
What is Civility and Why Does it Matter?

The dictionary defines civility as courtesy or politeness. In the workplace, civility can be defined as behaviors that produce feelings of respect, dignity, and trust. Unfortunately, acts of incivility can be easier to identify. These acts, like those listed below, can create a hostile and unproductive workplace.

- Creating unnecessary and irrelevant controversy
- Gossiping
- Treating a subordinate like a child
- Off-color jokes
- Texting during a presentation
- Racial or gender-based comments

An Uncivil Workspace

Incivility and hostility in the workplace have become a growing problem, with 62% of employees reporting that they are treated rudely at work at least once a month. Hostility in the workplace has real consequences for productivity and employee retention. Employees who experience uncivil behavior are less productive and, according to one study, experienced a 66% overall performance decline. In a survey of 800 employees, 12% said they left a job because of how they were treated during one interaction. Incivility is also catching. In one report, 25% of people who experienced incivility from a manager or co-worker reported taking their frustrations out on customers. These numbers highlight the importance of promoting and encouraging civility in the workplace.

Another reason a civil work environment is important is that it minimizes your exposure to harassment and hostile workplace lawsuits. A report by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission found that one-third of the 90,000 allegations reported last year included harassment. The report also found that incivility often preceded harassment.

Creating a Civil Culture?

Civility begins at the top. Model to your employees the kind of conduct you expect. Articulate that you expect employees to treat each other with courtesy and respect. This might mean creating and posting a mission statement/code of conduct or holding staff meetings to discuss workplace values; let employees know what is expected of them (e.g., not interrupting people, not telling off-color jokes, etc.). Furthermore, rewarding and acknowledging good behavior when you see it is just as crucial as addressing poor behavior in creating a culture of civility.

Encourage employees to speak up when a co-worker makes inappropriate comments or behaves rudely. Often the offender is unaware of how their comments or actions are being perceived. Statements such as “I’m uncomfortable with that.” or “I’d appreciate it if you would use a more professional tone with me.” can help educate an unintentional offender that their conduct is out of line. Also, use bystander training, which teaches employees to speak up when they witness someone being treated inappropriately.

What This Means for Counties

Creating a civil workplace takes a conscious effort from management and employees. When an incident of incivility is reported, address it immediately. Taking the steps mentioned here will help create a pleasant and productive working environment while limiting your liability. For more information, on workplace civility, contact Senior Human Resource Specialist, Dana Mumej, at (303) 861 0507. 