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# Managing Rudeness at Work



**Instructor Guide**



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*Civility is not simply a question of minding your manners; it is also a critical component of professional success.*

*P.M. Forni*

## Introduction

### **VIDEO with discussion.**

Welcome to the “Managing Rudeness at Work” workshop.

While a training program on workplace manners and courtesy may seem like overkill, the reality is: rudeness is an epidemic costing industry millions a year. Indeed, what society seems to be gaining in terms of both knowledge and technological advancement, it’s losing out on basic social values that directly impact the bottom line. Bosses freely intrude on subordinates’ personal space, gossiping co-workers are norm, and quality customer care has been forgotten. The result: an environment not conducive to getting work done, dissatisfied clients aiming for the competition, and in some cases, blatant tolerance for abuse and harassment.

To address the growing problem of rudeness in the work setting, this workshop introduces the concept of civility, its importance to a agency, as well as its typical causes and effects. Skills needed to effectively practice civil behavior, as well as different ways organizations can systematize civility in the workplace will also be discussed.

## Workshop Objectives

By the end of this workshop, participants will be able to:

- Define rudeness, understand its causes, and enumerate at least three of its behavioral indicators.
- Describe the costs of rudeness, as well as the rewards of civility, within the workplace.
- Determine practical ways of practicing workplace etiquette, including the proper use of greetings and respect.
- Identify skills in diagnosing the causes of rude behavior.
- Explain the role of forgiveness and conflict resolution in the creation of a civil working environment.
- Describe the different elements of effective communication, particularly effective para-verbal and non-verbal communication.
- Identify specific policies that address rudeness and employee conduct.

## Civility Review

Have you ever considered the current practice of civility in our workplace, as well as your own personal contribution to the status quo?

Think about a time when you felt most respected or considered by a co-worker, superior and/or subordinate. Identify the unique characteristics of the situation you've brought to mind. Assess your own practice of civil behavior in the workplace.

The following guide questions can help during this process:

1. Describe the situation where you felt most respected by a co-worker, superior and/or subordinate. What *exact behavior* did you observe from your co-worker that made you feel treated with respect?
2. What was the effect of your co-worker's respectful behavior on:
  - a) Your performance on the job?
  - b) Your relationship with your co-worker/s?
  - c) Your self-esteem?
3. Have you been treating your co-workers with similar respect? On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 representing "consistent practice of civil behavior", rate yourself in terms of your practice of civility in your workplace. Explain the rating you gave to yourself.
4. Is civility the norm in your organization? On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 representing "civility as consistently practiced", rate the practice of civil behavior in your workplace. Explain your rating.
5. What do you think you and your organization are doing correctly to reinforce civility in your workplace? What do think you and your organization still needs to improve?

Take a moment to review your responses. Keep your responses in mind during the workshop, as these answers can assist in transferring the skills learned in this workshop to practical life.

*Civility costs nothing, and buys everything.*

*Mary Wortley Montagu*

## Module One: What is Rudeness?

Failing to smile at co-workers, or even just a tendency to smirk at a supervisor's unusual request, may not seem like much at first glance. But these seemingly innocuous behaviors can be costly in the long run. It's important then for us to learn about the nature of civility, its behavioral indicators, and why its practice is so critical within an organization.

You will be introduced to the concept of civility, and the idea that even a little consideration can go a long, long way. Signs of rude behavior, its costs and rewards, as well as the case for promoting civility in the workplace will also be discussed.

### What is Rude Behavior?

Civility represents the social norms and rules that must be followed in order to positively and productively relate with others. When people hear the word "civility," words that come to mind include *respect, courtesy, tolerance, consideration, and a rational approach to conflicts*. Behaviors that threaten positive and productive relations with other people, therefore, constitute rude behaviors.

You can be rude without meaning too --- for instance, you simply assume that what's acceptable in one social context (say, at your old workplace or at your home) is acceptable across all contexts. Or you can be rude intentionally, e.g. you show an expression of contempt for a co-worker because you don't agree with her ideas, or you roll your eyes to a co-worker when another co-worker whom you don't like is making a presentation.

What behaviors can be considered as rude? There are many. Below are just a few examples:

- **Failing to acknowledge another person's presence:** Ignoring other people's greetings and well-wishes; going past a co-worker without so much as a nod or a greeting.
- **Using abusive language:** Being verbally abusive or using crude language
- **Gossiping:** It's rude behavior to both instigate and spread rumors against another person, regardless of whether the "news" seems accurate or relevant to the accomplishment of the task at hand.
- **Discounting employee contribution:** Discounting means deliberately downplaying or ignoring the importance of another person's statement or work contribution. For instance, some members in a team may tend to cut off a person that they do not like during a brainstorming session. Taking credit --- or worse, compensation! --- for work that you did not do is also an example of discounting behavior.

- **Bullying and intimidating co-workers:** Threatening violence against co-workers who would report timesheet irregularities to management; leveraging the power of cliques in order to ostracize particular individuals.
- **Singling out and isolating, ignoring, ostracizing a co-worker;** persistently demeaning, patronizing, belittling, and ridiculing.
- **Sabotaging individual and agency efforts:** Intentionally not informing a co-worker who is competition for a promotion of the exact time a client will arrive in the building.
- **Discriminating against a particular individual or group:** Attacking an individual based on intrinsic characteristics such as race, gender, age, mental ability, and physical appearance.
- **Practicing insensitivity against co-workers' needs:** Inability to pay attention to the feelings and needs of others e.g. not giving a grieving co-worker time off before demanding workplace attendance. Insensitivity may also come in the form of engaging in activities distracting to co-workers, e.g. taking a cell phone calls while in the middle of a meeting, not cleaning up the whiteboard as one leaves the training room, and demanding attention from subordinates outside of the prescribed working hours.
- **Practicing poor etiquette in dealing with correspondence:** Ignoring phone calls and emails, using agency email to send private messages, and discussing individuals in mailing lists as if they are not there.

It's worth noting: civility goes beyond mere good manners.

Civility is about effective self-awareness and effective social awareness. You can't be an effective practitioner of civility until you recognize your place in the general scheme of things, and you develop an appreciation for the unique contribution of all else around. It's a delicate balance between pursuing self-interest and practicing self-control in order for others and the organization to pursue their interests well. For this reason, effective programs on civility must always be prefaced by a training workshop on attentiveness to self and others.

## Three Reasons Why You Should Be Civil

The case against the stronger forms of rude behaviors, such as bullying and racial discrimination, is easy to build. After all, violence in the workplace can get an employee fired, if not arrested and sent to prison.

But how about the softer, yet no less important, acts of civility? Are there compelling reasons to give one's boss a warm "hello" every morning? Are there tangible benefits to making sure that you don't dump your folders in your neighbor's work station? For the more subtle acts of consideration, the case for engaging in civil behavior seems harder to present. But not impossible!

