5 STEPS

FOR ENCOURAGING CIVIL CONVERSATIONS AT WORK

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At SHRM, we believe civility is a cornerstone of workplace culture that allows people and business to thrive. Civility fosters respect, empathy, and the productive exchange of ideas and opinions.

SHRM believes everyone can play a role in transforming workplaces to be more civil, one conversation at a time.

To encourage civil conversations in the workplace, SHRM has developed a practical guide for leaders and managers. This guide is part of SHRM's Civility Starter Kit, and when combined with the kit's Cards Against Incivility, these resources offer a turnkey opportunity to equip teams with the skills to practice civil conversations. This guide offers five clear, actionable steps to turn tough talks into teamwork, discord into dialogue, and conflict into opportunity, ultimately setting teams up for success. It also highlights additional resources to help team members keep it civil at work.

By actively cultivating civil environments within individual teams, we can collectively ensure respectful and productive interactions across departments and throughout organizations. Every leader and team has a crucial role to play, and fostering civility is a commitment the entire organization must embrace.

STEP 1:
EDUCATE YOURSELF.

It is crucial to equip yourself with knowledge and understanding of the current state of civility and incivility in both the workplace and society at large.

Take Action:

1. Review the **SHRM Civility Index** to learn more about the current state of civility, including the prevalence of incivility in workplaces and everyday life as well as the business imperative for maintaining civility.

2. Sign up for the latest SHRM updates on civility and other important workplace initiatives.

3. Familiarize yourself with your organization's policies and procedures on civility. Use this information to inform your approach to the following steps.

Civility is a business imperative.
A lack of civility in the workplace leads to lower job satisfaction, less innovation, higher likelihood to leave, and higher turnover.

These steps are designed for teams that have already established a strong sense of psychological safety, where everyone feels comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas openly. If your team is still developing this, SHRM resources are available to support you. It's important to acknowledge that these conversations may be challenging at first. Not everyone feels comfortable speaking up immediately, and that's OK. As a leader, it's your responsibility to actively build a safe and inclusive environment where everyone feels valued and respected. Remember, building psychological safety takes time and consistent effort. Be patient, and celebrate progress along the way.

Potential question prompts:

"What does civility mean to you?"

"What does respectful communication look like to you?"

"What does incivility mean to you?"

"How have you handled incivility in the past? What went well? What would you do differently?"

"Can you talk about a time you had a productive disagreement? What made it productive?"

ESTABLISH SHARED UNDERSTANDING OF CIVILITY.

Building a strong foundation for civility within your team starts with establishing a shared understanding of what civility means, often referred to as a shared mental model. By ensuring everyone has a similar understanding of what constitutes civil and uncivil behavior, your team can communicate more effectively and navigate disagreements constructively.

Take Action:

1. Ask each team member to share their thoughts on what constitutes civil and uncivil behavior in a work setting.

2. After team members share individual perceptions, facilitate an open dialogue to discuss areas of agreement and disagreement.

3. Share the **SHRM Civility Index** with your team to supplement the discussion and reinforce the significance of civility.

4. Aim for a collective understanding of the definition and importance of civility by the conclusion of the discussion. Take a participatory approach to ensure everyone's voices are heard.

ESTABLISH AND FOSTER TEAM NORMS FOR MUTUAL RESPECT.

Following a shared understanding of civility, establishing clear team norms for mutual respect will further guide your team's interactions. These norms will define how your team interacts, communicates, and resolves conflicts in a civil manner. These norms are specific behaviors expected from everyone in the group.

Take Action:

1. Involve all team members in the norm-setting process.

2. Evaluate existing norms to ensure they align with fostering mutual respect and psychological safety. Develop strategies to address any shortcomings.

3. Identify and implement new team norms for mutual respect. Examples:
   - Practice active listening.
   - Avoid interrupting others when speaking.
   - Base constructive or difficult conversations on factual information.

4. Address incivility promptly. Establish clear procedures for reporting, addressing, and resolving conflicts.

5. Clearly articulate expectations and establish mechanisms for mutual accountability.

How to engage in active listening:

- Give the speaker your full attention.

- Show you're listening with verbal and nonverbal cues.

- Paraphrase what you hear, and ask clarifying questions.

- Respond appropriately.

- Create written guidelines or documents that detail expectations. This can serve as a reference for team members to review as needed.

- Verify that everyone understands the expectations by asking for feedback and encouraging questions. Clarify any ambiguities immediately.

- Schedule regular check-in or progress meetings where team members can discuss their progress, challenges, or any support they need.

PROMOTE A CULTURE OF CIVILITY.

With shared definitions of civility and team norms for mutual respect in place, you can actively cultivate a culture of civility within your team. This culture reflects employee perceptions of how leadership and managers utilize policies, procedures, and practices to maintain a respectful and civil work environment. These behaviors are expected not only from leaders but also from all team members.

Take Action:

1. Civility starts with you—lead by example to set the tone for civility within the team.

2. Encourage open and honest communication, which helps team members feel comfortable expressing their opinions, concerns, and feedback.

3. Embrace diversity and differences in perspectives and opinions.

4. Cultivate empathy to foster understanding and support among team members.

5. Recognize and reward acts of civility displayed by team members.

Model respectful behavior. Always speak and act respectfully toward everyone, regardless of their role or opinion.

Be consistent. Apply the same standards of civility to everyone, including yourself.

BECOME A CATALYST FOR CIVILITY.

You are now ready to be a catalyst for civility. Remember, fostering civility is an ongoing process, and doing so will further cement civility as a norm and expectation in your workplace culture.

1. Use SHRM's **Cards Against Incivility** to practice civil dialogue with your team.

2. Access a free, web-based tool from SHRM and Rising Team to run a 30- to 60-minute team activity designed to foster civil and open dialogue.

3. Further enhance your skills by exploring SHRM's Managing Workplace Conflict Toolkit.

4. Explore self-guided resources from SHRM and Inclusivv that highlight proven techniques and effective frameworks to host civil conversations at work.