the risk of behaving badly.

Differences in personalities, generational differences, communication styles, educational backgrounds, religions, cultures, race, and gender. Each of these perceived differences can contribute to unconscious bias, conflict, and friction in the workplace.

Benefits of civility in the workplace:

- **Staff show respect toward one another.**
- **Employees feel valued.**
- **There is greater mutual respect, trust is enhanced and there is more effective communication, productive conflict, and team collaboration.**
- **There is greater engagement, commitment, retention, and improved results.**

We all need to be role models of civil behaviors; to be self-aware, responsible for our impact on others and willing to take feedback nondefensively. We can learn to be more emotionally intelligent, manage negative emotions more constructively and responses to frustrations and things we don't agree with. We each need to be willing to hold others accountable for behaviors that are uncivil – such as aggressiveness, bullying, or disrespect..

"When you are in a supportive environment you can function at higher levels of complexity."
Kurt Fischer Ph.D. (Harvard)

Suggested Readings & Resources

The Ideal Team Player – Patrick Lencioni

The Five Dysfunction of a Team – Patrick Lencioni

Anger Kills – Redford Williams Ph.D.

Conversational Intelligence, Judith Glaser Ph.D.

Stress: The Portrait of a Killer Nat. Geo Documentary (Can be viewed on YouTube or Netflix)