

■ The Bottom Line on Being Nice

by Tom Terez

Don't underestimate the power of being nice. A major study shows a direct link between civility at work (or the lack thereof) and an organization's bottom line.

Among 775 people in the research group who had been on the receiving end of incivility in their workplace, 28% said they lost work time trying to avoid the instigator. And 53% lost work time worrying about the incident or future interactions.

These employees had been demeaned in e-mails, falsely accused of trying to undermine projects, verbally taken apart by their bosses, routinely ignored by others, and so on. We're not talking sexual harassment, racial discrimination, bullying, or workplace violence – just low-grade, lousy behavior.

Incivility caused other major hits to the bottom line:

- 37% of the targeted employees reported a weakened sense of commitment to their organization.
- 22% of them reduced their effort at work.
- 10% decreased their amount of time at work.

- 46% thought about changing jobs to avoid the instigator.
- 12% did change jobs – to get away from the instigator once and for all.

The study was led by Christine Pearson, a management professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Kenan-Flagler Business School. Respondents included people from a wide variety of industries and company sizes.

The report's concluding paragraph provides an important call to action: "Leaders hold the key to curtailing incivility through systematic awareness and early intervention. When workers flout the conventions of civility and leaders tolerate such behaviors, the interpersonal mistreatment may punish the target, taint the organization, and undermine leadership authority."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tom Terez is a speaker, workshop leader, and author of *22 Keys to Creating a Meaningful Workplace*. His Web site, BetterWorkplaceNow.com, is filled with tools for building a great work environment. Write to Tom@BetterWorkplaceNow.com or call 614-571-9529.

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To contact the author, write to Tom@BetterWorkplaceNow.com, or call 614-571-9529.

