

# Memphis Business Journal

## 10 actions you can focus on to influence culture of respect, civility in your workplace

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Imagine a work environment where all communications and interactions were conducted in a civil and respectful manner. Co-workers and customers would be treated respectfully on a consistent basis. There would be no place for harassment, discrimination, bullying, workplace violence, unethical actions, or other disrespectful and potentially illegal behaviors.

Instead of this idealized picture, studies and polls indicate that workplaces are a reflection of society at-large and that incivility is a serious problem that is getting worse. Web sites such as **www.rudebusters.com** and **www.bullybusters.com** reflect these trends. One study on workplace research found that 80% of those polled responded that lack of respect is a serious problem and 60% believed that the problem was getting worse. The study estimated that the average Fortune 1000 executive spent 13% of his or her time mediating employee disputes. Another found that nine out of 10 Americans thought that incivility increases opportunities for violence. Findings from these and other studies further point out that disrespectful and uncivil behaviors decrease morale, drain productivity, increase turnover, and negatively impact an organization's bottom line as well as the overall economy.

If we take a snapshot of today's workplaces, they generally will fall somewhere in between the two extremes on a continuum ranging from disrespectful to highly respectful. This measure is not expected to be static over time. Moving an organizational culture on a continuum toward an imagined environment, as described above, will require that respect become a core value, one that is understood, articulated, internalized and acted upon by employees at all levels of the organization. In organizations that have not identified this value as part of an overall focus, individual employees can still make a difference by adopting the concept "each one influence one" and taking responsibility for acting in a manner that demonstrates self-respect and respect for others.

The following are tips to assist each employee in being proactive in promoting respect and civility:

1. Focus on others' needs and consider how your words and actions will impact others before you speak or act. Approach each interaction with respect, regardless of whether you believe that the other person's behaviors "earn" or even elicit that respect.
2. Be intentional in your communications. Plan to listen to the other person without interruption and practice effective listening skills. Develop an awareness of the respect that you display in all areas of your communications, including what you say, how you say it, your voice tone, and the body language that you demonstrate.
3. Become a bridge builder and act in a manner that creates an inclusive work environment. Look for various ways to have diversity in work teams and committees as well as in individual associations. Be

aware of the downsides caused by labeling and stereotyping others. Replace these behaviors with respect for individual differences.

4. Appreciate the value of diverse opinions in developing approaches to varying situations. Recognize that it does not equate to agreement if you listen, clarify what was said, and ask questions to gain an understanding of others' opinions. In situations where disagreement results, learn to "agree to disagree" respectfully.

5. Understand that conflicts will occur in the workplace and take responsibility for your actions, regardless of the situation. Take time to understand your triggers or "hot buttons." Knowing what makes you angry and frustrated will enable you to manage your reactions and respond in a more appropriate manner. Practice self-restraint and focus on your overall objectives in responding to potential conflicts. A positive and solution-driven approach will facilitate your ability to reach resolution.

6. Guard against acting impulsively based on negative assumptions about another's intent, as that can lead to damaged relationships. Take time to analyze relevant facts and to reconsider your assumptions.

7. Avoid tendencies to become caught up in gossip, complaining, or other forms of negativity in day-to-day interactions. Be mindful of the following quote by Ruth Anne Crouse, "What Peter tells me about Paul tells me more about Peter than it tells me about Paul." Recognize that your actions will influence how others perceive you.

8. View today's difficult situations from a broader and more realistic perspective by considering what they mean relative to the overall scheme of things. Ask yourself questions such as, "How will I look back on these circumstances in a week, month, or year?"

9. Be supportive of your organization in your communications both inside and outside of the workplace. Ensure that any comments that you make place the organization (including departments and individuals) in a positive yet realistic light.

10. Pay attention to how respectful you are in your communications and other actions on an ongoing basis. Rate yourself (for instance, on a scale of 1-10) periodically after interactions to measure your success and to identify opportunities for improvement.

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