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Does civility pay?



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Being nice may bring you friends, but does it help or harm you in your career? After all, research by Timothy Judge and colleagues shows a negative relationship between a person's agreeableness and income. Research by Amy Cuddy has shown that warm people are perceived to be less competent, which is likely to have negative career implications. People who buck social rules by treating people rudely and getting away with it tend to garner power. If you are civil you may be perceived as weak, and ignored or taken advantage. Being kind or considerate may be hazardous to your self-esteem, goal achievement, influence, career, and income.

Over the last two decades we have studied the costs of incivility—and the benefits of civility. We've polled tens of thousands of workers across industries around the world about how they're treated on the job and the effects. The costs of incivility are enormous. Organizations and their employees would be much more likely to thrive if employees treated each other respectfully.

Many see civility as an investment and are skeptical about the potential returns. Porath surveyed of hundreds across organizations spanning more than 17 industries and found that a quarter believe that they will be less leader-like, and nearly 40 percent are afraid that they'll be taken advantage of if they're nice at work. Nearly half think that is better to flex your muscles to garner power.

In network studies of a biotechnology firm and international MBAs, along with surveys, and experiments, we address whether civility pays. In this article we discuss our

findings and propose recommendations for leaders and organizations.

HOW CIVILITY PAYS—AND INCIVILITY DOESN'T

Respect attracts others. People quickly judge whether they want to interact with you or build a relationship with you based on warmth and competence. Research shows that these are the universal dimensions upon which people in different contexts and culture perceive and make judgments about others. Judgments of warmth and competence account for more than 90 percent of positive or negative impressions we form of those around us. These impressions dictate whether people will trust you, build relationships with you, follow you, and support you.

Civility is unique—it leads people to evaluate you as both warm *and* competent. Typically, people tend to infer that a strength in one implies a weakness of the other. Many people are seen as competent but cold: He's really smart ... but employees will hate working for him. Or as warm but incompetent: She's friendly ... but probably is not smart. Being respectful ushers in admiration—you make another person feel valued and cared for (warm), but also signal that you are capable (competent) to assist them in the future.

Civility increases the likelihood that people want to work with you. In a social network study in a biotechnology firm, we found that those viewed as civil have 1.5 times more energizing ties (people are energized to work with them) than those seen as uncivil. Those seen as uncivil have 3 times as many de-energizing ties (defined as enduring, recurring set of negative judgments, feelings, and behavioral intentions toward another person) than those seen as civil. In a study of more than 10,000 work relationships across diverse settings,

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research found that when asked who they would choose to work with, most people chose congeniality, even though they said they would choose ability over affability. Prospective partners' congeniality (do I enjoy working with him?) outweighed their competence (does he know what he's doing?), even for difficult tasks. Civility signals congeniality without the tradeoff in competence. By evoking perceptions of both warmth and competence, civility enhances influence and effectiveness in the workplace.

In an experiment, we found that people were 59 percent more willing to share information, 72 percent more likely to seek advice and 57 percent more likely to seek information from the civil person as compared to the uncivil behaving person. The civil person also inspired people to work 71 percent harder. Participants were 73 percent more likely to want to do well for this (civil) person and 1.22 times more likely to recommend him (for a job) compared with the uncivil person. We highlight some of these and other specific benefits of civility next.

Broader Networks that Bring Benefits

Our research reveals that those seen as respectful have larger and broader networks. They are also more central in these networks. They are spokes in the wheel; connectors of ideas and information. They are posed to more effectively cross boundaries in organizations.

The more respectful reap a windfall of network and personal benefits, whereas those seen as uncivil get shut out of networks and the benefits that flow, such as information, advice, career opportunities.

How does this work? After a series of mergers, a large consulting firm we worked with wanted a flexible network structure that would facilitate successful short-term, team-based projects. During the restructure the firm put a premium on interpersonal skills. Those that were retained and excelled were people that were civil; they could interact well with others in multi-disciplinary teams and communicated effectively across borders.