Consider the following three reasons why you should practice civil behavior:

1. **There's no escaping other people!** Cliché as it may sound, no man is an island. You may be a self-starter and a person who takes pride in being able to work with minimal supervision. You may be blessed with innate talent that makes you indispensable in an organization. But you'd still need to rely on suppliers to create a product that will impress both stockholders and consumers alike. You still need the trust of your team mates in order to execute an idea. And, whether you admit it or not, the positive regard of those who work with you will do a whole lot for your self-esteem. Unless you learn how to play nice, you'll never be able to make it very far. Or at least, your path towards success will be littered with landmines you could do without.

In short, your survival in the modern world, a world where everyone is linked together (probably more so than in the past few decades), depends on civility!

2. **There are many benefits to practicing civil behavior.** Civility is not lacking in the WIIFM factor, or the "What's In It for me?" factor. Some of the benefits of civility to an organization or an individual employee are even proven by empirical research.

To begin with, civility helps create a positive working environment. Motivation theories support that happy and relaxed workers are productive workers --- and willing to go the extra mile for their agency. On the flipside, disrespect and inconsideration on a jobsite is highly stressful, and can contribute to workers' low morale. Indeed absenteeism and low employee retention is common in companies where rudeness is the norm. You can also expect that time better spent finding workable solutions to problems gets wasted in name-calling, "scapegoating" and face-saving.

The deliberate practice of civility can help a person grow as an individual. Civility teaches emotional intelligence --- a person learns to control anger and frustration until an appropriate time comes to express them. He or she understands that there may be more important things at stake than a petty argument during a staff meeting. Managing rude behavior also teaches social skills such as conflict management and negotiation, skills which can be applied across many areas of life.



3. **Lastly, it's the right thing to do.** If anything else, civility is recommended because it's the right thing to do. Most of the world's accepted religion, philosophies, and belief systems advocate consideration for one's fellow man --- indeed, isn't the golden rule "do unto others what you'd like others to do unto you"?

Violence and ill-will against other people, regardless of degree, never brings anything positive to a work environment. Indeed, even the current political landscape advocates tolerance and equality, cooperation and mutual support. The world is already past the age where it's each man for his own or self-interest is pursued at all cost. We can afford to be more polite and above irrational reactions.

### **Cost and Rewards**

While rudeness can be perceived as innocuous behaviors, they can significantly affect the agency's bottom line. Rudeness has direct impact on productivity and employee retention. Civility, on the other hand, can improve all these areas considered as relevant in the running of a successful organization.

*(This section is a mere introduction to the idea that rudeness in the workplace has negative consequences, while civility has more to offer than simply peaceful working conditions. Kindly refer to Module 4: Costs and Rewards for a more thorough discussion of this topic.)*

*Men are respectable only as they respect.*

*Ralph Waldo Emerson*

## Module Two: Effective Work Etiquette

Promotion of civility within the workplace starts with, at the very least, promotion of basic workplace etiquette.

Workplace etiquette refers to unwritten rules or norms of acceptable conduct within a professional environment. Violations of workplace etiquette are not always punishable by agency law, but ignoring etiquette guidelines have considerable consequences for an employee or a business entity.

In this module, you will be introduced to some tips in practicing workplace etiquette. In particular tips related to proper greeting, respect, involvement, and political correctness will be discussed.

### Greetings

The seeds of civility can be planted in an organization by encouraging every employee to give their co-workers greetings befitting the professional nature of the work environment.

What rules of greeting etiquette are worth remembering? Consider the following:

**Formal Greetings:** **Always give a formal acknowledgment of another person's presence, regardless of that person's rank.** Starting an interaction with greetings is a way of establishing rapport with new acquaintances and maintaining rapport with old ones. A "Good Morning/Afternoon/Evening" is an excellent way to both initiate and maintain a positive relationship with a co-worker or manager.

In the same vein, greetings are best followed by expression of **sincere** interest in the person that you saw or met. For example, you can reply to an exchange of Good morning with "How do you do?" or "How are you doing today?"

When used as a greeting, questions like "How do you do?" are not meant to be answered in great detail. You can consider them as a polite way people can get abreast of what's going on with people's lives. An appropriate reply can be as short as "I am doing very well. My son graduated from high school yesterday and the family is very thrilled. How about you? How are things at your end?" You and your co-worker can always schedule a longer chat at a more appropriate time.

**Informal Greetings:** Informal greetings can also be a great way of developing civility in a workplace. If familiarity is already established among co-workers, or when expressly invited to, informal greetings can set up positive working relationships in an organization. The use of "hi" and "hello" can put co-workers more at ease with each other, and set the foundation for social awareness.

Non-verbal greetings such as smiles, taps on the back, a handshake, a high five are also ways to develop civility within the workplace. Note though that it is not recommended to assume any familiarity unless expressly invited to.

**Other etiquette rules worth considering when it comes to greeting:** Greeting etiquette can be a seminar-workshop on its own; the topic can't be comprehensively covered in one module. It helps, however, to remember a few simple rules when sending and receiving greetings:

- **Give greetings the attention that they deserve.** Saying good morning to an entering staff member while you remain busily sorting folders on your desk can actually come across as rude instead of civil behavior. Instead, pause whatever it is you're doing, even for a few seconds, to offer your pleasantries. Establish eye contact; stand up when greeting a superior or a client, even step from behind your desk to offer a handshake if necessary. Make the other person feel that you're greeting them because you want to, not because you have to.
- **Remember that greetings are not limited to face-to-face conversations.** Even when sending and receiving written correspondence, including electronic communication such as e-mail or an instant message, it is recommended that you begin and end your letter with a greeting. "Dear (name)" is traditionally greeting for written and electronic correspondence; the word dear is acceptable for both formal and informal communication. "Greetings!", "Hope all is well at your end." are also acceptable salutations. Letter closings can include greetings like "Best Regards," "In appreciation of your message," and "Cheers,"
- **In business settings, rank and professionalism matters.** Make sure that you're always sensitive to the power dynamics in an organization when offering greetings. For example, avoid addressing your boss using his or her first name/nickname unless given permission to.
- The questions of "who should initiate a greeting?" and "when to offer a greeting?" are often debated, but a good rule of thumb is to always initiate a greeting as soon you see another person, regardless of rank. After all, you can't go wrong with courtesy! The exception is when the other person is otherwise engaged and will likely construe your greeting as an interruption instead of a pleasantry. Greetings must also be appropriate to the context; you can't offer a cheery greeting when the mood is grim or solemn such as during the aftermath of a workplace accident.

## Respect

**It may be said that the foundation of civility is *respect*.**

Respect refers to positive esteem for another person, one that demands both deferential and considerate behavior. Respect is commonly perceived as something persons of higher rank

demand from their subordinates. In reality though, respect is something every person, regardless of rank, both freely give to, and inspire in, those they interact with.

