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How incivility hijacks performance: It robs cognitive resources, increases dysfunctional behavior, and infects team dynamics and functioning



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Recent surveys indicate that incivility is rampant and on the rise. According to a recent *Civility in America* poll, 70% of Americans believe that incivility has reached crisis proportions. Seventy-one percent believe civility has declined in recent years; and the majority expect the decline to continue. People in organizations and schools experience or witness incivility too often. Incivility is defined by Andersson and Pearson as the exchange of seemingly inconsequential, inconsiderate words and deeds that violate conventional norms of workplace conduct. It is important to note that incivility is all in the eyes of the beholder. It is not an objective phenomenon; it reflects people's interpretation about how actions make them feel.

In a study by Alan Rosenstein and Michelle O'Daniel, most of the 800 physician executives surveyed said that disruptive behavior happens in their hospitals at least once per month. Ten percent called it a daily occurrence and almost all believed that this bad behavior negatively affected their patients' care. What are the costs? Nearly one-fourth said that it led to actual harm to their patients. The news from doctors and nurses actually treating patients is even more frightening. Nearly three out of four identified bad behaviors within their teams that led to medical errors; more than one-fourth were convinced that these behaviors contributed to the deaths of their own patients.

How does this happen? Some evidence suggests that rudeness affects individual functioning. Research shows that targets of incivility suffer psychological distress, negative emotional effects, and job burnout. Targets may lose time and cognitive resources worrying about the uncivil interaction. However, an underlying assumption of this research is that a single uncivil incident is unlikely to trigger major consequences. Rather, an accumulated effect of frequent "daily hassles" is responsible for the harm.

Yet, several of our studies suggest that even a single, brief uncivil incident can cause an immediate reduction in people's performance. For example, we found that experiencing incivility hampered participants' ability to perform complex tasks and reduced their creativity. We also found that rudeness from customers reduced customer service representatives' ability to recall relevant information and perform analytical tasks. What's more? We found that the effects of incivility are not limited to those who experience incivility; witnesses of incivility showed a reduced capacity for solving complex problems and were much less creative.

Our research begs the question about how far-reaching the consequences of incivility stretch. Does working in an uncivil culture affect people's functioning? This also begs the question of *how* does incivility affect the performance of targets, witnesses, teams, or those around incivility? Is it possible, for example, that nurses, residents, or doctors who work in an uncivil context may be more prone to make errors?

Over the years we have found that rudeness makes people mad, sad, or even fearful. It also shows that people's motivation may plummet. People who experience or even witness incivility often reduce their effort and time at work. Yet, interestingly, we found that negative emotions or reduced motivation did not explain why performance tends to tank following incivility. Rather, we found that people get mentally tripped up. They do not seem to remember as well, cannot focus their attention, and do not work as well with others; and this affects their performance.

Building on these findings, we set out to test *how* incivility may reduce people's performance and cognitive functioning. We also examined how rudeness affected witnesses, teams, and even those simply "working around it."

In this article we share what we have learned over the years. We highlight the cognitive costs of bad behavior, and

specifically discuss how incivility may instigate dysfunctional behavior, the contagious nature of incivility, and how incivility disrupts team dynamics. Finally, we share recommendations for what individuals should do to buffer the effects of incivility, as well as what organizations should do to manage incivility.

COGNITIVE COSTS OF INCIVILITY

Over the years, we have uncovered considerable evidence that incivility is devastating to performance. While people admit to reducing their effort following encounters with incivility, our experiments have shown that a lack of motivation is not at the root of the performance losses. Just witnessing rudeness caused outcomes to falter by nearly half. Witnesses' reactions to brainstorming tasks were stifled. They stumbled at solving puzzles. External experts rated their deliverables as significantly less creative. These results led us to believe that rather than a reduction in effort being the cause of the performance issues we observed, some sort of cognitive disruption was impacting performance.

