

Aggression at Workplace

With increasing work pressure, approaching deadlines, and stressful client meetings, it is not uncommon for employees to exhibit aggressive behavior at workplace. We have listed here a few real-life examples to understand the causes of aggression and its grave consequences.



The Case of Patrick Sherrill

It was the fateful morning of August 20, 1986, when the clock ticked 7 o'clock, and in walked into his office Mr Patrick Henry Sherrill, the 44-year-old mail carrier from Edmond, Oklahoma. He was in his uniform when he showed up at the post office.

Without having a word with anyone, he sealed off the exits, took out three loaded pistols and opened fire randomly at anyone who was unfortunate enough to cross his path. In just 15 minutes, he shot 20 employees, killing 14 and gravely wounding 6. When the cops arrived, Sherrill turned the gun on himself.

Patrick Sherrill had been badly reprimanded by two supervisors the previous morning because of his constantly misdirecting mails and being a poor performer. Of the 14 employees he killed, one was his supervisor.

The Case of Nidal Malik

On November 5, 2009, Nidal Malik Hasan who was a U.S. Army major and psychiatrist, shot and killed 13 people while injuring more than 30 others at the US military base located at Fort Hood, near Killeen, Texas. This was the worst act of massacre at any American military base so far.

The United States Department of Defense provided evidence that Hasan had been radicalized by a foreign terrorist organization before the attack and his actions were motivated by the same terror group who had poisoned his mind against his seniors.

The Case of David Burke

On December 7, 1987, Burke booked a flight at Los Angeles International Airport for Pacific Southwest Airlines Flight 1771 to San Francisco. Burke had managed to smuggle a .44 Magnum onto the plane and shortly after the plane took off, he started pumping bullets into the flight attendants, pilots, and crew members, killing all of them.

Flight 1771 crashed into a hillside in San Luis Obispo County, killing all the 43 people on board. Inside an airsickness bag recovered at the crash site, Burke had left a message to someone named Raymond Thompson which read: "I asked for some leniency for my family, remember. Well, I got none. And you'll get none."

David Burke was a ticket agent with US Airways until he was fired by his supervisor, Raymond Thompson for theft. Burke pleaded with his supervisor to grant him leniency, if only for the sake of his family, but his supervisor refused to give him another chance.

What Causes Aggression

Many of you would strongly condemn these examples of **repulsive behavior** that led to the deaths of all these innocent people. Such extreme acts of violence undoubtedly have no place in a civilized society. However, if you were to look closely, you would notice that the stimulus of these unusually bloody actions were rooted in some very commonplace incidents. As a matter of fact, by the time you are done reading this sentence, millions of employees would have got reprimanded by their bosses, millions would have heard others bad-mouthing their supervisors, and millions would have been fired from their jobs.

Given the sheer numbers of such cases happening around us on a daily basis, that too in environments that are not so dissimilar to the ones involving Hasan, Burke, and Sherill – is it just some miracle that such homicidal incidents are not more frequent and bigger in numbers?



Are we to believe that our working class is a **ticking bomb** waiting to explode and we should count ourselves lucky that we haven't seen the worst side of it yet? That would be a very dangerous thought to entertain, as that would mean when we step inside our workplace, we are all under a potential risk of life and limb.

In a world that is run by large corporations and government institutions, there will always be a huge volume of employees who will have to report to their supervisors and will be held accountable while delivering under **crushing deadlines**. It's unrealistic to expect that similar cases of firing employees, reprimanding them or influencing them won't happen. Or maybe those extreme reactions are the results of uncivil behavior and derogatory actions directed at them in their workplace.

Incivility at Workplace

Experts have found out that Workplace Incivility is closely associated with employees who have to endure abusive behavior from their supervisors on a regular basis. In short, work-place incivility is a milder, more nascent form of the type of workplace aggression that we discussed earlier.

This abusive behavior includes but is not limited to supervisors ridiculing their employees, constantly berating them due to their past failures, ignoring them or avoiding conversation with them, not crediting them and praising them for their efforts and achievements, addressing them in bad mood or a fit of rage.

Many think that the easy solution to these kinds of work-related problems could be to either retaliate against such degrading behavior, or simply quit. However, with the employment situation being the way it is in this recession-hit world, more and more talented people are deciding to suffer the abusive behavior they face at the hands of their supervisors.