In many ways, respect can be summarized in terms of attitudes. When you respect another person, you understand that he or she is a person of worth, which in turn demands that you treat him or her ethically. A co-worker's worthiness of respect has little to do with his or her job performance. All people are deserving of respect regardless of their contribution to an organization.

Respect may also be conceptualized in terms of boundaries; that is, we know that we can't act just as we please when relating with a person that we respect. Every individual, for example, requires work space in order to perform their task effectively. Intruding on this workplace, for instance speaking loudly when you know someone is conducting a task that requires mental concentration can be a sign of disrespect.

**Discussion - What are the ways you can show respect for your co-workers? The following are just a few ways to consider:**

- **Practice active listening.** Every person deserves to be given attention when they're communicating. In fact, it's recommended for employees to make a habit of encouraging their peers in contributing more to the discussion. More importantly, give each person's message fair consideration. Just because a suggestion came from someone not considered as a subject matter expert doesn't mean that the suggestion is automatically without merit. (Active Listening will be discussed in more detail in a later module.)
- **Respect your co-worker's property.** Disrespect in the workplace plays itself, not just through face-to-face interactions, but also through lack of consideration for co-worker's belongings and work space and privacy. For instance, it's not uncommon in offices to have issues regarding missing lunches from the kitchen, or missing pens and staplers from a desk! Clarify from the onset what is to be considered as office property and personal property. Better yet, establish rules and guidelines when it comes to using any and all equipment and materials from the office. For instance, should reservations be first made before using a meeting room? These rules and guidelines can go a long way in maintaining civility in the workplace.
- **Respect the right to own beliefs.** Most companies advocate diversity in the workplace. Diversity means that you'll have people of different religions, political beliefs, abilities, traditions, and values working in the same organization. For as long as a person's faith and beliefs do not interfere in his or her work performance, there's no reason for said faith and beliefs to be an issue in the agency. And definitely, no manager or co-worker has cause to compel a person to convert religion and abandon belief systems. A healthy debate is okay, but only for social purposes and not as a way to discriminate or bully.
- **Use your co-workers' time wisely.** A little known way you can practice respect in the workplace is by respecting your co-worker's time. On the jobsite, time is an important commodity, especially when there is much to be done and employees are paid on an

hourly basis. Don't waste your co-worker's time with idle gossip or unimportant concerns. Keep meetings short and to the point. And set appointments instead of ambushing. These little acts of courtesy may not look much at first glance, but they will surely be appreciated by those with lots to do and think about.

## Module Three: Costs and Rewards

This module explains how subtle and blatant acts of rudeness and inconsideration in the workplace equate to lesser revenue, higher employee turnover, and millions of funding spent responding to litigation. This module will also present how the opposite is true: that civility in the workplace means greater profits, higher employee engagement, and harassment-free working conditions.

### Rudeness and the Costs

As mentioned previously, rude behavior seems harmless, with its cost limited to probably a petty argument now and then, or the disgruntlement of a boss, peer, or subordinate. But experience and research reveals that the impact of rudeness in an organization is more serious than what meets the eye.

#### Activity:

Ask participants for some examples of the costs of rudeness in the workplace. Record them on the flip chart.

Consider the following negative effects of rudeness in the workplace:

- **High Employee Turnover.** Fact is: rudeness in the workplace is a top reason for employee resignation; 1 in 8 targets of rudeness leave their jobs to escape the stressful situation (Pearson, Anderson, and Porath, 2001). Even individuals who enjoy their agency's compensation and are working a job they dreamed about would feel compelled to find another job when harassed, bullied, and disrespected by their co-workers on a regular basis. A high attrition rate in a agency is a costly situation for management. Not only will companies have to incur the extra expense of recruiting, screening, and training replacements, but the investment of having trained the staff members who leave never gets recouped.
- **Poor productivity.** Even if employee turnover rate remains stable, rudeness creates roadblocks to the maximization of agency resources --- including manpower. Rudeness from co-workers creates stress in the workplace, which makes it difficult for employees to concentrate. Creativity suffers --- who can come up with great ideas when there's the anticipation that ideas will just be discounted or ridiculed?
- **Stress at the workplace due to rudeness can even spill over to an employee's personal life.** A study by Keashly and Jagaic (2000) reveals that 16.7 per cent of a random sample of residents experience "severe disruption of their lives from workplace aggression. More alarmingly, rudeness can create a chain reaction that will ultimately lead to agency loss. Consider the following quote from a study on rudeness by Pearson and Porath in 2005:

***"Our research shows that when targets believe that someone at work has treated them disrespectfully, half will lose work time worrying about future interactions***

*with the instigator, and half will contemplate changing jobs to avoid a recurrence. One-fourth of research respondents who feel that they have been treated rudely will intentionally cut back their work efforts. A few will steal from their instigators or their organizations. Some will sabotage equipment. Most will tell friends, family, and colleagues about how badly they have been treated...in the worst case, some targets of rudeness will exit.”*

- **Health Costs.** Health-related costs due to workplace stress mean financial losses for companies, and rudeness in the workplace is a significant cause of workplace stress. The financial liability of a agency for one employee who develops heart problems and/or anxiety disorders due to workplace stress can run into thousands of dollars depending on the gravity of the developed health issue.
- **Lawsuits and settlements.** Let us not forget: rudeness in the workplace can also result in critical incidents that can progress into court cases. Persons victimized in the jobsite are encouraged by many today to act on their situations and file a lawsuit in defense of their rights, and when proven to be wronged, the resulting pay-off in terms of damages can be quite high. And even if worker disputes don't get in front of a judge, it can still cost a agency. A 2005 Time Magazine article, for example, reported that the average executive of a Fortune 1000 agency spends as much as 13% of his or her time mediating worker disputes.
- **A steady decline in agency values and culture.** Studies reveal that aggression begets aggression, and that even low intensity acts of aggression in the workplace can spiral into serious problems when left unaddressed. Hence, even mild interpersonal conflicts can progress to actual shouting matches that disrupt work if unattended. And over time, the repeated protection of instigators by management can erode the agency culture and communicate that rudeness is not just tolerated, but also considered as a way to become “part of the team.”

## Civility and Rewards

Rudeness in the workplace can cost agencies a lot of money. On the flipside though, civility can also save organizations on costs.

The following are just some of the rewards of civility in the workplace.

- **Employee Satisfaction and Engagement.** A 2003 study of workplace civility examined numerous companies over a 5-year period. The conclusion: workers' strong positive emotions correlate reliably with corporate financial success, and workers' positive emotions include a sense of being treated with respect --- civility. It is for this reason that many companies, including Costco, IKEA, and the Container Store, advocate positive relationship with employees. They have significant annual profits; pay valued quarterly dividends and monthly sales increases. And because of those workplace packages, their employees are loyal, and the agency is less likely to incur the turnover losses mentioned in the previous section.