The question was – what was this cognitive disruption? We discovered that incivility was actually disrupting working memory. Working memory is a central component of the cognitive system. It is responsible for the rehearsal and storage of both verbal and visual information, and is also responsible for more in depth thought processes like decision-making and goal management. Digging deeper, we set out to uncover how incivility was impacting working memory by exploring its effect on the three separate functions of working memory. We started off looking at the effects of incivility on the verbal component of working memory. What did we learn? Those who witnessed rudeness performed 18% worse on the verbal tasks. Since processes associated with creativity draw upon this verbal function of working memory, participants' creativity was also impacted. They came up with 29% fewer creative ideas than those who had not witnessed rudeness. Experts rated their ideas as 23% less creative.

Building on these results, in another study we investigated whether incivility affects performance on visual tasks, which are also governed by working memory. This has important implications for how incivility may disrupt attention and cause people to “miss” critical information, often referred to as “inattention blindness.” Researchers Daniel Simons and Christopher Chabris have demonstrated that perception of visual information requires attention, and that when attention is diverted to other objects or tasks individuals often fail to perceive unexpected objects, even if people are right in front of their eyes for a significant amount of time.

We believed that since incivility tends to occupy one's mind, shifting the focus of attention to the uncivil event, it might contribute to inattention blindness. To test this, we used Simon and Chabris' infamous “invisible gorilla” manipulation. During the task of counting basketball passes among a group, a person in gorilla suit walked through the screen. After viewing the complete video, participants were instructed to write down the tally for the number of passes made by the team they had been assigned to watch. Those who were primed with incivility were nearly five times less likely to notice anything unusual, including this “invisible” gorilla.

Finally, we explored whether incivility affected the central component of working memory responsible for problem

solving, decision-making, and the planning of future actions. Those who experienced rudeness showed increases in both decision-making and physical move time for goal management activities, but not those that did not require goal management. These results help us to better pinpoint how incivility taxes working memory, and in doing so, decreases performance on complex tasks.

While those results suggested that actually experiencing incivility led to reduced cognitive performance, to test whether simply having incivility on your mind was detrimental, we conducted an experiment in which we primed people with incivility. We found that that even for those simply primed with incivility, working memory capacity suffered and performance declined on three separate tasks. Specifically, those in the uncivil condition recalled 17% less, performed 86% worse on the verbal tasks and came up with 38% fewer creative ideas than those who had not been primed with rudeness. Experts rated their ideas as 33% less creative. They also made 43% more math errors and 1.25 times more speed errors in the working memory task.

These priming results suggest that it is not simply witnessing an uncivil event that consumes cognitive resources, disrupts working memory, and harms performance. Rather, there seems to be something qualitatively disruptive about incivility in particular that elicits a response in people. Even subconscious triggers of incivility weigh on people's minds, taking a cognitive toll on working memory and subsequent performance. These results indicate that even if people are unaware of the effects of being around incivility, there are detrimental effects.

Taken together, these results show that incivility impairs working memory, which in turn negatively impacts both performance and creativity. Working memory has three main functions – the verbal function, the visual function, and the central function responsible for higher order cognitive tasks; incivility impairs all three. What's more, this effect occurs in the absence of a specific uncivil event; simply having incivility on one's mind has been shown to decrease working memory performance. This is important because it suggests that even being in a workplace that has a climate of incivility may impair workers' creativity and performance. Incivility robs people of cognitive resources, disrupts all three components of working memory, and ultimately hijacks performance.

INCIVILITY ALSO PRIMES DYSFUNCTIONAL BEHAVIOR

Beyond impairing working memory functioning, incivility influences cognitive functioning by priming dysfunctional thoughts. When asked what to do with a brick, participants who witnessed rudeness in all three of our studies – and those we have run previously – were more likely to create dysfunctional uses for a brick than those who did not witness rudeness. Participants in the rudeness condition wrote things like, “I'd like to smash the experimenter's face with a brick,” as well as “break someone's nose,” and “smash someone's fingers.” Many stated that a brick could be used to “murder someone,” “kill people,” “attack someone,” “beat someone up,” “hurt someone,” “torture someone,” “throw at someone,” “trip someone,” “throw through a window,”

“sink a body in a river,” and could be used as a weapon. Our experiments suggest that an isolated rude comment could provoke the urge to aggressively retaliate — or to take aggression out on someone. Participants who were exposed to rudeness not only produced more dysfunctional uses (which may be conscious or subconscious) but also tended to incorrectly reassemble the scrambled word “remdue” (which should have been assembled “demure”) as “murder.” Those in the rude condition were nine times more likely to write “murder.” This kind of implicit measure is used by cognitive psychologists to uncover important facts about subconscious thinking processes.

