



January 2013

# City Difference Maker

Tips to help you effectively manage and lead your employees

## Reducing Bad Behavior in the Workplace

Workplace incivility takes place in most workplaces yet is often overlooked and left untreated. It is very expensive in terms of productivity and employee retention to any organization. Managers have the responsibility to act when they notice behaviors contributing to incivility.

### What is workplace incivility?

Workplace incivility could be defined as any behavior that violates the standards that exist in an organization for mutual respect. This could be between manager and subordinates or between coworkers or citizens. Sometimes these acts are direct but, other times they are very indirect and could be termed as passive-aggressive. Some examples of workplace incivility are below:

- Passing blame for mistakes
- Talking down to others
- Spreading rumors
- Taking credit for others' efforts
- Withholding information
- Making demeaning or derogatory remarks
- Taking resources that someone else needs
- Failing to return phone calls

Other acts of disrespect may be as simple as not holding a door open for someone that is disliked; giving unpleasant looks when passing coworkers in the hallway; or texting on a phone when a person should be listening to a presenter in a meeting.

### The True Cost of Incivility

There are some real costs associated with allowing incivility in the workplace. Some are minor, however, it is important for a manager to understand what is at stake if there is pervasive culture of incivility. Some examples of the general costs are:

- Lost work time worrying about an incident and future interactions with the offender.
- Lost work time avoiding the offender.
- Employees spend time trying to get even.

- Theft issues arise within the organization.
- Lessened sense of commitment to the organization from offended employees—lower morale.
- Intentionally reduced efforts at work leading to other employees having to carry the workload.
- Intentionally reduced hours at work resulting in excess absenteeism.
- Increased employee turnover.
- Deadlines are missed and overall work quality is negatively influenced.

There are many more potential negative impacts on organizations from allowing incivility. Once a culture including these types of behaviors takes hold, it takes a lot of work to change course.

### Combating Workplace Incivility

A manager must look at their own approach in the workplace before addressing issues with others. A manager should hold themselves to the same standard that they are going to hold their employees to.

A way to keep incivility out of the workplace is to keep trouble out before it enters. When interviewing and hiring don't just rely on "gut" feelings. Complete reference checks before making a bad hire.

It is very important to take complaints seriously as they arise. Invest the time to investigate and address the problem appropriately. Make sure employees understand that you have a zero-tolerance policy for maltreatment of each other in the workplace.

Involve the Human Resource Department when an employee has patterned behaviors of causing workplace discord. Start down the disciplinary path. The result will either be a change in the employee's behavior or further disciplinary action leading to termination. If the negative employee chooses to weed themselves out, it will be better for the city in the long-run.

It is important to understand the effect of workplace incivility if a manager is going to change its direction. We owe it to our staff members that do show mutual respect on a daily basis to address issues of incivility with those that don't.