Sought for Advice, Greater Information

We found that those who are respectful are much more likely to be sought for work advice and information, which is directly linked to better performance. Whereas incivility repels people, civility draws people. People are more likely to trust those seen as civil. They feel psychologically safe—and as a result, are much more willing to ask for and share ideas and information. As with virtually any resource at work, information and advice tends to be reciprocated, resulting in more and richer networks for those who are civil.

Steve, a scientist in the R&D (research and development) department of a biotech firm, controlled the storage and maintenance of the materials that all of his coworkers needed access to in order to get their job done. His role made him an invaluable spoke in the organizational network. But Steve's subtle insults to the scientists, and general lack of civility alienated his colleagues. Although scientists were dependent on Steve, they created "a work around." A couple of key individuals who were immune to Steve's snide remarks became brokers between the scientists and Steve. Rather

than have to deal with Steve, all of the other employees and scientists went through these key brokers. While these brokers gained power, Steve lost it.

Unfortunately, like many, Steve lacked self-awareness. The consequences of incivility are often masked. This is especially likely if the person is of higher status or others are dependent on him, as in Steve's case. Like many, Steve was shocked to find that—when he needed support, a resource from this network, or a recommendation for a promotion—he was unable to obtain it.

Contrast this with Carrie, an attorney, whose civility allowed her to gather information from strangers and clients. She won people's trust almost instantaneously. She was genuine; her tone was warm and friendly. Her tone and words conveyed an authentic desire to track down information which would help her client. People also deemed her competent: she was articulate, hard-working, and emotionally intelligent. Saying please, humbly asking questions, listening to people, and expressing heartfelt thanks communicated warmth *and* competence. In one case where she asked for a favor, she expressed how much this would mean to her client—and her; she acknowledged that she recognized the effort and cost to the person she was speaking with, and even offered to send her a gas card to cover the mileage required to fulfill her request. The woman assured her that such a token of appreciation was unnecessary; her gratitude was enough. Interactions like this resulted in several of her contacts calling to provide her with updated information, and offers to connect her with others who might help, unprompted. This allowed her to successfully serve her client.

Greater Support and Influence

Over time, personal benefits mount for those who are civil; and negative effects accrue for those who are uncivil. Though the dividends of civility are often hidden, and may come much later, every study we have conducted suggests that civility pays. People want to see those that are civil do well and are happy to provide them with resources, attractive projects, and support. Mary, an executive in health care known for her civility, was contacted by leaders in another location for a position that just became available. Her interpersonal skills had won people over; when they thought about who might step into the coveted role they pursued her.

A recent study of the U.S. Congress found that when members of Congress use pro-social language, words that convey cooperation, trust and respect, their approval ratings increased; when they did not use pro-social language, ratings plummeted. Between 2002 and 2014, pro-social language dropped 20 percent; meanwhile, public approval dropped 75 percent. There was a similar effect on media coverage of the politicians. The words politicians use predicts their approval about six weeks in the future (controlling for societal events and economic conditions).

Disrespectful people lose out. After graduating from a top tier school, Brad joined a consulting firm. He behaved as if he knew everything and was above everyone else. He would snap at other new consultants who weren't from as elite schools, and often refused to pitch in and help others. When Brad finally got his big chance to lead a bid for a project, he found that he faced resistance at every step from the other consultants

assigned to his team. His talent and potential were squandered because of arrogance and incivility.

While Steve and Brad displayed a pattern of incivility, one uncivil incident can have a potent effect on an employee as the effects reverberate through the network. This happened with a senior professor in one of our seminars. During a colleague's presentation of his research paper, this senior professor said, "If ignorance was water, this paper would be an ocean." The seminar room was aghast, particularly since this professor was typically helpful and kind. Although he played a central role in the network, most no longer seek information, feedback, support, or other resources from him; nor will they give them to him.

Career Opportunities and Progression

Being seen as a respectful and collegial is a game changer when it comes to hiring and promotion. Seventy-two percent of directors we surveyed from the Human Resources Leadership Forum reported that that you would have career problems in their organization if you were rude. As Microsoft's general manager of leadership and development, Vicki Loestetter explained, "Performance is not just what you do, but *how* you do it. That's critical."