Our findings suggest that an isolated rude comment could provoke conscious as well as subconscious aggressive thoughts that may cause individuals to behave in an aggressive manner. People who witness — or even work in an uncivil environment — may be more prone to lash out at others, to snap when responding to someone, or to take out frustrations on others without realizing it.

This suggests that incivility may spiral, as people display emotions or behaviors (even non-verbal) connected to such dysfunctional thoughts or behaviors. We believe that such reactions affect team functioning, the organization and its culture. In a *Fortune 100* manufacturer we worked with, the lead of an external consulting team presented their findings in a dismissive tone that set off one of the managers attending the meeting. Verbal exchanges between the presenter and the manager grew more personal until the manager challenged, “let’s take it outside.” The room full of “suits” marched out to the parking lot, where someone with a cooler head stepped in to prevent the fight. This is clearly atypical. But when incivility occurs, ill feelings and associated bad behaviors can escalate and spread until the entire environment seems nasty.

This type of contagion often occurs in teams. As depicted in ESPN’s miniseries *The Bronx is Burning*, on-and-off field incivilities within the 1977 New York Yankees eroded team dynamics. A three-way power struggle among owner George Steinbrenner, manager Billy Martin, and star Reggie Jackson evolved, generating numerous conflicts. Reggie Jackson caused enough friction among the team that members eventually refused to talk to him. Insults and incivilities escalated until Martin and Jackson had to be physically restrained from injuring each other.

IS INCIVILITY REALLY CONTAGIOUS?

To explore whether incivility could “infect” people, we conducted several studies to explore the contagious nature of incivility. The results of these studies showed that rudeness is indeed contagious, in that experiencing rudeness in one interaction causes individuals to be rude when they interact with others in the future. Digging deeper, we found the reason was that when people experience rudeness or incivility, they become more aware of incivility in their environment. Thus, if Tom is rude to me, I am more likely to notice rude cues from Jim in the future, and respond to Jim accordingly. This effect is less pronounced if Jim’s actions are clear (if Jim is clearly being nice and polite, I am unlikely to believe he is being rude), but if Jim’s actions are unclear, then my previous interaction with Tom taints the way I view

the interaction with Jim. Research suggests that almost all interactions are at least somewhat ambiguous, meaning that almost all interactions are flavored by the tenor of prior interactions. This may be particularly true in today’s corporate culture, where more and more communication is conducted via informal methods of communication like e-mail and text. Communicating in this manner may enhance the contagious nature of rudeness in an organization because it leaves communications somewhat ambiguous and open to interpretation.

THE IMPACT OF INCIVILITY TO THE TEAM AND THEIR FUNCTIONING

Beyond its ability to influence dysfunctional ideation and its contagious nature, rudeness may be particularly harmful in organizational settings because of its effects on teams. There are some types of threats that research has shown cause teams to become more cohesive and thus perform better. For example, when a team believes that their supervisor is unfair, they tend to band together in response to the shared threat. However, when teams experience incivility, the effect is exactly the opposite. When teams experience incivility, regardless of whether the incivility comes from inside the team or outside the team, it has catastrophic effects on the team’s collaborative processes and severely impacts the way team members perform their tasks.