Such employees decide to weather out the stormy employment scenario so that they can quit the company when the time is right, however many of these don't manage to see the bright side of this picture and deviate into destructive behavior. Instead of quitting or retaliating, they strike out against their employers by engaging in actions that are detrimental to the organization. This negative driving force results in **uncivil behavior**.

When these employees are denied their due in the eyes of the management, they tend to think that the management owes them which leads to such abusing of office supplies. Because employees operate and utilize the majority of a company's assets, they tend to direct their frustration and anger by abusing the company's resources, using office equipment, even stealing them. They start reporting late, slacking in work, leaving early and delivering low quality output. This happens because their sense of commitment and obligation towards their employer is destroyed. When that line is breached, employees simply stop caring about the employer.

Worse still is the fact that these employees will gain approval from other equally-mistreated employees, snowballing the unproductivity and slackness even further into a huge loss for the company. Such behaviors are called **acting out**. This is the stage where people want to forget the cause of their unhappiness by taking part in destructive actions that they think justifies their ill-treatment.

Many employees who act out of anger cite **not getting enough respect** as the main reason behind their uncivil behaviors, closely followed by **not getting enough recognition**. While these two are the top reasons for minor offenses, they are not the reason behind severe offenses.

It is also found that while employees become less productive when they are not satisfied with their work or the work environment, the deviant behavior is not universal. Many organizations produce a sustained supply of quality output even if employees complain of longer hours, lesser pay and erratic schedules.

Causes of Workplace Incivility

A case could be made that it's fair to the supervisors and managers to paint all of their sub-ordinates and associates under them in a negative light, as all of them don't have the same managerial style and approach to work. Indeed, our very first premise began by wondering why extreme outbursts at workplace are not so common when there are millions of employees getting reprimanded, terminated and influenced every day.

There's no questioning the talent and team-managing skills that are employed by many efficient managers and supervisors all over the world, however, there are certain situations when even the most seasoned and adept managers are found at the end of their tether. Such situations are often caused when managers are spurred on to achieve **unrealistic targets** within **pressing deadlines**.

Such expectations force the managers to apply relentless pressure on their teams to extract the best performance out of them. While this might give positive results at times, but expecting a team to meet stiff targets every day is unrealistic and when a team does bad, it results in a **kick the cat** situation where the managers won't be able to vent their frustration on anyone other than the hapless subordinates, and the unwelcome actions they conduct on that particular day forms the basis of incivility.

After having a discussion with HR heads and disgruntled ex-employees, researchers identified the five major areas which were behind the uncivil behavior of most employees –

- **Pay-cuts** – It was found that making frequent pay-cuts was one of the biggest reasons many employees resorted to uncivil behavior.
- **Part-time Employees** – Employing part-time employees when there already is a full-time staff made the existing full-time employees uncertain about their job and career prospects, leading them toward uncivil behavior.
- **Freezing payments** – Freezing payments of staff and making budget-cutting makes the workplace extremely unfavorable for an employee.
- **Changing Managers** – Employees get used to the managerial styles of their supervisors and become productive over a period of time. Making sudden managerial changes significantly decreases the levels of employee engagement.

In addition to these administrative reasons, improper working environments like unhygienic workplace, high temperature, and poor ventilation also influence uncivil behavior.

Types of Workplace Incivility

Different people have different levels of tolerance for mistreatment and ill-behavior at the hands of their employers or supervisors. Depending on these levels, they may exhibit different types of uncivil behavior.

Experts have studied these various levels of incivility. Let's discuss them –

Verbal-passive-indirect	No interest in clarifying any false
Verbal-passive-direct	Silent treatment of co-workers, not answering calls or replying to emails. Avoiding contact.
Verbal-active-indirect	Propagating lies and rumors about co-workers and belittling others' ideas and
Verbal-active-direct	Insulting people, giving condescending replies and yelling at co-workers.
Physical-passive-indirect	Influencing others to stop co-operating with specific people in the workplace.
Physical-passive-direct	Trying to be in groups with larger number of people, to camouflage underperformance.
Physical-active-indirect	Stealing office resources, destroying property, abusing equipment, funds misappropriation.
Physical-active-direct	Physically attacking people, verbally assaulting, sending cold non-verbal messages.

It has also been observed that the ones who exhibit the level of uncivil behavior do not stay at that level, but plunge to the next low level of increased passivity at work. A “verbal-passive-indirect” will have the tendency to quickly move down to the “verbal-passive-direct” stage, if proper counselling and intervention is not done at the right time.