Insights about incivility's impact may be the single most important lesson we can share with fast-trackers. If you treat people badly, all the technical skills and confidence you can harness will not get you to the top. Career derailment happens all the time as ascendant managers fail to live up to their full potential.

Take Jake, the heir apparent of the chief operating officer (COO) position at a *Fortune 50* organization. Jake was known for his propensity to tear people apart. The COO recognized Jake's talent and thought he could handle the position. The COO offered to coach him on his people skills. During one of these meetings the COO asked Jake, "How many times have you asked a question at a meeting that you didn't know the answer to?" The COO pressed him to recount the last time, but Jake couldn't. He just laughed. Eventually everyone ruled Jake out as the successor. His uncivil style derailed his career.

Contrast this with how civility helps people get ahead. Terri Kelly, Gore's chief executive officer (CEO), credits her colleagues for her career progression to collegiality and contributions based on recognition of her peers. At Gore, performance evaluations are based on peers evaluating contributions and living the values of the firm.

Leadership Potential and Reputation

If you want to be seen as a leader, be civil. In a collaboration with *Harvard Business Review*, we collected data from nearly 20,000 employees around the world. We found that the leader behavior that had the single most powerful effect on employees across the five outcomes we studied was respect. No other leader behavior had a bigger effect. Being treated with respect was more important to employees than recognition and appreciation, communicating an inspiring vision, providing useful feedback—even opportunities for learning, growth, and development. Those who felt respected by their leader reported 56 percent better health

and wellbeing, 1.72 times more trust and safety, 89 percent greater enjoyment and satisfaction, 92 percent greater focus and prioritization, and 1.26 times more meaning and significance. Those who felt respected by their leaders were also 1.1 times more likely to stay with their organizations.

Across studies in organizations and experiments, we have found that civility is positively associated with being perceived as a leader. In the biotech firm, those seen as civil were twice as likely to be viewed as leaders. Civility not only garners people status, it also boosts performance. People in this biotech firm performed 13 percent better than those deemed uncivil.

Others' Engagement and Performance

Respect doesn't just benefit you, though; it benefits those around you. It's contagious—and brings out the best in others. Whereas incivility makes people feel small and limits their contributions, civility builds people up, it lifts them. In the data from nearly 20,000 people, we found respect also had a clear impact on engagement. The more leaders give, the higher the level of employee engagement: People who said leaders treated them with respect were 55 percent more engaged.

WHAT'S BEHIND JUDGMENTS OF CIVILITY? THE IMPORTANCE OF THIN SLICES

We have found that little things have a big impact: thanking people, listening attentively, humbly asking questions, acknowledging others, sharing credit, smiling or other non-verbal behaviors matter. Research shows that judgments about respect are often made quickly, based on "thin slices" of information. These evaluations are tied to likeability. They captured thin slices of conversations between surgeons and patients. They then had judges watch the tapes and rate the doctors on the basis of warmth, hostility, dominance, and anxiousness. Based on those ratings alone, researchers could predict which surgeons got sued and which didn't. This research also shows that teacher and professor ratings are also based on thin slices. Four minute clips of their behavior could be used to predict the teachers' rankings on evaluations for a full semester course. Even research using short, silent video clips revealed that people's ratings of the teachers on characteristics like dominance, warmth, anxiousness, professionalism, and supportiveness predicted student evaluations. Such ratings did not reflect the teacher's physical attractiveness. Rather, they seemed to draw on behavioral information.

Retired Judge Gary Hastings of Los Angeles, tells us the same is true in the courtroom. When he polled juries about what tipped their favor, respect was key. Juries were swayed based on thin slices of civil (or uncivil, arrogant) behavior.