A nurse from a top hospital shared that when she called a physician who was not “in house” for a patient who was deteriorating, the physician said, “Do you know where I am? I am with my family and you are interrupting me. Find someone else to take care of your nonsense.” The team member explained that, “I felt like I had done something wrong. I wanted to cry but knew my patient needed me. Being that this physician was close to the top of the chain, I really wasn’t sure whom to call. It took me some time to recover, and my patient care was delayed. I felt like a horrible nurse that night. Moving forward, I was afraid to communicate with this physician, which presented a major issue because she and her team were assigned to many of my patients.”

As this example illustrates, rudeness impairs team dynamics. Teammates no longer share information. They also fail to share the workload. In a recent study of 75 teams, those with high number of rude members reported work sharing behaviors that were 14% worse than other teams, and information sharing behaviors that were 9% worse than other teams. These findings hold even if the incivility is from an uncivil colleague outside the team: team functioning and performance suffer. In this context, teams that were exposed to rudeness experienced a 15% decrease in helping behaviors and a nearly 10% decrease in information sharing. Regardless of the source, teams are distracted. Whether teammates waste resources discussing the incident or how they might respond, replaying it in their minds, or avoiding the person, chances are the incident pulls them off track. The rude incident consumes resources that could have been focused toward more effective problem solving, task achievement, and customer or patient care.

How serious can this be? An anesthesiologist at a large university hospital in the southeast region of the United States communicated to us that when incivility is present

in the operating room, it can have a tremendous effect on the team. Anesthesiologists, for example, not only have to constantly monitor the patient's condition, which is represented by a series of pings, beeps, and bleeps on various machines in the operating room, but also communicate this condition to the rest of the team so that they can successfully perform their functions. This process is tremendously taxing, and when there is incivility present this process is impaired. Each team member has a harder time performing his or her job, which subsequently impairs the way they communicate with and help other team members. In a situation like an OR (operating room), where a successful operation requires real time communication of tremendously detailed information, the consequences of distractions like incivility can be truly disastrous.

WHAT IS BEHIND ALL THESE LOSSES?

In various experiments we have tried to pinpoint why incivility is so distracting. Why does it pull people and teams so off track? We have found evidence of at least three potential explanations: performance losses stem from conscious evaluations of the uncivil event, conscious processing of social information, and sub-conscious processes resulting from the perception of a social threat.

Perhaps the most obvious explanation for why incivility impairs performance is because it occupies individuals' conscious awareness. Compelling evidence suggests that when individuals experience incivility or any kind of social threat, they think about it. Because self-preservation is a fundamental human motive, any social experience that could be considered threatening tends to be consciously evaluated. Individuals think about the threat and evaluate its veracity, the potential consequences of the threat, and most important, potential reactions to the threat that would result in the least amount of harm. For example, research done with a large cellular communications provider in Israel found that when customer service representatives experienced incivility from customers, they had a harder time recalling details of the conversation with the customer because they spent mental energy thinking about the incivility. It is difficult to control this process. When people experience incivility, the process of consciously evaluating it seems to take precedence over primary tasks, even when an individual does not want to think about the rude incident. It tends to occupy them, even if they do not want it to.

A nurse in a top ranked research hospital in the northeast region of the United States shared how she called the surgeon because of the unexpected deterioration of his patient. The nurse was concerned about the planned discharge for this patient given the patient's state. The surgeon accused this nurse and the unit of not being "competent" to care for patients. The surgeon said that he would send all of his patients elsewhere from this point on. The nurse felt helpless as she knew her patient was in trouble and was trying to focus on the patient, not the uncivil tone and words from the surgeon. However, for the remainder of the day, the nurse was angry with the surgeon and spent time and mental energy thinking about the interaction. She admitted that she was distracted and irritable throughout the day, and that she did not perform as well because of this interaction with the

surgeon. The discussion took her off track, and she struggled to focus on her other patients that day.

Another reason incivility may harm performance is that it presents people with an informational challenge. It may not be clear to the victim or a witness what the uncivil person "really" wants, why he or she is being rude, and how to respond. Instead of concentrating on the task at hand, the victim or the witness is likely to be focused by trying to understand what the source of the problem is and how to address it. As a result, incivility increases cognitive load and makes the task at hand more cognitively complex. In other words, it is possible that it is not only the emotional challenge described above, as people are upset by the event, that creates the cognitive distraction, but also the informational challenge that is presented by the uncivil person.

