

ANUx - SP | Courtesy_in_the_Workplace

Oh, hi there. I'm Gale Frank, and I'm the advisor to staff here at the ANU. That is, I'm the staff counselor, and I'm also a member of the ANU counseling team. I'm going to be talking on this talking tip about the power of courtesy, in particular in the context of the workplace or a similar environment. In the course of my work here I quickly became aware of the extent of stress and disquiet that individuals can suffer when they experience or witness a discourtesy or a series of discourtesies. As a result I started to looking to any relevant research and I found some

So what is courtesy? Synonyms include thoughtfulness, politeness, consideration, civility, respect and decency.

Really I think we can think of courtesy as respect in action. It's the behavior that manifests from an internal commitment to respecting others.

Much of the research in relation to the role of courtesy in workplaces and other similar environments is actually focused on measuring the effect of an absence of courtesy or a presence of discourtesy. We can think of it as behaviors that display incivility effectively a carelessness of others. Gretchen Spreitzer is one of the major researchers in the area of incivility in workplaces. She has a working definition of incivility as follows-- incivility at work is often milder forms of negative behavior that create ambiguity for people about what the intent of the behavior was.

You'll notice she talks about milder quote unquote "forms of negative behavior." Much discourteous behavior is seemingly innocuous. It can be subtly disrespectful or careless, hard to describe, seemingly inconsequential. But the research shows that apparently minor negative behavior can be very costly to the individual affected by it or witnessing it. It can interfere with their being and productivity. More serious negative behavior can tip into bullying, but this talk is confined to discourtesy and its effects which are significant in and of themselves.

So what sort of behavior are we talking about? Well, some good examples are-- not greeting colleagues or saying goodbye when you're leaving the office, interrupting, checking emails or texts in a meeting, leaving snippy voice messages, ignoring someone-- acting like they're invisible or inconsequential, being late to a meeting without an apology, acting irritated when someone asks for help or has a question, eye rolling, making jokes that are offensive to others, using offensive language, dismissive behavior, rude emails, dirty looks and so on.

All of these behaviors can be subtle, hard, perhaps, to name at times, but they're very damaging all the same. They are, according to the research, all too prevalent. Pearson and Porath, another research group in this area, showed in their 2009 research data that one in five workers claimed to have been the target of incivility from a coworker at least once a week. Two thirds of the workers they interviewed said that they witnessed incivility no less than once a month and 10% said that they witnessed incivility daily in their workplace.

So this is not a rare phenomenon. Well, so what? Well, the research went on to show the costs of incivility. Pearson and Porath actually developed a formula for workplaces to calculate the cost to the employer of discourtesy in the form of lost productivity. Common individual responses to an experience of incivility include-- a

preoccupation with the behavior that was experienced as discourteous and the person who displayed the behavior, a deliberate attempt to quote "get even" end quote, or in short, repay the discourtesy in kind, a drop in creativity, a drop in commitment and-or application to the work of the workplace and to the workplace itself, worry and stress and a hand-me-down effect-- that is, if you have suffered a discourtesy you are more likely to be discourteous yourself.

So who does discourtesy at work? Well, the research showed that 60% is top-down, that is the person who is senior being discourteous to a more junior person in the organization. So that means 40% is bottom up or between peers. Men are twice as likely as women to be uncivil. Men and women are equally likely to be treated uncivilly. Offenders tend to be older than their targets.

So by now I hope you're getting the picture that discourtesy is costly to the productivity and to the general well-being of colleagues. So how do you build a courteous environment? Well, start by checking your own behavior. Discourtesy can be unintentional. Could you be experienced as discourteous at times?

If you have behaved discourteously, consider apologizing. Validation of the other's experience is a courtesy in itself. And if you are offered an apology, consider accepting it with grace.

If discourtesy is catching, so is courtesy. Start building high standards of courteous behavior in your group. It will catch on. Talk about the behavior that is expected in your group. Smile at others.

Well, I hope that this talking tip has been of some interest to you. Thank you for listening. Remember if you are staff of ANU, you can access the Employee Assistance Program for confidential counseling support. Details can be found at this website-- services.anu.edu.au/humanresources/wellbeing/employeeassistanceprogram Or just put EAP into the search engine. And if you are a student at ANU, you can access counseling support from the ANU counseling center on 61252442 for an appointment. Thanks again for listening. Bye, now.