Recognize That You Are Always in Front of Some Jury

Knowing your audience is crucial. Greater diversity in organizations has made interacting effectively with others more challenging. Social and cultural intelligence are key. What's civil in one culture may be perceived as uncivil in another. For

example, non-verbal behaviors, including eye contact, greetings, and gestures, which greatly impact how we judge people, vary dramatically across cultures.

In France, the norm is to be quite distant until two people are friends, which can take a while. Recently a job candidate from abroad came to visit one of us. Upon meeting the chair of the department the candidate gave our chairperson—a petite Frenchwoman—a hug. She was mortified. This was completely unacceptable behavior between strangers. The job candidate failed to read the signs or study beforehand on basic norms. Faculty deemed that the candidate's behavior during his first day of the visit was boorish, immodest, and pedantic. He was trying to impress, but with his bravado, he had managed to insult and repel most of the faculty. His lack of respect on his first day hijacked his chances.

A common stumbling block is feedback. Very direct feedback, which is common in some cultures, may be viewed as rude in others. A Japanese manager in an American company was told to give critical feedback to a subordinate during a performance evaluation. Japanese use high context language and are uncomfortable giving direct feedback. It took the manager five attempts before he was direct enough to discuss the poor performance so that the American subordinate understood.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for Leaders

We have learned that those that are uncivil do not necessarily intend to be. We found that only 4 percent claim they are uncivil because it is fun and they can get away with it. More often people just do not realize how they affect others. They may have good intentions, but they fail to see how they are perceived.

Leaders need to keep in mind that respect is different for different people; it's all in the eyes of the beholder. Norms vary by culture, generation, and gender—as well as industry and organization. Respect is directly tied to what a particular individual expects—and how the leader makes the person feel.

Improve Self-Awareness—Then Work on Improvements

Organizations help solve misperceptions with 360-degree feedback. Regardless, people should invest in gathering feedback. Gather candid feedback from your colleagues and friends, not only on what you're doing that conveys respect, but also on how you can improve. Specifically, what are your shortcomings? Listen carefully.

Many leaders are shocked by the feedback. Paul, a vice president with The Hanover Insurance Group, gathered feedback, asking specifically about what bothers people about him. He learned that he has a tendency to look at his phone when it vibrates/rings. Colleagues say this bothers them. He has changed as a result. Small changes have a large impact on employees and how they feel. Just asking often scores you points.

If you don't feel comfortable enlisting the feedback of your entire team, you can also ask a trusted direct report to gather feedback within the organization about whether you

(the leader) consistently demonstrate civility; and what situations may trigger uncivil behavior.

Work with a Coach

Coaches can uncover potential weaknesses through surveying and interviewing those with whom you work.

At some *Fortune 100* companies we work with, internal and external coaches partnered with high flyers to surface blind spots. A coach would shadow the executive at meetings and network events to pick up on subtleties, including their non-verbal behavior. This allowed the coach to track people's reactions to them. A skilled coach may unearth some of the underlying assumptions, experiences, and personal qualities that make one prone to uncivil behavior.

Enlist Your Team to Keep You Accountable

Home in on one change that could improve your behavior and then experiment, asking your team to help you by letting you know when they see improvement. For example, after a meeting, ask your team if they saw an improvement in the behavior that you're working on. What was the impact?

A woman we know of—let's call her Karen—enlisted her team to help her change a specific behavior. Karen's team had grown increasingly frustrated by her inability to listen and empower them. While she was highly intelligent, she was constantly interrupting people in meetings and taking over initial ideas before they could be presented. Karen worked with a coach and developed a technique to avoid this pattern. She would tap her toe instead of interrupting. She informed her team that she was working on improving. After a couple of days of meetings, she checked in with them on her progress. In addition to helping Karen, this process helped establish a norm for more of an open dialog—a spirit that the team could count on each other to support one another's development.