A vice president at a large bank recently recalled for us an incident in which she received what she considered to be an uncivil e-mail from a colleague from another country. "The most troubling part of the e-mail was that I wasn't sure what he meant—did he mean to come off like that, was he truly angry, or was I just misinterpreting it?" She elaborated, "I thought about it for a good amount of time after that—if I had known he was trying to be difficult it almost would have been better; at least then I would have known how to respond." Think about the last time you received a rude e-mail from someone. Often, the intention is not clear. You may have spent a significant part of the next hour or so ruminating over that e-mail. What did he/she want? Why did he/she treat me like that? This process of trying to evaluate the e-mail likely pulled at least part of your mental awareness away from the task at hand, and it is likely that task suffered as a result. Taken together these two mechanisms suggest that rudeness and incivility may have their effect on cognitive functioning and performance because people consciously ponder the event. These two mechanisms above (social threat and social information processing) may also interact with each other. Rudeness is on some level a social threat, but on another level the threat is ambiguous, so it may require cognitive resources to discern *if* there even is a threat. Thus it may be that rudeness is particularly insidious because it is unclear how to react to it. If someone is "angry" with us or expresses "aggression" we know how to respond, and therefore it is not particularly cognitively taxing. Responses to rudeness are often not quite so clear. Did your teammate exclude you from the meeting with your boss because he is going behind your back, taking credit for the project you just busted your tail leading, or because he thinks he has a better relationship with him and can exert more influence garnering support for your project? You are steaming about it, and have played at least ten different scenarios through your mind. You have also wasted a ton of resources on how you handle this situation. Do you confront your teammate? When? How? Should you talk to a confidant on your team first to get her perspective and advice?

While both conscious evaluations of the event and the information challenge explanation assume that individuals are consciously thinking about the uncivil event, there is also evidence that suggests that automatic processes over which individuals have no control may also be responsible for performance impairment. Strong evidence from Joseph Ledoux and Antonio Damasio's neuroscience research suggests that the amygdala, located deep in the limbic system of

the brain, is activated in the presence of even minor threats. When activated, the amygdala shifts attentional resources from higher processes to a more primitive flight or fight response. Incivility may disrupt cognition by automatically activating the primitive brain systems that communicate the fight or flight response rather than focusing on the cognitive task at hand. Since we are wired for survival, the priority is “self-protection.” This process is *automatic*, meaning that individuals have no control over it, which implies that it cannot be stopped. Unlike the conscious evaluation of the event, this process has no conscious component – it is a primitive function designed to prepare people to respond to a threat. While this process is going on, individuals’ attentional resources are likely devoted to the process, redirecting them away from the task at hand. Our ability to focus on the task takes a back seat, and performance suffers as a result. Try to remember how you felt the last time something surprising happened that really scared you. Were you able to concentrate on your work immediately? Most people cannot, because this automatic threat evaluation process is occurring and it draws attention to it, away from primary tasks. For some people, an uncivil interaction does just that.

CAN YOUR ORGANIZATION AFFORD THESE LOSSES?

Our findings may help explain why health care mistakes occur and patient care may suffer despite well-intentioned efforts. It is clear that incivility impairs individual’s ability to think, even when individuals are not the targets. Witnessing incivility – or even being around it – triggers reactions in the brain, making it tougher to manage tasks and solve problems. Incivility increases the likelihood that people miss important information.

Not spotting the gorilla is one thing, but present a similar situation in a hospital and it can be fatal. A doctor detailed to us how a medical team at his west coast hospital administered the wrong treatment to a patient after an uncivil encounter with their supervising M.D. The necessary information was right there on the chart, but the team lacked the attention and awareness to take it into account. The patient died.

What is scary is that this medical story is far from unique. Other doctors and nurses have shared similar stories with us, and they urge us to spend time studying the health care industry because the costs are so high and way too prevalent.