- **Improved agency branding.** Civil behavior among employees can be a plus to a agency's reputation. An agency known to have a pleasant working atmosphere within it will have professionals lining up to be of service. The agency's good name is also an integral part in attracting new employees and, in government, in influencing the public to back legislative initiatives that will benefit the agency.



## Four Causes of Rudeness

There are many possible causes of rudeness. P.M. Forni, the co-founder of Johns Hopkins University Civility Project, describes four causes of rudeness. These four are:

- **Lack of self-restraint.** Rudeness, in any context, can be easily avoided, or at least controlled, if individuals will actively practice self-restraint. For instance, annoying conduct by a co-worker need not be recognized --- if you're dealing with an attention-seeker, the move may actually be counter-productive. And even in situations when anger and frustration are warranted, self-restraint can spell the difference between assertive and aggressive communication.

Emotional Intelligence demands that one must be able to express one's feelings in such a way that is always cognizant of constructive goals. If you desire to fix problem behaviors in your co-worker, then stooping to his or her level will not get the job done.

- **Anonymity.** Studies have shown --- and even casual observation will verify --- that people have less inhibition when they know that they can't be made accountable for their actions. You're more likely to rudely address a waiter that you will never see again, than your office's "Good Old Girl" who knows where "all the bodies are buried." People are more likely to say insulting things against a boss or a peer on an online community forum, where one's identity can be hidden. In fact, it's questionable if a rant on social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and various blogs and personal sites would have the nerve to say the things they write about straight to the face of the object of their anger.
- **Stress.** A considerable amount of rudeness in the workplace can be traced to both personal and work-related stress. The workplace, after all, can be a pressure cooker. In this day and age, many workers endure the minimum standard of working conditions for compensation disproportionate to work that they put in. In light of the on-going economic crisis, there's always threat of getting demoted, fired or laid off. Having to survive on a daily basis means lesser time for rest, recreation, and self-care. It's not impossible then for workers to channel their fatigue, frustration, and even depression on the individuals that they interact with on a daily basis. The ability to react to a provoking event may also be diminished by the experience of stress.
- **The Pursuit of Individualism in the Society of Equals.** Forni also suggests a more philosophical root of rudeness today: the attitude that it has to be "each man for his own" and that expressing one's self in the most authentic way possible is a "right" and an "entitlement."

For instance, there are people who feel entitled to talk as loudly as they can in a restaurant because they're paying for the meal and the crew's service anyways. Some people believe that they have as much right as the other person to use the bathroom for as long as they can. There is also the attitude in some quarters that the workplace is survival of the fittest --- if you can't deal with the pressure, and fight back tooth and nail,

and then you should just get out or else be eaten by the system. Many reality TV shows today the plotlines of which revolve around contestants trying to gain the favor of an acerbic boss or judge reinforces this way of thinking.

## How to Overcome It

Overcoming civility in the workplace can be a big challenge, especially in companies where blatant tolerance for explicit and implicit acts of rudeness is already the norm. But this doesn't mean it's impossible to create a civil workplace.

The following are just some of the recommended interventions for creating greater civility in your agency:

- **Create, communicate, and enforce policies regarding civil behavior in the workplace.** Organizations have the power to create the kind of culture they desire by making the practice of civil behavior part of agency policy. The key is in being explicit from the very onset what is desired and expected behavior from managers and staff members alike. These policies should be included in the training program of each incoming employee. Pre-determined consequences of rude behavior in the workplace must also be consistently enforced to ensure that civility ideals don't remain just words on paper. The creation of a agency civility policy will be discussed in later modules.
- **Screen job applicants for tendency towards rude behavior.** Companies can create pleasant and ethical working environments by carefully choosing personalities who will make up the organization. It can only take one bully to create much distress in an organization, which is why it's important that persons with tendencies towards inconsideration, aggression, and disrespect are filtered out from as early as the job interview.

This may sound like common sense, but in reality, companies are willing to overlook personality traits that point to potential rude behavior when faced with an employee with impressive credentials and experience. Most instigators of rudeness in the workplace are those in management, and competent managers are hard to find. It wouldn't be surprising if agencies turn a blind eye on rudeness just to keep top brass.

- **Provide continuous education and training on civility.** Civil behavior is a skill, and many cases of rudeness are simply the result of lack of knowledge and/or practice of skills needed to navigate the workplace in a respectful and considerate fashion. Agencies are encouraged to regularly raise awareness on the costs of rudeness, as well as keep employees trained in civility-related concepts such as gender sensitivity, harassment in the workplace, stress management, conflict management, and workplace etiquette. Assigning advocates among management and staff members is also an excellent way to keep the momentum of civility training programs going.
- **Practice regular self-assessment. If you want to create an environment that values civility, then you have to look no further than yourself.** Make sure that you always look at your own behavior and identify the ways you contribute to workplace rudeness.

All people are guilty of rude behavior, some regularly, others on occasion, but this doesn't make it ok. Modeling civil behavior in your workplace can be the beginning of organizational change.

- **Increase accountability and transparency in the agency.** Rudeness in the workplace may persist because agency set-up makes it easy for acts of rudeness to go unnoticed. If there is nothing keeping an employee from posting derogatory emails to co-workers anonymously, then the agency is providing instigators with opportunity. If performance review is based only on the opinion of the immediate supervisor, then it gives supervisors leverage to treat subordinates as they wish. But if there is a system for accountability and transparency in a agency, then there is a deterrent against instigators of rudeness.

### **Activity: Case Study**

The potential high cost of rudeness in an organization can be illustrated by the case of Stamos v. Annuity Research:

*Stamos suffered severe stress working for her employer's uncle, described as having an "explosive personality." The uncle refers to the women in the office using the term "bitches," waylaid meetings and had been resistant to directions and suggestions. According to an article written by Harvey Enchin for the Vancouver Sun, Stamos' employer's uncle "burst(ed) into the woman's office, made accusations against her and threatened her to the extent that she locked herself in her office and, at one point, called the police." And despite the blatant display of rudeness and abuse, the employer would not fire his uncle.*

*The case was brought to court and the judge ruled in favor of Stamos. Annuity Research was required to pay Stamos "six months' salary, vacation pay, and expenses incurred in finding another job, as well as a bonus the employer had offered as an inducement for her to stay, another \$3,600 for dental repairs arising from grinding her teeth due to stress and an additional sum to cover mental distress."*

Source: [http://www2.canada.com/vancouver\\_sun/features/civilsociety/story.html?id=feebff03-e545-4275-8994-42ea98dc8caa](http://www2.canada.com/vancouver_sun/features/civilsociety/story.html?id=feebff03-e545-4275-8994-42ea98dc8caa)

**Guide Questions:**

1. List down all the acts of rudeness experienced by Stamos in Annuity Research.
2. What do you think are the effects of these acts of rudeness on Stamos? How about the effects on the agency?
3. Do you think that the judge's ruling was fair? Why? Why not?
4. What do you think is the cause of the rudeness in Stamos' workplace?
5. Aside from taking the case to court, what do you think can be done by both Stamos and the management of the agency to overcome similar cases of rudeness in the future?