Recommendations for the Organization

Hire for Civility

It all starts with hiring. Given how civility pays for individuals and the organization, it is worth taking the time and energy to screen for civility. Jeff Bezos, founder and CEO of Amazon, has stated, "I'd rather interview 50 people and not hire anyone than hire the wrong person." U.S. Deputy Secretary of Labor Chris Lui explained to us how anytime he is looking to hire someone, he simply picks up the phone and calls people who should know him or her. Chris said it never fails. He gets great information by relying on a trusted network. Going off this network—or the candidate's—and talking to people who've worked for them is a way to surface whether they treated all with respect. Gifted recruiters can also obtain terrific references.

Getting teams involved in the hiring process improves your ability to choose wisely. Amazon, Whole Foods, IDEO, and many other firms are employing teams to make hiring decisions. This is particularly wise if the recruit is going to be working in a team environment.

Create Norms and Ground Rules for Civility

Leaders need to set and role model norms for civility. Pete Carroll, who led the USC Trojans to seven consecutive PAC-10

titles and BCS bowls (an NCAA record) and two national championships, instituted such rules when he moved to the NFL (National Football League) to coach the Seattle Seahawks. Coach Carroll mandated positive, respectful words and behavior among everyone—coaches, players, personal assistants, and valets. His goals included civility replacing yelling and swearing. One simple norm they live by: Seahawk players and coaches close every media interview by thanking the reporter. Respecting one another and the organization has led to a number of payoffs. In just his fourth year as the coach, the Seahawks won the Super Bowl.

Having a conversation with your team is a great way to tune-up team behavior (and root out information that people feared giving you directly). What conveys respect—and what doesn't? Are there patterns to when or how you are uncivil? What triggers these behaviors? What will your team gain from civility—and living by these norms?

A vice president with an insurance company asked his employees what their team standards were going to be. With one another? As a business? He wasn't evangelical. He focused on performance and health. He also asked each employee to rate each other as individuals, as a group. What will they be known as? Being late? Having a great level of respect for colleagues?

Score and Reward Civility

One surefire way to communicate how much you value civility is to directly evaluate interpersonal skills or emotional competence. If performance evaluations suffer as a result of poor ratings tied to this, employees will be more motivated to improve. At one *Fortune 50* technology firm, bosses downgrade the employee performance if he or she falls short on the how. They did this with a superstar who was great at the what, but “left dead bodies in the wake.”

For the most potent impact, these evaluations must be tied to meaningful financial incentives and career progression decisions. At Gore, peer ratings of contributions and living the values are tied to career progression. At law firms we have worked with, uncivil partners refused to change their behavior until it hit their pocketbook (through reduced shares).

Coach Civility

As a leader, it pays to think of yourself as a coach. Review the fundamentals with employees. Twenty-five percent blame their incivility on the organization not providing them with

the skills. Encourage specific behaviors. At the National Security Agency, employees receive business-size cards with a personal civility challenge headed by “Civility starts with you. . .” Challenges are as basic as “hold the door open for at least five people this week,” and “this week, resist the urge to point out others' mistakes.” The challenges bring civility to the action level for every employee.

Invest in training programs that provide your employees with interpersonal skills that convey respect. These programs range from those focused on specific skills, such as giving and receiving feedback, e-civility (being civil on e-mail), and listening, to stress management, mindfulness, and negotiation. A hospital we have worked with in Los Angeles sends uncivil doctors to “charm school” to hone their interpersonal skills. This decreases the probability of lawsuits against the doctor and hospital. In Microsoft's popular “Precision Questioning” class, participants learn to question their own ideas, develop approaches to healthy, constructive criticism, and act with emotional agility even in tense situations.

Don't Tolerate Incivility

As a leader—and an organization—give corrective feedback. Whether the employee is a star or not, people must be held accountable for their actions. After being made aware of their actions, the impact it has on them, others, and the organization, you must hold people accountable to the expectations for treating others with respect. People quickly become cynical about the organization and its values if incivility is tolerated. It's contagious—and spreads like wildfire.

CONCLUSION

Civility pays. It is a potent behavior you want to master to enhance your influence and effectiveness. It is unique in the sense that it elicits both warmth and competence—the two characteristics that account for over 90 percent of positive impressions. By being respectful you enhance—not deter—career opportunities and effectiveness.



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