Our team findings highlight how communication and helpfulness is often stifled following incivility. And, this reduces performance – and could help explain errors in the medical context.

Researcher Amy Edmondson and colleagues, and doctors such as Atul Gawande have highlighted that a climate of trust and respect, or psychological safety, benefits learning. Our study may offer some specifics about why this is the case. The implications of our research span far beyond health care, however. Employees whose work demands focus, problem solving, decision-making, creativity, or cognitive performance should be wary of incivility’s impact. Beyond the workplace, our findings hold important implications for school settings. Students who are simply around an uncivil setting (e.g., classroom behavior, playground antics) may suffer negative cognitive effects and decreased performance. Given the

relationship between working memory and learning, writing, language comprehension, and reasoning, we suspect that uncivil environments will reduce students’ ability to be attentive, learn, and perform well. There may be a greater likelihood of dysfunctional behavior in uncivil environments as well.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our results suggest that people may not realize that working in this environment may limit their potential and harm their functioning. They may be unaware that incivility is silently chipping away at their productivity, creativity, and well-being. Research by Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman reveals that ordinary daily hassles considerably outstrip major life stressors and their impact on emotional, social, and work functioning. Incivility may be one such hassle, yet it may not be consciously acknowledged.

INDIVIDUALS’ ROLE IN BUFFERING THE EFFECTS

Take Care of Yourself

Simply being aware of how distracting incivility is helpful. Recognize the toll that incivility is likely to take, and that your workplace effectiveness is likely to drop. Whether you are a target or are working in an uncivil environment, pay special attention to taking care of yourself. Surround yourself with friends and family members. Schedule time for relaxation and fun. Make time for activities where you feel a sense of thriving. Get into routines where you disengage from work (evenings, weekends, and vacations) and its strains. Thriving outside of the workplace can help rejuvenate you. It will help you bring a stronger, more vital self to work, where you will be more immune to the toxicity of incivility.

Reduce Your Exposure

Ideally people steer clear of incivility whenever possible, limiting their involvement with uncivil colleagues and organizations. Reduce your dependence on uncivil colleagues by seeking advice, information, and support from other teammates, peers, or leaders. You might strategically reduce your offenders’ dependence on you by diverting his or her requests to other employees whenever possible. Schedule your work to limit your time (especially face-to-face) and exposure (using discretion on committee or projects).

Engage in Mindfulness

When around incivility, one should attempt to re-focus attention mindfully as best as possible. Mindfulness and meditation practices should enhance focus, particularly when dealing with emotions and stress stemming from incivility. Such practices should help people regulate their emotions, decreasing the likelihood of incivility spiraling, and increasing the chances that they will respond with emotional intelligence (versus saying or doing something that they might later regret).

THE ORGANIZATION'S ROLE

While many recommendations for managing incivility are aimed at the target, our results shift the focus and onus to managers and organizations. Managers can limit incivility through recruiting and selection with an eye for civility, setting expectations, rewards and recognition, coaching and training. When incivility occurs, they cannot tolerate it. Managers must deal with it swiftly in order to limit the negative consequences.

Recruit and Select for Civility

Given the costs of incivility, it pays to invest in selecting civil employees. Do your homework. If in doubt, do not hire. Replacement costs soar quickly. A chief administrator told us how one highly talented, but uncivil, doctor cost his hospital millions. The chief administrator explained that had the hiring committee done its homework, it could have surfaced problems before hiring the offensive doctor: he had left a wake of complaints at his previous hospital. Here the offender spurred dissatisfaction among nurses and technicians. Their dissatisfaction sparked a lawsuit. Beyond the financial burden of the eventual settlement, the emotional toll was felt widely throughout the hospital.

Take a page from legendary basketball coach John Wooden's (at UCLA) notebook. Wooden surveyed people close to recruits (principal, opposing coaches, coach, etc.). He also used visits to screen for civility and character. In one case, when a talented player mouthed off to his mother, Wooden opted to pass on this blue chip recruit. Although this player went on to beat UCLA, Wooden stuck by his decision – for he did not want one bad apple to contaminate his team, and its values.