Efficient managers always keep a look out for employees who are exhibiting the first symptoms of dissociation from work and have a frank one-to-one discussion with them, so that the employee can once again connect to the workplace and align himself with the work-flow.

Defining Workplace Civility

Civility at workplace is the practice of addressing the root causes of incivility, understanding its behavioral indicators, learning the costs of incivility and the rewards of civility. It explains the importance and the overall impact of practicing workplace etiquette and political correctness.

You Demand, I Supply

Years ago, businesses used to run on the simple concept of **You demand, I supply** routine. The focus was more on the goods, in the sense that if somebody needed a product, he will first have to find someone who supplied it. It was immaterial, if the supplier was the most uncouth person imaginable. He always had a steady market, just because he supplied commodities that met demands of the people. This was the initial stage of marketing strategy that stressed only on **commodity acquisition**.

Market Competition and Customer Service

The conservative marketing strategy changed forever with **growing competition**. Although the existing business-owners tried their best to wipe the competition through various practices, they could still notice a gradual decline in the number of customers' visiting them to purchase goods.

The interesting thing to note here is that even if the demand of products fell drastically for some business-owners, the demand of the commodities, in itself, saw no decline. In business terms, the relative demand fell, while the absolute demand remained the same. This brought the concept of **customer service**. The focus shifted from the goods to the customer. The people who provided good customer service prevailed whereas those who only believed in catering goods to the market couldn't survive the changing business environment.

Customer services brought a change in outlook and this new thinking process tricked down gradually to the adequate treatment of employees too. In today's world, providing customer-centric service is one of the most significant elements of successful business, closely followed by effective employee engagement.

So it came as an understandably rude shock to many when experts and industry observers singled out **rudeness** as one of the factors that costs industries millions every year. It forced the industry heads to introspect and realize that all the knowledge and technological advancement is coming at the cost of basic social values.



Maintaining Civility at Workplace

Maintaining civility at workplace is not rocket science. All employees get into their jobs after clearing an interview where their interpersonal skills are tested and evaluated, so they are already aware of how to be civil to co-workers. However, they have lost the skills to communicate and practice basic etiquette.

This loss in basic social etiquette has resulted in the creation of an uncondusive workplace where bosses intrude upon their subordinates' privacy, gossiping among employees and berating them is common, case of co-workers facing abuse and harassment in office crop up frequently.

Workplace Civility addresses key issues of handling difficult scenarios in workplace and also discusses practical ways of conflict resolution. Effective communication, both verbal and non-verbal, and active listening play a big role in the enhancing the civility of a workplace.

Workplace Civility - Worksheet 1

Suggesting a person to smile back when a co-worker smiles at him, or to return someone's greetings, may be smirked away initially as airy manners, however such an attitude could end up with that person paying a heavy price for it in the long run. It is these small gestures that sums up an individual's perception in the public mind and an image is built accordingly.

The following activity will help you identify the levels of civility you practice in office.

Recall a time when you had to garner a lot of respect from a co-worker, superior and/or subordinate. Identify the reason you received this consideration and what rules of civility you practiced in this situation.

Based on your recollection, answer the following questions –

- What was the behavior of our co-worker like which made you feel that he was respecting you?
 - How did your co-worker's behavior towards you affect?
 - Your performance at job
 - Your interaction with co-workers
 - Your self-esteem?
 - Your self-confidence?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 representing model civil behavior, rate yourself in terms of your practice of civility at your workplace. Explain the rating you gave yourself.
- On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 representing “ideal civil environment”, rate the practice of civil behavior in your workplace by all co-workers. Explain your rating.
- What do you think you are doing to ensure civility at your workplace? What do think you are the areas in which you still need to improve?
- What do you think your organization is doing to ensure civility at your workplace? What do think are the areas in which your organization still needs to improve?

Download Try-it yourself sheet.

Workplace Civility - Importance

The words that frequently come to mind when one hears "civility" are respect, courtesy, tolerance, politeness, and courtesy. All these are qualities employers look for while recruiting employees, because they understand that these qualities are essential to relate with others in a positive and productive manner.

A respectful person will be able to handle an opposition in an efficient and professional way. Similarly, a tolerant person will know how to rationally handle an unruly situation without losing his cool.



However, there are times when uncivil behavior is mistaken for boorish behavior. Many a time, a person can be uncivil without his being aware of it. For example, someone who starts working for a new company assuming that he will be subject to the same guidelines in the new company as he was in his previous one, will unintentionally invite friction with his co-workers.

