

SUMMARY

Best Practices to Improve Workplace Civility

Workplace incivility has been shown to significantly undermine employee performance and organizational profitability. Over the past decade, research has consistently demonstrated the importance of addressing incivility to enhance employee engagement and sustain business success. Evidence-based strategies have proven effective in strengthening organizational culture and fostering a more respectful and civil workplace.

WHAT IT IS

Incivility is behavior that is rude, demeaning, or disrespectful to others. In the workplace incivility can take many forms, commonly showing up as harsh or rude language, dismissing others' comments or contributions, ignoring or excluding coworkers, being unresponsive to questions, belittling others, denigrating someone's work to colleagues and superiors, and a supervisor taking credit for a subordinate's success.

Left unchecked, incivility pervades an organization's culture creating a toxic environment that suppresses productivity and creativity, impedes collaboration, increases resignations, and reduces profit. Incivility has also been found to lead to bullying and other forms of misconduct that open an organization to legal liability and reputational damage.

WHAT IT DOES

Over the past decade, more than 50% of employees report experiencing incivility on a weekly basis in their workplace. A landmark study published in the Harvard Business Review in 2013 found that 98% of employees have experienced incivility in the workplace. In response to that experience, 48% of employees intentionally decreased work efforts, 47% decreased time spent at



work, 66% said their performance declined, and 78% felt a decreased commitment to their organization. In 2025, the Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) reported that incivility in the workplace is on the rise, costing U.S. organizations over \$2 billion of daily profits in Q1 compared to Q4 of 2024.

Fortunately, tools exist to help organizations identify, address, and reduce incivility, including:

- **Establish and reinforce a code of conduct.** To help reinforce civility requirements, HR can perform an anonymized monthly or quarterly survey of departments tracking employee experience with incivility and produce a dashboard documenting results and trends. The SHRM Civility Index provides a template. Departments with high civility scores can be rewarded while those with low scores should be provided with interventions to support a civil environment. Employees that are found to violate the code of conduct should experience consequences, such as official warnings that impact opportunities for continued employment and/or promotion, mandatory trainings on civility, or demotion if the perpetrator is a manager.
- **Create civility norms and practices that reduce conflict.** Organizational practices can significantly impact employee behavior. Teams with high interpersonal conflict can benefit from regular, structured meetings to facilitate productive and inclusive communication and decision-making. These meetings can cover the week's tasks and assignments, solve process problems, and boost team belonging through short team-building activities.
- **Train employees on communication and conflict resolution.** Incivility is often the product of learned behavior and may be the norm that someone has operated in for the entirety of their career. Training on positive communication and conflict resolution provides an opportunity for employees to learn new, positive habits that reinforce a civil environment. Trainings additionally provide an opportunity for employees to internalize the organization's expectations for workplace behavior.
- **Promote inclusivity.** According to a 2025 SHRM survey, the top 5 contributors to incivility in the workplace are interpersonal differences, including: (1) different political viewpoints, (2) differences of opinions on social issues, (3) racial or ethnic differences, (4) gender differences, and (5) age or generational differences. Organizations that proactively and effectively promote inclusivity as well as a sense of shared workplace goals and values



will experience fewer interpersonal conflicts over perceived differences, reducing the prevalence of incivility. Companies can also provide employees with a playbook for how to navigate political conversations at work.

- **Lead by example.** Toxic culture often starts at the top, either by example or through a passive approach to management that does not address problematic behaviors. Leaders that practice active listening, constructive feedback, positive communication, gratitude, and professional conflict resolution set a tone that is mirrored throughout their organization.

WHO USES IT

Microsoft	NorthShore University HealthSystem
Cisco	KPMG
Ochsner Health System	Colorado Community College System

WHERE TO FIND OUT MORE

[SHRM](#)

[Psycholo](#)

[HR Morning](#)

[Work Shi](#)

