# Who really pays the price for workplace incivility?

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**Kaleen Barbera**
Consultant, coach, and trainer in communication, sales, and executive presence

Do any of these things sound familiar: people arriving late to meetings, receiving an impolite email from a colleague, finding out someone took credit for a project in which you were instrumental? If so, you're not alone.

One of my favorite parts in teaching our program titled "Clout" is the group discussion that comes up during the sessions. Recently many of the experiences that our participants share have had more to do with incivilities that they've experienced IN the workplace rather than with clients. When clients experience incivility, roughly 60% will choose not to work with that company. But what happens when incivility occurs inside the workplace? The stats are staggering. Authors Christine Pearson and Christine Porath spent 10 years studying this topic and their findings show that from a monetary perspective, incivility in the workplace results in loss of productivity, loss of revenue, turnover, human resource costs, and recruiting and training expenses, to the tune of over $300 billion each year!!! Additionally, over 90% of people who are treated with incivility will look for opportunities to retaliate, and over 80% will share a bad experience with

those outside the organization. All of this creates not only a cycle of bad behavior, but the company experiences risk to its brand and reputation.

Some common themes we hear that we feel are cause for concern:

"Not minding the basics"- a woman I was speaking with recently has been told on several occasions to 'just shut up and listen to me' by a colleague. It can stem all the way from downright rude behavior to things that initially seem superficial, like not greeting or making eye contact when walking past a coworker, not saying 'excuse me' when appropriate, and interrupting and checking cell-phones while in meetings.

"High-schooling"- getting the impression (typically through implied actions, but not always as blatant as the previous example) from one or more co-workers that you are not part of the crowd and better watch your back. This appears in situations such as not being invited to meetings or involved in team initiatives, receiving unflattering emails with key individuals CC'd, and generally being ignored or one-upped every time you have an idea or need cooperation. A gentleman I spoke with the other day was recounting his early career in the packaging industry. Once this person's direct superior realized he had the knowledge to help his department succeed, he was figuratively cut off at the knees. His boss even went so far as to cancel supply orders to make him look like he was failing. The outcome was that the company lost revenue, the employee left to work for a competitor, and the whole division shut down.

"Politicking"-similar to 'high-schooling', this is a clear undermining of everyone else by managing up of one or a few people. It includes a general misrepresentation of the Politicker's self and his or her efforts at the expense of others not getting credit, publicly or privately issuing blame to a coworker when the boss is present or involved, developing initiatives that are clearly self-serving, and putting one's self in the limelight when it's obvious others would be more appropriate.

Sadly, people polled who feel they are in an already uncivilized workplace claim that they are treated with incivility on at least a weekly basis. Again, the cost is monumentally high from both a monetary perspective as well as a reputational standpoint. The repercussions of bad behavior in the workplace literally trickle down to every facet within the organization and out to clients, prospects, and the general public.

Our focus with many of the programs in JAM centers on developing a professional brand. Each individual can do his or her part in establishing a brand that encompasses professionalism, courteousness and civility. Because the cost of workplace incivility is so high, those that wish to truly build and grow within their company need to be concerned

with the culture and what they are doing to help create and maintain a civilized environment. How do we keep things around us in check? It starts with each individual making an effort at being a better coworker, leader, and all-around employee. We can each be change agents to improve circumstances. The first thing is to take a look at your own behavior. Do you fit any of the above descriptions? If so, how and why? Are you reacting to those around you? Hopefully not, but while it takes a concerted effort and self-awareness to modify behavior, it can be done. I've worked with several large companies that continually support development and publicly reward positive behavior, and it emulates through each department in a culture of positivity.

On the flip-side, if you are living in an uncivilized workplace and aren't one of the culprits causing issues and wish to be a part of making a change for the better, you may be able to see some positive effects, either in your own state of mind or in others, by trying the following:

1.     Commit to having a POSITIVE ATTITUDE every day- the key here is being genuine and being consistent. It will reflect in your emails, your voice over the phone, and your demeanor with others.

2.     Simply take the time to say hello, make eye contact, and smile. Be approachable and make the effort to connect with others.

3.     Be ENGAGED during meetings. Do not bring your phone, check messages, or have a casual attitude or body language that says "my time can be spent better elsewhere".

4.     Separate the issues that you can do something about from the things you simply can't control, and then have a plan. Voicing concerns to a superior or colleague without offering a solution can be detrimental to your brand, your job, and well-being. Identifying a solution and sharing concerns with only those that can affect change allows you to be a positive part of the process for that directly affects you and your environment.

5. However, if the issues are just too overwhelming, hurtful, or detrimental to your career and well-being to manage, contact the appropriate individual/department to discuss before taking action.

A cohesive, cooperative culture in the workplace can make or break a company's success. Each individual can play a role in creating that environment, and making a commitment to sustain it can lead to growth and likeability as a professional and as a key member of the organization.