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# Does civility pay?

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Being nice may bring you friends, but does it help or harm you in your career? After all, research by Timothy Judge and colleagues shows a negative relationship between a person's agreeableness and income. Research by Amy Cuddy has shown that warm people are perceived to be less competent, which is likely to have negative career implications. People who buck social rules by treating people rudely and getting away with it tend to garner power. If you are civil you may be perceived as weak, and ignored or taken advantage. Being kind or considerate may be hazardous to your self-esteem, goal achievement, influence, career, and income.

Over the last two decades we have studied the costs of incivility—and the benefits of civility. We've polled tens of thousands of workers across industries around the world about how they're treated on the job and the effects. The costs of incivility are enormous. Organizations and their employees would be much more likely to thrive if employees treated each other respectfully.

Many see civility as an investment and are skeptical about the potential returns. Porath surveyed of hundreds across organizations spanning more than 17 industries and found that a quarter believe that they will be less leader-like, and nearly 40 percent are afraid that they'll be taken advantage of if they're nice at work. Nearly half think that is better to flex your muscles to garner power.

In network studies of a biotechnology firm and international MBAs, along with surveys, and experiments, we address whether civility pays. In this article we discuss our

findings and propose recommendations for leaders and organizations.

## HOW CIVILITY PAYS—AND INCIVILITY DOESN'T

Respect attracts others. People quickly judge whether they want to interact with you or build a relationship with you based on warmth and competence. Research shows that these are the universal dimensions upon which people in different contexts and culture perceive and make judgments about others. Judgments of warmth and competence account for more than 90 percent of positive or negative impressions we form of those around us. These impressions dictate whether people will trust you, build relationships with you, follow you, and support you.

Civility is unique—it leads people to evaluate you as both warm *and* competent. Typically, people tend to infer that a strength in one implies a weakness of the other. Many people are seen as competent but cold: He's really smart ... but employees will hate working for him. Or as warm but incompetent: She's friendly ... but probably is not smart. Being respectful ushers in admiration—you make another person feel valued and cared for (warm), but also signal that you are capable (competent) to assist them in the future.

Civility increases the likelihood that people want to work with you. In a social network study in a biotechnology firm, we found that those viewed as civil have 1.5 times more energizing ties (people are energized to work with them) than those seen as uncivil. Those seen as uncivil have 3 times as many de-energizing ties (defined as enduring, recurring set of negative judgments, feelings, and behavioral intentions toward another person) than those seen as civil. In a study of more than 10,000 work relationships across diverse settings,

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research found that when asked who they would choose to work with, most people chose congeniality, even though they said they would choose ability over affability. Prospective partners' congeniality (do I enjoy working with him?) outweighed their competence (does he know what he's doing?), even for difficult tasks. Civility signals congeniality without the tradeoff in competence. By evoking perceptions of both warmth and competence, civility enhances influence and effectiveness in the workplace.

In an experiment, we found that people were 59 percent more willing to share information, 72 percent more likely to seek advice and 57 percent more likely to seek information from the civil person as compared to the uncivil behaving person. The civil person also inspired people to work 71 percent harder. Participants were 73 percent more likely to want to do well for this (civil) person and 1.22 times more likely to recommend him (for a job) compared with the uncivil person. We highlight some of these and other specific benefits of civility next.

### Broader Networks that Bring Benefits

Our research reveals that those seen as respectful have larger and broader networks. They are also more central in these networks. They are spokes in the wheel; connectors of ideas and information. They are poised to more effectively cross boundaries in organizations.

The more respectful reap a windfall of network and personal benefits, whereas those seen as uncivil get shut out of networks and the benefits that flow, such as information, advice, career opportunities.

How does this work? After a series of mergers, a large consulting firm we worked with wanted a flexible network structure that would facilitate successful short-term, team-based projects. During the restructure the firm put a premium on interpersonal skills. Those that were retained and excelled were people that were civil; they could interact well with others in multi-disciplinary teams and communicated effectively across borders.

### Sought for Advice, Greater Information

We found that those who are respectful are much more likely to be sought for work advice and information, which is directly linked to better performance. Whereas incivility repels people, civility draws people. People are more likely to trust those seen as civil. They feel psychologically safe—and as a result, are much more willing to ask for and share ideas and information. As with virtually any resource at work, information and advice tends to be reciprocated, resulting in more and richer networks for those who are civil.

Steve, a scientist in the R&D (research and development) department of a biotech firm, controlled the storage and maintenance of the materials that all of his coworkers needed access to in order to get their job done. His role made him an invaluable spoke in the organizational network. But Steve's subtle insults to the scientists, and general lack of civility alienated his colleagues. Although scientists were dependent on Steve, they created "a work around." A couple of key individuals who were immune to Steve's snide remarks became brokers between the scientists and Steve. Rather

than have to deal with Steve, all of the other employees and scientists went through these key brokers. While these brokers gained power, Steve lost it.

Unfortunately, like many, Steve lacked self-awareness. The consequences of incivility are often masked. This is especially likely if the person is of higher status or others are dependent on him, as in Steve's case. Like many, Steve was shocked to find that—when he needed support, a resource from this network, or a recommendation for a promotion—he was unable to obtain it.

Contrast this with Carrie, an attorney, whose civility allowed her to gather information from strangers and clients. She won people's trust almost instantaneously. She was genuine; her tone was warm and friendly. Her tone and words conveyed an authentic desire to track down information which would help her client. People also deemed her competent: she was articulate, hard-working, and emotionally intelligent. Saying please, humbly asking questions, listening to people, and expressing heartfelt thanks communicated warmth and competence. In one case where she asked for a favor, she expressed how much this would mean to her client—and her; she acknowledged that she recognized the effort and cost to the person she was speaking with, and even offered to send her a gas card to cover the mileage required to fulfill her request. The woman assured her that such a token of appreciation was unnecessary; her gratitude was enough. Interactions like this resulted in several of her contacts calling to provide her with updated information, and offers to connect her with others who might help, unprompted. This allowed her to successfully serve her client.

### Greater Support and Influence

Over time, personal benefits mount for those who are civil; and negative effects accrue for those who are uncivil. Though the dividends of civility are often hidden, and may come much later, every study we have conducted suggests that civility pays. People want to see those that are civil do well and are happy to provide them with resources, attractive projects, and support. Mary, an executive in health care known for her civility, was contacted by leaders in another location for a position that just became available. Her interpersonal skills had won people over; when they thought about who might step into the coveted role they pursued her.

A recent study of the U.S. Congress found that when members of Congress use pro-social language, words that convey cooperation, trust and respect, their approval ratings increased; when they did not use pro-social language, ratings plummeted. Between 2002 and 2014, pro-social language dropped 20 percent; meanwhile, public approval dropped 75 percent. There was a similar effect on media coverage of the politicians. The words politicians use predicts their approval about six weeks in the future (controlling for societal events and economic conditions).

Disrespectful people lose out. After graduating from a top tier school, Brad joined a consulting firm. He behaved as if he knew everything and was above everyone else. He would snap at other new consultants who weren't from as elite schools, and often refused to pitch in and help others. When Brad finally got his big chance to lead a bid for a project, he found that he faced resistance at every step from the other consultants

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