## Module Four: Getting to the Cause

Cases of rudeness in the workplace do not exist in a vacuum. Most of the time, rudeness is caused (or at least maintained) by a bigger problem --- perhaps in the system, perhaps in the individuals involved. Going straight to the root cause of the problem is one of the best ways of managing rudeness in the workplace; it has a better chance of preventing further incidents compared to merely addressing symptoms. It also helps us get a bigger picture of the problem behavior.

In this module, you will learn about the importance of getting to the cause of rudeness, and some tools that can help in understanding the elements behind rudeness in an organization.

### Examining the Root Cause

One of the laws of physics is that an object doesn't move unless there is force acting upon it. In the same vein, rudeness in the workplace is rarely ever an isolated event. There are factors that directly and indirectly cause the act of rudeness, and if the incident is a recurring event, there are factors that maintain it. Analysis of the root cause of rudeness in the workplace may even reveal systemic issues that the whole agency must address immediately.

It is recommended therefore, that managers and staff members don't just address the symptoms of rudeness but instead start the hunt for its root cause. As mentioned in a previous module, managers from Fortune 1000 companies (companies which you would expect have better programs on organizational development) spend a significant amount of time attending to disputes and disagreements among their subordinates. By targeting the cause, managers can use their time for better things, and employees are less likely to get stressed by an environment that lacks consideration.

It's important to note: identifying the root cause of a problem is a science, and it demands knowledge, skill, and experience. On many occasions, cases where the causes seem obvious are not really straightforward. For example, intimidation in the workplace may not only be about an employee with anger issues. It can also be about a manager who exercises favoritism, an agency culture of passivity and lack of systems in the agency that will penalize disrespectful behavior.

To better understand the root cause of rudeness in our organization, we must apply scientific tools and techniques of analysis. We must also be willing to make tentative but intelligent hypotheses, subject to scrutiny and study. More importantly, we must understand that the cause of rudeness in an organization is not always *other* people--- in systems, such as organizations, every person contributes to the status quo. We are part of the cause of any act of rudeness in our workplace, either by our action or our inaction.

### Creating a Cause-and-Effect Diagram

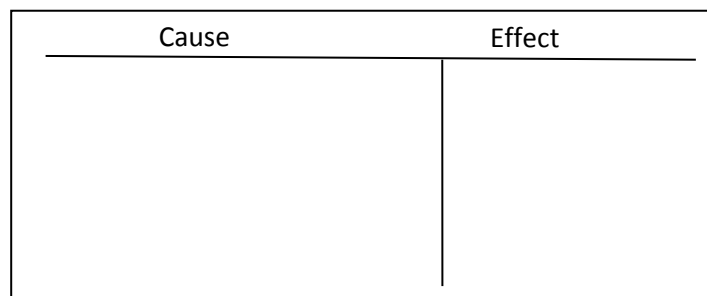
A Cause-and-Effect diagram is an effective tool that you can use when trying to understand the potential causes of rudeness in the workplace is.

Also called the Ishikawa Diagram (after its inventor Kaoru Ishikawa) as well as the Fishbone Diagram because of it looks like the skeleton of a fish, the Cause-and-Effect diagram is a graphic tool that helps users identify, present and analyze the possible causes of a particular outcome.

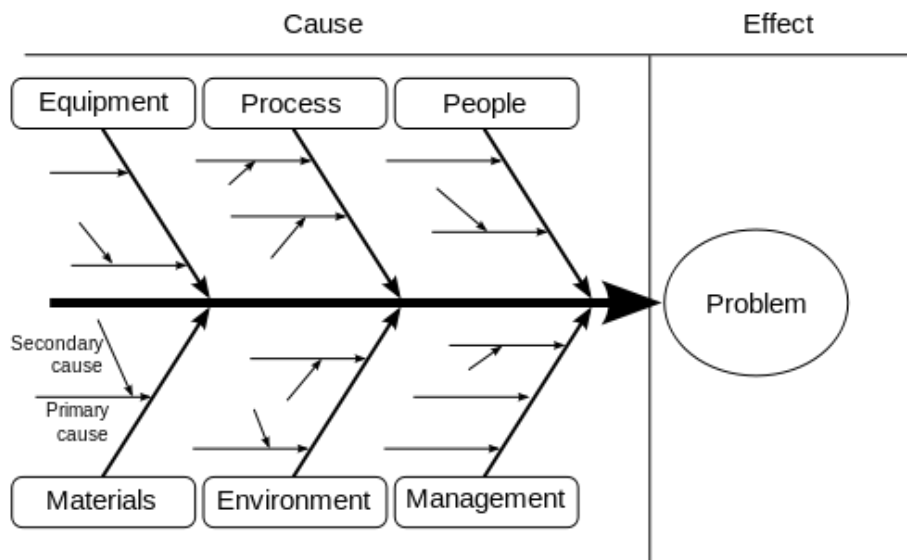
From a Cause-and-Effect diagram we can see both basic causes of a situation or problem, as well as possible interactions among the different causes. Used correctly, the cause-and-effect diagram can also be a way to increase a group's awareness of the different factors surrounding a problematic event.

How do you create a Cause-and-Effect diagram? The following are some simple guidelines to follow:

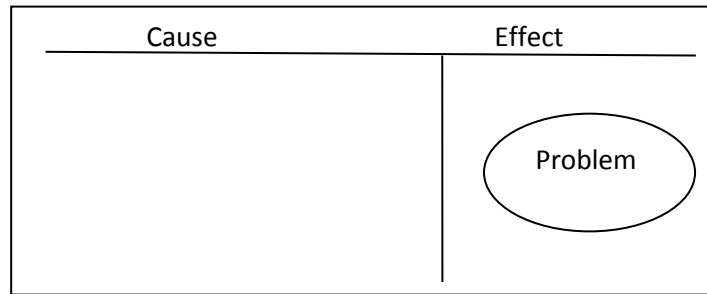
1. Note that the diagram has two sides: the cause side which is on the left and occupies as much as 75% of the drawing space, and the effect side on the right.



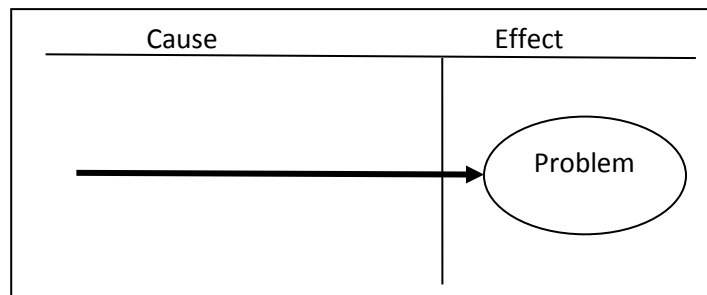
2. Identify the consequence or effect that you want to understand. Place it on the effect box to the right. You may add a brief description so that the exact effect that you want to analyze would be immediately clear to the person looking at the diagram. Be as specific



as possible when presenting the effect.