At times, discussing work performance with someone might be misconstrued as harsh criticism, especially if the tone of the voice is not modulated properly. A supervisor could easily argue in his defense that he has the senior designation and can share criticism whichever way he wants. However, in doing so, he ends up soiling his reputation in workplace and killing future chances at career growth.

There are many other instances where a good-intentioned person could unknowingly create for himself the tag of an "uncivil employee". Some of them are mentioned below. Let's see how these simple actions are often misunderstood –

- **Gossiping** – Unless a news has been confirmed, it's uncivil to instigate the discussion of a topic simply based on rumors. This seemingly harmless action can inflict major psychological damages on the target of this unsubstantiated gossip.
- **Using Abusive Language** – Even if the intention is good, using crude language or abusing someone verbally doesn't serve any purpose whatsoever. The recipient won't want to understand the reason of the tirade, but would rather take it personally. The abuser will also earn a bad name for himself as an ill-tempered guy.
- **Ignoring People's Presence and Greeting** – This is another uncivil behavior in common practice. Even if one is the busiest person in the world, he would still find time to return someone's greeting with the same compassion. Ignoring people's greetings and walking past them without even a smile is extremely rude.

- **Discounting Employee Contribution** – discounting employee contribution means not sharing proper credit with someone for his contribution, or not giving proper recognition to someone's efforts. Even if this happens unintentionally, someone's emotions could get hurt when his hard work is not appreciated or credited to him.
- **Sabotaging Individual Efforts** – Trying to cut a way out of competition by not informing someone who is your competitor in promotion of the exact time of a client's arrival.
- **Discriminating Against People** – Harboring prejudice against an individual based on his race, gender, age, mental ability, and physical appearance.
- **Not Being Sensitive to Co-Workers' Needs** – Not being able to pay attention to the feelings and needs of others e.g. not giving a co-worker a sick-leave, or not giving maternity leave to someone to justify optimum workplace attendance.
- **Engaging in Distracting Activities** – talking over the phone while a meeting is going on, not cleaning up the whiteboard after using it are all actions that don't involve anyone but draw criticism of everyone.
- **Practicing Poor Communication** – Ignoring phone calls and emails, disclosing contents of confidential emails to people outside organization.

Balancing Self-Interest & Self-Control

In a practical world, it's impossible to meet the interests and preferences of all conflicting parties. The reason behind this is that there are no one-point issues that employees face in the workplace. Many problems are interconnected and could be traced back to even years. For instance, an annoying worker could simply be needing someone who would listen to his issues, and give him the attention and recognition he deserves. He might also be venting his frustration from his personal life at workplace.

When you are engaged in civil behavior with your co-worker, you provide more opportunities for supportive interaction and empathy - which opens the door to aligning your self-interest with the employee's interests, and the company's scheme of things in general.

Civility is more than mere good manners. Civility is about walking the thin line between self-awareness and social awareness. You have to appreciate the efforts of others, while also having an accurate assessment of your role in the grand scheme of things. It's a delicate balance between pursuing self-interest and practicing self-control. This is one of the main reasons that makes all the facilitators of effective programs on civility preface a training workshop on self-control, before they move

on to self-interest and others. Therefore, one cannot just depend on good manners but also has to be informative and understanding to practice civility.

What Necessitates Civility?

There's a line from John Donne's Meditation XVII that goes- "No man is an island." In today's world of global business and instant connectivity, this thought couldn't be truer. In fact, the sentence could be further modified to suit the present time, and be re-written as "no man can be an island".

In your professional life, you may come across many people who pride themselves on being self-starters who can provide optimal output with minimal supervision. People like these are indispensable in an organization and yet, even they need to rely on their supervisors to get exact instructions to proceed with their work.

Even employees will have to rely on other's efforts to execute a plan successfully. A self-funded businessman needs customers whom he is going to sell his products, and distributors to provide supply channels. Authors need readers to sell his book. So, whether you admit it or not- if you want to make it far in today's world, you have got to learn how to play nice.

You might still get success by being a **reclusive genius**, but your road to success could face many hurdles that you could easily do without. There was a time when civility simply meant proper upbringing, but in today's world, it could be the difference between survival and fading away.

