



LifeSolutions

The Successful Supervisor

June 2015

A civil workplace

“I would like to learn more about how to create and maintain a respectful and civil workplace. What can you tell me that might be helpful?” This issue of *The Successful Supervisor* first appeared in 2011 as a follow-up to the series on bullying. It begins to shift the focus from examining what constitutes bullying to what characterizes a truly civil workplace. It is a reminder that most of what we do to prevent workplace bullying involves cultivating an environment that does not offer fertile ground for bullying behaviors to take root.

As always, we are interested in your feedback and/or questions. Please email EAP at ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com or contact an EAP account manager at 1-800-647-3327.

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Dealing with workplace civility remains a priority for managers and supervisors. Leaders want to find ways to reduce or eliminate uncivil behavior for the benefit of individual employees, the well-being of the work unit, and the organization as a whole. While we must be prepared to respond to individual acts of bullying, it is *equally* important to remember that bullying does not suddenly appear. It is symptomatic of an underlying culture that allows disrespectful behavior to take root and grow. So, we shift our focus. We talk less about the behaviors we want to be rid of and more about the behaviors we want

to see. We ask, “What is a civil workplace culture and how do we cultivate it?” To use the medical analogy, we don’t just treat the symptoms, we try to change the underlying causes. We focus on creating a healthy system ... a *civil* culture ... where the “symptoms” of bullying and disrespect will disappear.

What is a civil workplace?

Civility in the workplace can be defined as: workplace behaviors that demonstrate respect, cooperation, the honoring of differences, an underlying foundation of interpersonally valuing and being valued by others, and the expression of personal interest and concern toward one another. Civil workplaces are:

- **Inclusive** — Everyone belongs and “it’s our differences that make us strong and vibrant.”
- **Welcoming and Friendly** — Saying hello, smiling, letting others know you are glad they are a part of your workplace.
- **Respectful and Courteous** — Good manners, saying “please and thank you.”
- **Helpful and Supportive** — “What can I do to help you out?” Noticing when others are stressed or overburdened and *doing something about it*.
- **People-Centered and Flexible** — Recognizing that while getting the job done is important, people’s needs also matter.

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- **Egalitarian** — Every person is accorded the same level of respect and kindness regardless of position or rank. As George Bernard Shaw so aptly put it, "... behaving as if you were in heaven, where there are no third-class carriages"
- **Reasonable** — Again, even though there is a job to be done, care is taken to make sure assignments are fair and employees are not overburdened.
- **Attentive to Stress** — Leaders acknowledge when stress is the result of policies or circumstances and do not blame the employee for being stressed.
- **Compassionate** — Recognizing when others are suffering and responding to them.
- **Not Fear Based** — Employees work out of a sense of engagement, not out of fear.

But *wait ...* "Sometimes you have to threaten people ... doesn't fear motivate some people to perform better?" The answer is yes, *if what you want is a compliant employee who will be present but not engaged, who will do what he or she has to do and nothing more, and who will perform better while being watched than when on his or her own.* If you want an engaged employee who is creative, hardworking, and loyal, then it's better to lead by inspiration than by intimidation.

The reality is that, for most of us, leading cultural change requires a paradigm shift. We have to change the way we think about managing people. It often requires us to

act in ways that feel counterintuitive, are not what we are used to doing, or do not reflect how we were, or are, being managed ourselves. In cultures that applaud "tough management," we may feel that we are bucking the norm or that our "kinder, gentler" approach will mean that we forfeit authority or even the respect of our employees. These fears are unfounded. Managers can use their power to direct and even discipline staff without resorting to methods that are disrespectful. A civil workplace supports happier employees and results in a more productive and harmonious environment where bullying decreases and even the need for discipline diminishes.

Call LifeSolutions if you have any questions or you would like to explore ways to foster civility in your workplace.

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