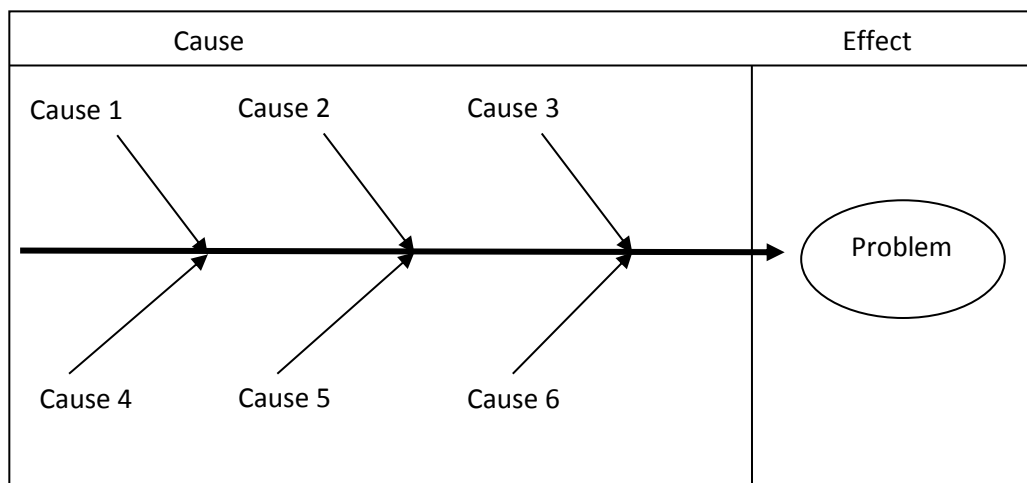
3. Draw the spine of your diagram. The spine is a horizontal arrow pointing to the effect box. You can think of it as like the vertebrae of your fishbone.



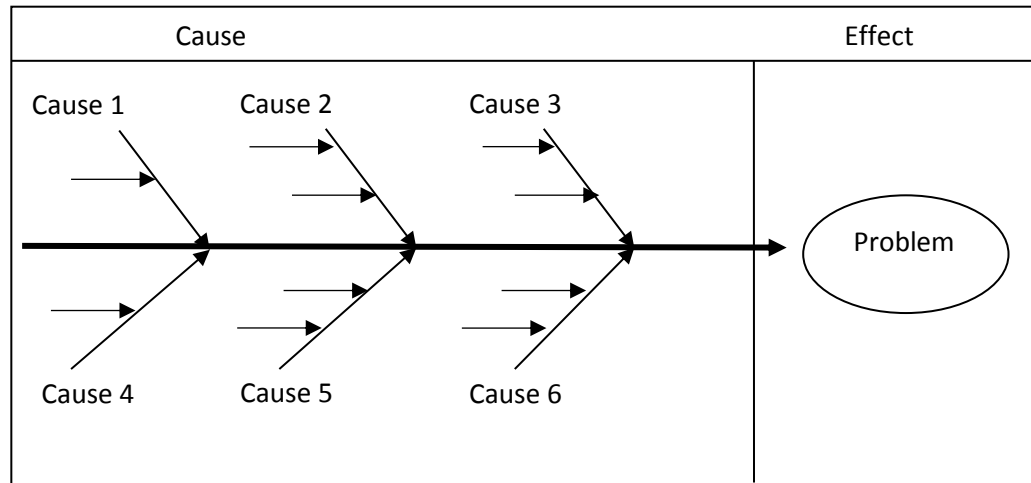
4. Identify as many possible main causes of the effect you are analyzing. The causes you will list may be an intelligent guess, or it may be born of empirical research. A problem in production, for example, may be caused by issues in the process of making the product, poor management of resources, inferior materials, and faulty equipment.

Here's a hint: some researchers have ready categories that they use when coming up with the causes of particular situations. For instance, there are those who keep these six ready categories in mind: Equipment, Process, People, Materials, Environment, and Management. Others use easy-to-remember categories, such as the 4Ps: Policies, Procedures, People, and Plant.

5. Place all the causes you've identified inside boxes above or below the spine and create arrows directing from the cause to your diagram's spine. If done correctly, your diagram will look like a fishbone, with smaller bones branching out from the main vertebrae.



6. For each major branch, think of other specific factors which may have contributed to the cause. Attach them as sub-branches of the major branches. Add more detail as applicable. If smaller branches for the sub-branches are applicable include them as well. For best results, challenge yourself or your group into a critical analysis of the problem situation by studying the problem from all angles.



A completed Cause-and-Effect Diagram is presented in the Case Study section of this module.

7. Now it's time to analyze your cause-and-effect diagram. Tips in analyzing your diagram include:
- Is there a recurring cause, e.g. poor communication? Then perhaps it represents an area worth looking into. You may have stumbled upon the main cause which will account for most of the symptoms. Remember: in systems, the cause-and-effect process is not linear but circular.
  - Are there areas where you don't have much information on? Then perhaps further investigation is needed in that area.
  - Does there seem to be logical inconsistency in your diagram? Find out where the irregularity is coming from. You may have to challenge your assumptions.
  - Keep on asking "why" questions. For example, if you've jot down "no agency policy" as one of your causes, ask yourself: why is there no agency policy? Ask why again when you've come up with the answer.



## Forgiveness

Very rarely is forgiveness included in skills training for the workplace. Many dismiss it as a spiritual concept that has no place in the corporate environment. But the reality is, regardless of your religious beliefs or faith orientation, the ability to both ask forgiveness and receive forgiveness can go a long way in creating a positive relationship among co-workers.

What is forgiveness?

Forgiveness is the process of closing anger, resentment, and feelings of victimization that comes after real or perceived offense.

Active forgiveness is the deliberate effort to start the forgiving process even though negative feelings from having been offended or victimized remain. It's basically saying: *"Nope, I don't feel like bygones are bygones yet. But, I am going to make a decision to forgive and work on my feelings later."*

Note that forgiving doesn't mean that you condone the other person's negative behavior. Nor is it an admission of weakness. Instead, forgiveness is saying that you are willing to move on to a less emotional state and find ways of re-building a relationship. Forgiveness is a healing exercise, both for the person who forgives and the person who is forgiven.