Many people ask the oft-repeated question – **What's in It for me?** – when asked to practice civility at workplace. Researchers counter this line of thought with statistics that are proven by even empirical research. A direct connection can be found between growth in employee **self-esteem** and **employee performance**. This performance was found to be incremental in both quality and quantity.

It was found that practicing civility at the workplace greatly increases an employee's self-esteem. When an employee gets added respect and importance from his co-workers, it impacts his confidence and behavior positively. In return, he feels obliged to be civil towards his co-workers and strives to contribute his best to the collective staff performance.



Disrespect and inconsideration to employees can be highly stressful on their morale, and encourages absenteeism and low employee retention. Civility creates a positive and conducive working environment. Happy and relaxed workers are much more productive as compared to their unhappy counterparts. Practicing civility helps an individual grow by developing his emotional intelligence.

Civility is the best practice while **dealing with difficult people at the workplace**. Many start with the assumption that a difficult person is a bad person, however, seasoned managers would know that most difficult persons actually care passionately about the company. They just have a fixed way of seeing things, which is nothing that a little positive feedback from peers can't correct. While a hostile person might see only opposition in other people's concerns, a civil person would see beyond the apparent implications of people's behavior.

A civil person knows how to express his dissent in a professional and matter-of-fact manner. He learns how to control his anger and frustration instead of expressing it in public. He understands the importance to soaring above petty arguments and ego battles to see the big picture. He learns social skills and conflict management which makes him better at negotiation as he has a clear, well-developed vision that is based on performance, and getting everyone willingly on board.

Workplace Civility for Employers

Managers often admit that the biggest challenge of their work is adjusting to the different working styles of the team-members. It's not only different working-styles but also different personalities. As it is, the job they have is a stressful one but things get even messier when some employees don't just have different personalities, but difficult ones too.

Who is a Difficult Employee?

As the preferences of people vary, the definition of a **difficult employee** will vary from person to person too. However, on a general scale – a difficult person is someone who has extreme personality traits which makes them very difficult to work with others, especially when they are in a team environment.

Each person is unique, and even when you have a responsible and emotionally mature co-worker in your team, there's bound to be some initial incompatibility, simply because others might not have the same working speeds and styles. For instance, while the job of a manager is to control and regulate the working of his team, being a control-freak manager would make the employees feel stifled. This will lead to a claustrophobic workplace where everybody's creativity will be limited by the decisions and preferences of the manager. The ideal manager would consult the co-workers and take their inputs while taking any major company decisions.

On the other end of the spectrum, asking for feedback, assistance and instructions are considered good working styles when done in moderation, but when an employee consults with his co-workers and seniors so much that it almost becomes impossible for him to work on his own judgment, he becomes a difficult employee.



When teaming up with someone who shows signs of bearing a difficult personality, most people try to cut corners and avoid the responsibility of trying to get them at

par with others, attitude-wise. Managers start avoiding team-members who exhibit a dominant personality, and start reprimanding the overtly dependent ones.

This leads to a **vicious cycle of blame-game** where good talent is lost out over ego and indifference. The task of managers, in situations like this, is to motivate people with different backgrounds, styles of working and personalities to have a common vision. They can achieve that by having a frank discussion with each one of them on a one-to-one basis, and then making all sit together to get issues sorted out. However, dealing with people in this collected manner calls for practicing civility.

Managers need to understand that when they are working with a team of intelligent people, each of them will also try to contribute with his/her own ideas, which will make conflicts in the workplace inevitable. Even when all agree to an idea unequivocally, the fact remains that every person is different and it will be rare for two people to agree on everything. In such situations, **collaboration** – and **not competition** – is the way out. A manager in this situation needs to aim for an **integrative approach** – a solution to the problem that incorporates the good parts of every member's ideas while discarding the parts that won't work. This will give the employees the moral boost that some part of their plan is going to be implemented, resulting in a **You win, I win** scenario.

Workplace Civility for Employees

Earlier, incivility used to be perceived only as inconvenient behaviors, however research now proves that uncivil employees significantly affect the company's sales, productivity, and customer retention directly. For example, an employee who loves gossiping could be considered a tad too fond of conversing in the beginning, however, when you calculate the amount of time he spends in gossiping with others about others, you will realize that a **two-pronged damage** is getting inflicted on the company's productivity.

- First is the loss of productivity in losing out on working time. When an employee starts gossiping, he not only wastes his time but also that of his co-workers which should have gone into productivity.
- On the second front, this gossiping would circulate and instigate false statements based on rumors all around the company.