Choosing a civil workforce can only be as good as your candidate pool is. Use your network to attract better candidates. Tap friends, family members, colleagues, professional associations, former employees, consultants and search firms. Keep a database of excellent candidates who do not fit now, or who chose to work elsewhere for now. They also are an excellent source for referrals. Touching base with them, you may even find that their situation has changed and they are interested. One consulting firm we have worked with reports that they have landed some top employees in doing so-years after the initial contact.

Set Expectations and Norms for Civility

Leaders need to set expectations and norms for civility. Include civility as a value in the mission statement, highlighting the importance of how employees treat one another. Have a conversation about your goals for civility – and what individuals and the organization stand to gain from it. Give employees a voice in developing specific norms. You will gain support and empower employees to hold each other accountable for specific behaviors.

Establishing such expectations and norms provides a baseline for which organizations can measure, reward, and correct behavior.

Think creatively about how to encourage and promote civility. One bank we worked with formed a Civility Council to spearhead various initiatives.

Peer and Customer Recognition and Rewards

Use social network surveys or 360-degree feedback to track patterns of incivility; it may be helpful in rewarding and correcting behavior. How do people find working with others? Peers are the most underutilized source in reinforcing and rewarding behavior. Tap them and customers to reward civility.

Any Zappos employee at any level who sees a coworker doing something special can award a "Wow," which includes cash awards of up to \$50. All recipients of "Wow" are automatically eligible for Zappos coveted "Hero" awards, which are selected by the top executives. Those chosen receive a covered "Hero" parking spot for a month, a \$150 Zappos gift card and a hero's cape.

The National Security Agency (NSA) has a Civility Wall of Fame in which employees nominate candidates. They recognize one star each month. In addition to being featured on their Wall of Fame at headquarters, they are recognized on the company webpage with their photo, story and details of what scored them the award. NP Medical has employees nominate employees for living their positive values (including civility). At their quarterly meetings, they talk about the nominations, tell stories about the positive exemplars, and distribute prizes. Alaska Airlines has a nifty Above and Beyond program (\$500 and name in company magazine) in which customers nominate employees they see living the Alaska Spirit.

In these organizations, the stories of the specific behaviors and values the person enacts reinforce civil behavior.

Coach for Civility

Porath found that a quarter of uncivil employees blame their organizations for not providing them with interpersonal skills training. Investing in training is wise. There are many possibilities. Organizations that she has worked with have sent their doctors to charm school, their attorneys to anger management classes, their sales people to negotiation courses, and employees to stress management, civility, and diversity training sessions. Research has shown that such training can make a difference.

Coaches can also help uncover potential incivility through surveying and interviewing those with whom they work, and may shadow you at meetings and events to pick up on subtleties. This information can be used to guide improvement.

Do Not Tolerate Incivility

Leaders need to signal that the organization will not tolerate bad behavior. Employees who fail to comply with established norms are given fair notice about their behavior – along with clear direction about what needs to change. They must be dealt with swiftly. Failure to do so results in cynicism about the organization and its values – and costs mount. Avoid transferring uncivil employees, as this contaminates other teams and areas. Although letting talented but toxic employees go feels costly, it can generate faith in leaders and sends a strong signal about the organization's values. Think about the employees you may retain in taking such actions – or the

extra cognitive resources, motivation, focus, engagement, and commitment you gain from so many other employees.

CONCLUSION

We hope our results raise awareness about the costs of incivility – the cognitive toll it takes on people, sneakily robbing them of resources, disrupting working memory, prompting dysfunctional thoughts and ultimately hijacking performance. What's more, incivility is contagious. Anyone

can be a carrier. Given this, it is no wonder that incivility tends to impact team functioning and performance. Overall our findings imply that this incivility contagion is much larger than was realized and that it could carry major consequences for people, organizations, and society.



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