How can you start to forgive someone who has hurt and/or wronged you? Consider the following tips:

- **Understand that holding on to a grudge is not healthy for you.** Not forgiving is tantamount to saying that the offense you've experienced is more powerful than your capacity to heal your life.
- **Humanize the monster.** What the other person did to you may seem like the act of the devil incarnate, but in most cases, people's motivations are less dark than they seem. Perhaps your co-worker has a tendency to gossip because he or she was a neglected child and craves attention from having a juicy tidbit to share. Maybe your co-worker is just not used to dealing with a personality like yours. Or it could be that they did what they did because they genuinely thought they're doing the right thing. Seeing the other person as a human being instead of a monster will make it easier for you to appreciate what prompted the behavior that offended you so much in the first place.
- **Remember your own transgressions.** You are not perfect! For sure, you've hurt and offended other people as well, deliberately or by accident. Perhaps you may even be hoping for the forgiveness of another person yourself. When you can appreciate how every person can make a mistake, you'll be open to other people's mistakes.
- **Know that you can choose to forgive even if the other person won't admit his fault.** What if you never hear an admittance of guilt or an apology from the other person? Does this mean that forgiveness is impossible? Of course not! Forgiveness is not

dependent on what the other person does. You can choose to let go of a grievance even if the other party chooses to hold on to his or her own.

- **Lastly, if you want to work on your forgiveness of another person, actively find ways to get rid of your anger and resentment.** You can use thought stopping techniques to curb angry thoughts when they come unbidden. You can choose not to join in your co-worker's bashing. Better yet, you can go to the person who caused you pain and communicate that you have forgiven him or her. It's possible that your gesture will not be appreciated and that's okay. But it's also possible that for the other person, your forgiveness means the world.

## Benefits of Resolution

Identifying the root cause of acts of rudeness in the workplace, and resolving it competently, has the following benefits:

- **It points to what needs correcting.** Analyzing cause-and-effect is basically looking for feedback: you want to know what works in a agency, and what needs to be eliminated or improved upon in order to make the workplace more conducive to productive and happy employees. When employees are skilled in troubleshooting issues early, the time lost from interpersonal skirmishes can be lessened.
- **It creates a culture open to change.** It is agency culture that is rigid and resistant to change that often gets into trouble. But when you are constantly analyzing root causes of rude behavior in your organization, you communicate a positive attitude towards implementing changes that is the best for everyone. Done correctly, it may even instill among employees the skill in thinking about issues in a systemic way, and hence problems may get addressed even without management telling the staff what to do.
- **It prevents small issues from escalating into big conflicts.** Research has consistently proven that small issues, when left unattended, can escalate into a bigger issue that will cost the agency more and create more damage. This is called the "glass window effect" --- even small cracks in glass window can result to the whole window breaking eventually. Getting to the root cause keeps things on a manageable level, and ensures that little skirmishes do not progress to disasters.

## Module Five: Effective Non-verbal Communication

Civility is not rocket science. To a large extent, civility is all about effective communication: the process of stimulating meaning in the mind of another person using both verbal and nonverbal messages. But while many presume that communication occurs naturally, the reality is that communication is a skill that must be studied, practiced, and developed.

In this module, we will discuss two kinds of communication that often result in misunderstandings in the workplace: para-verbal communication and non-verbal communication.

### Para-verbal Communication

Para-verbal communication refers to the messages that we send using our vocal intonation, pitch, volume, emphasis and pacing of words. Basically, para-verbal communication refers to how we say something, not the exact words we use. If you've ever heard someone tell you "*well, you sounded sad*", or "*the way you said that word, it's as if you're implying something*", then that person is likely referring to your para-verbal communication.

Consider the way the sentence "I didn't know that you wanted to buy that dress" changes meaning if you change the word emphasized:

*"I* didn't know that you wanted to buy that drill."

I *didn't* know that you wanted to buy that drill."

I didn't *know* that you wanted to buy that drill."

I didn't know that *you* wanted to buy that drill."

I didn't know that you wanted to *buy* that drill."

I didn't know that you wanted to buy *that* drill"

Depending on the word you choose to emphasize, you can be chastising someone for failing to inform you of wanting to buy a certain drill, or expressing shock that a particular individual likes a particular drill. Given the many possible variations in volume, intonation, and other vocal elements possible during a conversation, it's not surprising that ineffective use of para-verbal communication can result to miscommunication and conflicts in the workplace.

What *must* be asked from every member of an organization is at least awareness of how one speaks; we are not always conscious of our para-verbal communication. When tired or stressed out, you may be speaking in a volume lower than our usual. Hence, the people you talk to may assume that you're disappointed or unenthusiastic. If you're used to being in a position of power, for instance you're the eldest in the family, you may tend to constantly speak in an authoritative tone. Without awareness, you can't communicate deliberately; that is, intentionally creating the message that you want to send.

## Non-verbal Communication

Non-verbal communication refers to the messages that we send through our body language, e.g. our facial expression, gestures, and posture.

Examples of non-verbal communication include eye contact, smiles, the way shoulders are hunched when standing up or sitting down, gestures of affection such as a touch on the back, mannerisms while speaking e.g. constantly looking at one's watch, and the use of personal space through body language, e.g. taking in most of the room on a relatively spacious couch.

Like para-verbal communication, non-verbal communication is separate and distinct from the actual words a person uses to convey a thought or idea. In fact, non-verbal communication can contradict verbal communication! A person can say he or she is happy, for example, but the sad tilt in his or her lips will communicate that happiness is the last feeling she is experiencing. Without eye contact, a claim of high self-confidence can be easily refuted.

How important are non-verbal communication?

The answer: very. Studies show that as much as 93% of the message people received from others come from their non-verbal behaviors. This result implies that effective non-verbal communication may, in fact, be more important effective verbal communication.

Understandably, awareness and deliberation when it comes to non-verbal communication is critical in developing the value of civility in the workplace.

### Activity:

In your groups, come up with a list of nonverbal behaviors that you think are rude and be prepared to explain why they are rude. These can include facial expressions, gestures, movements, your use of space, vocal tone, etc.

Now come up with a list of NV behaviors that are polite and why you think they are.

Report to the large group.

## Listening Skills

Active listening refers to the deliberate effort to attend to what a person is communicating, both verbally and non-verbally.

Most of the time, all an angry person needs is an opportunity to tell someone how they feel, and have their feelings acknowledged. Seeing that you are genuinely listening to their grievance can help lessen the intensity of their angry reaction.

The following are some helpful components of active listening:

- **Showing non-verbally that you are listening.** Make sure that your posture shows openness. Establish eye contact. Speak in a soft, well-modulated, non-threatening tone of voice.

- **Reflecting verbal and non-verbal communication.** Re-state what you hear from the person. Example: “This is what I heard from you: You are mad because the package did not arrive on time.” You can also mirror back their body language in a tentative but objective, non-judgmental fashion. Example: “I can see that you’re really upset. You are clapping the desk very tightly.”
- **Clarify.** Help the person make sense of their garbled, confusing, and/ or illogical statements. “Could you help me explain to me a bit more about what happened in the cafeteria? What do you mean by ‘he bullied you’?”