The one who becomes the target of such baseless rumors becomes psychologically stressed and his productivity decreases. The ones who indulge in this gossip would start building a bad reputation of the person they are gossiping about, even if he might be completely innocent of the blame.

Another important issue that needs to be addressed here is the level of involvement the employees have towards their jobs, i.e., how much active participation they are bringing to the important activities of an organization. An ideal employee would want to know the various programs that are being organized by the HR department of their company and would actively participate in them.



When a recent survey was conducted with all the big, successful companies worldwide, where employees were asked to answer a set of questions based on their approach to certain scenarios, the results were both surprising and assuring.

Performers Share Common Traits

It was found that employees who are performers share a few common traits universally. Let's list them and understand how these traits help them rise above the rest and be a star employee –

- They are more interested in finding remedies than faults.
- They listen to the other people in their team to understand their point of view.
- They always try to find different solutions to the problem, rather than fighting over one.
- Their proposed solutions are very inclusive in nature and address all, or most of the concerns that the situation creates.

They would always want to know how the company is doing and feel a sense of pride when they know it's doing well, as they can identify with the success, having contributed to it.

Involvement also means that the employees don't just be happy and content with the work they are doing, and work hard to be considered an active contributor in the company's growth strategy. Instead of waiting for opportunities, an ideal employee would seize a moment when they see one and make the most of it.

Workplace Civility - Worksheet2

While being quite a good performer at her job of providing administrative support in a law consulting firm, **Jade Smith** was found wanting in her grooming skills, particularly in dressing up in such a manner that it suits the formal atmosphere of a consulting firm.

Her boss, otherwise happy with her competency, would always reprimand her for this, often in front of the rest of the staff. There were instances when Jade overheard her boss even refer to her with slurs.

It's not as if Jade was complacent and ignored her boss's observations, but even after several attempts to improve her dressing, the result never met the approval of her boss. This was because Jade lacked understanding of the difference between 'well-dressed' and 'appropriately-dressed'.

The constant reprimanding made her self-esteem low and stressed her into interacting lesser and lesser with co-workers. This reclusive nature didn't do her performance any good and finally, after seven months on the job, Jade resigned.

Depending on this scenario, answer the following questions –

- Who do you think was at fault here? Explain your answer.

- Would you consider Jade's boss uncivil? Explain your answer.

- What is the best way to respond to the situation as a co-worker?

- How would you have handled the situation, as Jade and as her boss?

- If you were in Jade's position, how would you feel about your boss' actions?

Download Try-it yourself sheet.

Importance of Communication

It's a well-known rule of etiquette in the Hospitality Industry to never smirk at the customer's suggestions. Although, admittedly this rule was brought to practice only before a few years, it has seen wide approval and appreciation among diners, who earlier used to be quite mortified while ordering foreign cuisines.

For example, a Spaniard could find it tough to order something off the menu card of an authentic Brazilian restaurant. Smirking at him while he is clearly struggling with finding a dish that will suit his tastes will not only come off as arrogant and un-helping, but also give a bad name to the restaurant as being simply "unprofessional".



The word **etiquette** might sound to be outdated to many, but someone who follows etiquette sends powerful messages to people around him. These messages are positive in vibes and make people respect you more. People tend to change their behavior and approach around those who are well-mannered and observe social etiquette.

In many ways, etiquette simply means respecting others the way you would expect others to respect you. It's important to know that when someone greets you, he

thinks highly of you. A big part of that gesture is based on his belief that you are an amiable, social person who would respect him back.

It's not only about greeting someone or responding back to someone's greetings. It's also about how you conduct yourself while having a conversation with your co-workers. Simple things like not looking at the person while talking to him would give an impression that you value your company's job more than the people who are building the company.

How to Gain Respect at Workplace

Let's observe the most effective steps one can take to gain the respect and trust of people at workplace –

