

# The Incivility Crisis in America

By Dr. Woody, The Career Hot Seat

Do you ever feel that people just aren't as nice as they used to be? Well, you are not alone. According to the fourth annual "Civility in America: A Nationwide Survey," 70 percent of Americans feel incivility has reached crisis levels in this country.

The survey also notes that "for the first time since the survey began in 2010, the Internet/social media has risen into the top ranks of perceived causes of incivility." In fact, the average American experiences incivility online more than eight times per week. In the wake of the recent online criticisms toward the newly-crowned Miss America, this number shouldn't come as any surprise.

The survey found that more than one third of all Americans have personally experienced incivility at work, which undoubtedly has a negative impact on productivity and engagement. The survey also found:

- 26 percent quit their job because of incivility at work;
- 33 percent believe the tone of their workplace is uncivil;
- 81 percent believe incivility is leading to more violence; and
- 95 percent believe we have a civility problem in this country.

Pam Jenkins, president of Powell Tate and co-sponsor of the study, says "incivility is turning into a national epidemic. When seven out of 10 citizens report that incivility has reached crisis proportions in this country, you know that we need new solutions and greater leadership accountability. We may have reached the tipping point."

Americans are working longer hours as wages stay stagnant and the job market remains weak, so it's not surprising that tensions in the workplace are running high. The problem is that these tensions can often result in frustration and interpersonal conflict, which leads to toxic work environments.

Here are expert tips on how to change the trend of incivility in our nation:

## Set Standards

According to Andy Polansky, CEO of Weber Shandwick and co-sponsor of the study, incivility can be the enemy of a collaborative culture.

"We know that the key to a positive, productive, engaging culture is listening, understanding, and responding to concerns about behavior quickly and ensuring that leadership sets the tone for meaningful, respectful interaction." Institutions have to set the tone for discourse in their organizations and make sure incivility is never tolerated, particularly when it becomes toxic.

Expectations of how people are expected to interact and communicate with each other and the outside world should be clearly discussed and articulated.

## Onboarding and Training

It's not enough to just set the standards; managers have to effectively communicate those standards. All new employee orientation should address rules for engagement and lay out expectations for civility. Communication is a challenge in every organization, so providing a roadmap for how to communicate and setting expectations for following communication protocols can help get employees and managers on the right path.

## Role Modeling

Just as Albert Bandura's infamous Bobo doll demonstrated, children imitate their parents. In a similar fashion, employees often model their behavior on that of their bosses. Leaders at all levels set the tone for what is considered acceptable behavior within their organizations, so managers need to pay attention to their behaviors and be proactive in setting a positive tone.

## Off-Site Retreats

It's so easy to get caught up in the daily grind that we often fail to pay attention

to what we are actually doing. Leaders at all levels should find ways to extract their teams from the daily grind to their pulse. Even if it's only for a half day, an off-site session can be incredibly productive. The idea is to facilitate conversations about communication challenges and encourage group discussions about solutions.

Workplace incivility is a vicious cycle that is hard to stop, but no one benefits from incivility in the long term. Combating it is something everyone needs to participate in if there is to be any hope for changing this trend.

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