## Case Study

*John Smith is a newly-hired manager at the DMV. A retired military officer, he is used to hierarchal organizations, and expects his employees to defer without question to his judgment as supervisor. The team’s previous supervisor, however, had been keener on participative approaches. Hence, John’s directive style is causing resistance --- and resentment --- among his team.*

*John decides to be flexible. He appreciates that civilian companies can’t (and shouldn’t be!) run like the military. He starts a focus group discussion to get what the staff members think of the agency’s current performance. He researched the right questions to ask so as to encourage the participation of his employees. And yet, despite his efforts to be the one to first reach out, his subordinates remain lacking in enthusiasm, even a bit fearful, of his presence.*

*A communications coach was hired to analyze John’s problem in dealing with his staff members. The coach gave John feedback on his non-verbal and para-verbal behavior. According to the coach, even if the words that John uses favor a more democratic style of leadership, he still appears and sounds like an army general barking orders. After gaining awareness of his non-verbal and para-verbal communication, John trained on how to be more nonverbally in sync to what he says. Eventually, he was able to build a solid rapport with his employees.*

Guide Questions:

1. What did John do right in this case?
2. What makes you say that it is the right thing to do?

## Module Six: Civility Policies

Agency management can talk about the importance of civility in their organization, and then assume that everyone will take the hint. Or, management can include civility as part of agency policy. When an organization is serious in creating culture deeply rooted in civil behavior, the latter is the better option to take. When expected behavior from employees is explicitly stated in the agency manual, there is little room for second-guessing.

In this module, you will be introduced to State of WV and WVDOT policy as tools in institutionalizing civil behavior in the workplace.

### Activity:

### Case Study

Review the WV Policy on Harassment and the WVDOT policy on Employee Conduct..

Guide Questions:

1. Do you think that the these policies meet standards for defining unacceptable behavior?
2. What do you think the writers of this policy did well?
3. What do you think can be improved upon in this policy?

You need to strategically plan how you can go about making sure that civility policies translate to a culture of civil behavior.

So what to do first? Consider the following:

- **Launch an awareness campaign.** The first step in any campaign is to increase the awareness of persons concerned regarding the existence of a program. After all, you can't develop a positive attitude towards what you do not, much less put it into action. You have to spread the word around. There are many possible ways you can raise awareness about civility within your agency:
  - You can schedule a presentation of the new agency policy --- set a date for the "launch" of the policy and make sure everyone is in attendance.
  - You can put up posters, distribute flyers, and create a website or an e-learning course.
  - You can spread the information via word-of-mouth; for instance, task your core group to make sure that at least one new person every day from their social circle gets to know about the policy, or you can designate a spokesperson/champion for civility.

- It would also be helpful if, as soon as possible, civility policy gets included in the training and continuous education program of new and old employees alike.
- **Change people's attitudes about civility.** Many experts in personal and organizational development believe that the next critical pre-requisite for change after knowledge is a change of attitude. People may already know what civility is and what it can do, but unless they have a positive attitude towards its practice, the knowledge will remain mere knowledge.
- **Set systems in place.** Civility is not just a function of people voluntarily practicing civility; it can also be from having the right systems in place. It's therefore important to look at the agency's ways of doing things and see if there is anything in its practices that provide breeding ground for rudeness. Improving systems is actually an effective way of significantly lessening violations *of any regulation* in the workplace.

For instance, given that anonymity is one of the main causes of rudeness, management must eliminate a procedure that encourages acting without any sort of accountability. Management must make sure that there is a venue to report violations, and that the reporting process is a non-threatening experience.

## Addressing Complaints

What must be done when an actual incident of rudeness has already taken place, and particular employees have a complaint?

Consider the following tips on how to address complaints about rudeness in the workplace.

- **Actively create a culture where there is a healthy respect for the process of filing a complaint.** Staff members must not be made to fear filing a complaint --- after all, protecting yourself, your reputation and your ability to work is your right. Neither should agency members be put through much song and dance before getting their complaint entertained. Complaining is already a stressful exercise on its own; you don't have to add to an employee's trauma. Communicate clearly that all complaints will be given the attention that it deserves.

But at the same time, ensure that all staff members understand that complaints are serious accusations, and that a person must not file a complaint on a whim. A person's good name or even his or her work and freedom can be at risk --- file a complaint only when certain that you are in the right.

- **Unless the subject of the complaint is on the more serious spectrum of rudeness (e.g. harassment, bullying), opt to encourage workers to settle their dispute on their own.** Settling a dispute without involving agency administration can come in the form of a dialogue or even through counseling or mediation by, say, someone from Employee Relations.

Complaints can be an opportunity to teach employees what they can do to settle disputes peacefully without infecting the work environment. And if there is significant hesitation for parties in disagreement to settle the matter, at least provide a referral to a list coping resources or personal/professional counselor/coach who can help the complainant navigate his or her issues effectively.

- **If the issue has reached the point when agency administration has to interfere, then encourage the complainant to put his or her grievance on paper.** A formal complaint in writing ensures that due process can be followed when handling complaints. This due process includes an investigation as to the accuracy of the complaint, an analysis of possible mitigating factors (e.g. there are, for example, intentional and unintentional violations) and an opportunity for the other party to air his or her side of the story. Only after the prescribed process is followed can decisions be made.
- **Take the appropriate action based on the results of the investigation.** Consistently follow the consequences laid down on the agency's written civility policy, e.g. first offense for a minor act of rudeness may deserve a memo and a written warning, while a reported case of harassment may mean mandatory participation in arbitration.
- **Lastly, regularly review the systems for managing the complaints.** No system is perfect, and a system that is already working at its optimum condition needs to respond to changes within the agency and outside it. In order to be able to fine-tune the complaining process and serve the employees' interest better, make sure that you evaluate the system after every case managed.

## Enforcing Violators

The way violators of agency policy are dealt with differs from agency to agency. The following, however, are some ways you can handle violations in your agency:

- **Supervision.** Instead of punishing a violator, you provide coaching and modeling of acceptable behavior. Supervision is the best resort when the violation is mostly due to ignorance of policies or lack of skills training.
- **Implementation of Pre-determined Consequence.** If investigation has proven that a complaint does have merit, it's important to implement the pre-determined consequence to a particular behavior. It is in the consistency of the implementation of consequences, as well as in the swift delivery of the consequences once judgment is made, that a rule gains credibility and therefore becomes effecting in managing behavior.
- **Systemic Change.** If the incident reveals problems in procedures, communication, power hierarchies, and other systemic factors, then the incident must be taken as opportunity to improve the system.



## Module Seven: Wrapping Up

Although this workshop is coming to a close, we hope that your journey to improve civility in your workplace is just beginning. Please take a moment to review and update your action plan. This will be a key tool to guide your progress in the days, weeks, months, and years to come. We wish you the best of luck on the rest of your travels!

### Words from the Wise

- **Yogi Berra:** In theory there is no difference between theory and practice. In practice there is.
- **Dwight Eisenhower:** Plans are nothing; planning is everything.
- **Jonas Salk:** The reward for work well done is the opportunity to do more.