- **Greetings** – Giving a formal acknowledgment of someone's presence by greeting him is an excellent way of establishing rapport with new people, and maintaining good working relationships with old ones. A "Good Morning/Afternoon/Evening" initiates a positive thought about you in the minds of clients, business partners, or co-workers, irrespective of their ranks.
- **Respect** – In many ways, respect can be compared with attitude and a change of approach. We don't act just as we please when communicating with someone we respect. When you respect another person, you acknowledge the fact that he is an important person. There is a tendency in people to respect only those who have authority, or those who are top performers. However, every co-worker deserves respect, irrespective of his job performance.
- **Practice Active listening** – Managers are now encouraging more input-sharing from team members, so that they learn the value of contributing to the conversation and listen carefully to each word that is being discussed. Every person's point of view should be taken into consideration, even if that person is not an expert on that topic, unlike earlier days, when an opinion coming from someone not a subject matter expert would be immediately rejected.
- **Respect your Co-worker's Property** – Disrespect towards co-workers could also come in the form of not respecting their privacy and encroaching upon their personal space. Taking a stapler from someone's desk without permission and knowledge of the owner, sitting on someone's desk and using someone's chair without asking first, are all examples of disrespect to the co-worker.
- **Respect the right to own Beliefs** – Most companies advocate having people from different backgrounds, ethnicities, religions, abilities, and traditions to work together in the same organization. It has been observed that a diverse working place brings more

stability to a working place as everyone feels included in the workplace. It also prevents the formation of lobbies. However, it's important that the beliefs and values of these people are respected. The yardstick should be performance and professional behavior, irrespective of a person's background.

- **Being Politically Correct** – Political Correctness is the art of conversation where tough messages can be given with the right choice of words, taking great care not to offend others or sound discriminatory. When communicating to co-workers, it's essential that proper emphasis is put on using words that might not create a potentially insulting situation. Unfavorable words, even if mentioned unintentionally, would create a hostile environment and breed negative attitudes in the minds of people who felt discriminated against.

An example to demonstrate political correctness is to address those with hearing, visual, mobility impairment, and any other disability as “persons with disabilities” instead of “disabled person.” The difference in both the terms is that a “disabled person” sounds like someone with serious limitations, however “person with disabilities” sends the message that the person is quite capable, and all his disabilities are linked to their bodies only. It's the same reason for which the word “challenged” is preferred to “impaired” (e.g. hearing challenged instead of hearing impaired). This is used to separate a physical disability from a person's individual capability.

Negotiating Under Pressure

Negotiating is the act of applying charm, logic, persuasion and conviction to arrive at a mutually satisfying conclusion for two or more opposing parties. As you can understand, when there are multiple expectations made by different people, there is always the chance that some of the demands might encroach upon others' needs. In situations like these, it's imperative that the person facilitating the negotiation takes everyone's interests into account while trying to find a common ground for all parties.

Negotiating properly needs an in-depth understanding of the reasons why the people with opposing ideas are having them. It could be personal benefits or it could be a long-term plan. There are times when people at a negotiation yield from their initially-tough stand once they get to hear other people's views. So it's the negotiator's priority to ensure everyone gets heard first.



How to Negotiate

There are many ways of negotiating. We have listed out the four most widely practiced methods –

- **Collaboration** – This is the most respectful of all traditional negotiation methods. The biggest advantage in this method is that, it provides an opportunity for everyone to put his/her point across. After that, each point is considered and reconsidered before arriving at a conclusion. However, the disadvantage is that, this method of negotiation doesn't suit an emergency or crisis situation, where speedy resolutions are the need of the hour. It also presumes that people with different opinions will be open-minded and patient enough to listen to everybody else's suggestions too, which very often is not the case.
- **Competition** – In many ways, this method of negotiation is completely opposite to the method of collaboration, in the sense that each party tries to come up with a solution that's best for the entire group. The opposing parties often challenge one another's views and openly discard opinions that they think don't suit the purpose. This method of negotiating is best suited for situations where an immediate conclusion is needed. Although the idea is to arrive at a conclusion, the method, in itself, gives a general sense of dissatisfaction to those whose ideas were discarded. In addition to that, this might lead to bullying, intimidating and people resorting to underhanded tactics to win.
- **Compromising** – This is the middle path between collaborating and competing. While compromising, the different parties listen to one another's point of view, but are not interested in finding the ultimate solution that addresses everyone's needs. The idea is to find the minimum common solution so that all parties can work together with some minor sacrifices and modifications to their original proposal. Compromising, also known

as **bargaining**, is most beneficial while finding a quick temporary solution to problems, especially when there is a delay in reaching an inclusive decision owing to aggressive participators.

- **Accommodation** – In this method of negotiation, the accommodating party sacrifices most of his interests and initially proposed ideas to gain the favor of the other party. People engaging in an accommodating method of negotiation often eye the big haul and are more interested in future business as compared to the present assignment. However, that might not always be the case, as a lot of people often end up accommodating others' request just because of their inability to voice their opinions and ideas assertively. There are also cases of people with low self-esteem exhibiting poor negotiating skills due to their habit of tolerating abusive behavior.

Workplace Civility - Conflicts

When there is a conflict of interests in the workplace, you need to understand and prioritize your needs so that you can focus on them, rather losing your goal in the ensuing discussion between different parties. To solve problems that arise out of such conflicts, it's essential that you analyze the problem carefully, develop potential solutions, select a working solution from the list and check its practicality. Many cases of workplace incivilities arise out of the absence of a proper reporting authority whom the aggrieved person can report to.

In many cases, the conflict needs a creative approach to solve the problem. This creative approach requires that all the parties with differing opinions to have a discussion with each other and put facts on the table. This meeting is often presided by experts who facilitate and moderate the conversation to ensure that all parties get an equal say in the matter.

Depending on the responsibilities of the presiding authority, there are two kinds of facilitators – **Mediation** and **Arbitration**.

Mediation

Mediation is a method of conflict resolution where a mediator is asked to get both sides to sit together and have a constructive dialogue. In some cases, mediators also share their expert opinion. However, the option to take his opinion as the final word is completely left to the participating parties.

Mediation practices a collaborative style of finding a resolution and is very effective in ending disagreements. It helps to keep sensitive disputes in a company private, which might otherwise be exposed in a court and damage a company's reputation. Mediation also allows room for improvisational solutions whereas a court can only

function according to the law. Mediation is also relatively inexpensive compared to litigation.

Arbitration

Arbitration, like mediation, is an inexpensive, speedier and more private form of dispute resolution, and also requires the presence of a third party to help settle the conflict. Just as the third-party in the case of mediation is called the mediator, the third party in the case of arbitration is called the arbiter.

The main difference between mediators, who mainly facilitate dialogue and suggest solutions and arbiters is that, arbiters are needed to give their final and binding judgment on a case. For this reason, the arbiters are supposed to have expertise on law and company policy.

Implementing Civility Policy

Talking to co-workers about the need to be civil and respectful to others is the traditional approach to civility, however it has been observed that in the absence of a clearly-defined policy on civility, people often tend to abuse their authority which in turn, makes the other person uncivil in his professional conduct. This results in a huge downward spiral that greatly affects the company's bottom-line.

To be considered as a company with a zero tolerance on incivility, the company must have an effective civility policy that clearly defines what the company considers as unacceptable behavior in the workplace. That will make the employees understand what exactly is the behavior required of them and will also protect others from feeling exploited.



Features of Civility Policy

To accurately represent the company's standing on workplace incivility, a Civility Policy should be **specific, measurable, observable, and definitive**.

- **Specific** – Civility policies must describe the unwanted behavior explicitly. Just mentioning that rude behavior is unacceptable won't suffice. Rude behavior needs to be properly defined and all the actions that constitute rude behavior need to be mentioned too. This will ensure that the policy doesn't get misinterpreted.

For example, a manager giving a tough talk to one of his team-mates mustn't be put under rude behavior. The language needs to be firm and serious while also being easy to understand. A Civility Policy won't have any desired effects if nobody understands it in the first place.

- **Measurable** – Civility policy must give a quantified definition of consequences. For example, the policy should explicitly state the number of days an employee will be suspended if he is found guilty of a single racist remark.
- **Observable** – A person's intentions, unless observable, mustn't be listed under Civility Policy. Policy should define the consequences of undesired actions, and not be based upon the intentions to participate in undesired actions, unless clearly proven.
- **Definitive** – Defining the consequences of not following Civility Policy will make the employees take notice that the company is serious about policy implementation and will adhere to it. That being said, there must be a set of different degrees of offense. Not all offenses should meet the same consequence. For example, the consequences of an employee's not responding to emails or calls timely shouldn't be the same if he indulges in serious offenses such as verbal, physical or sexual harassment and discrimination.

In addition to these points, there should also be an escalation ladder to handle uncivil behavior. For example, an employee hurling an expletive could be given a verbal warning first. In case he repeats that, he should be given a written warning stating that his repeating the action, the third time will result in his termination from company. In addition to this, the consequences must also conform to national and state law.

It's important to remember that a company policy is the basis for legal action, so the ones drafting the policy must carefully weigh the appropriateness of every word, the prescribed regulation and its corresponding effect, as well as possible backlash, if any.