



# Civility In The Workplace



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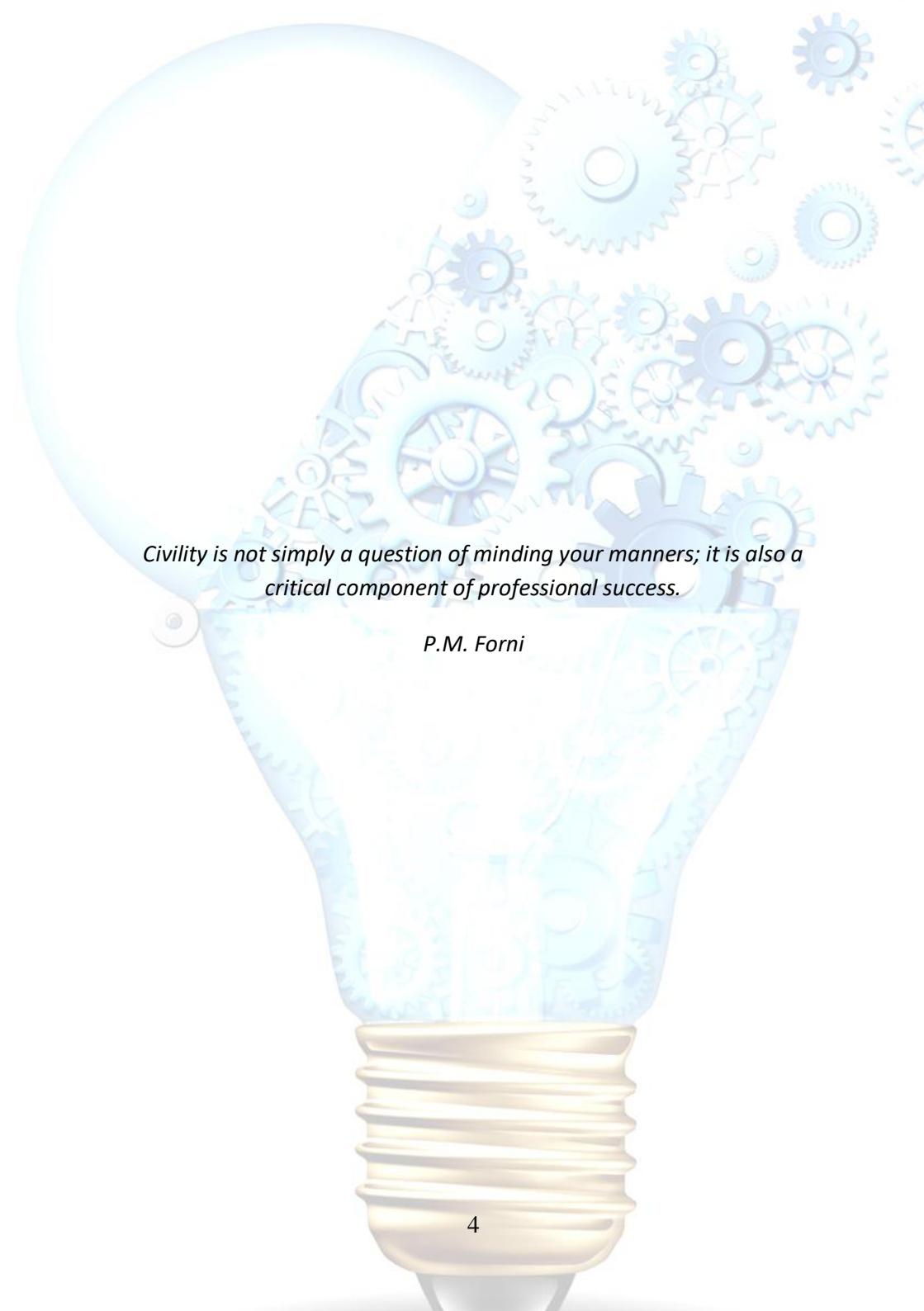
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## CONTENTS

	Preface	7
1	Introduction	9
2	Effective Work Etiquette	21
3	Costs and Rewards	33
4	Conflict Resolution	45
5	Getting to the Cause	57
6	Communication	73
7	Negotiation	81
8	Identifying Your Need	93
9	Writing a Civility Policy	103
10	Implementing the Policy	113



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

P.M. Forni

## Preface

While a training program on workplace manners and courtesy may seem like overkill, the reality is: rudeness is an epidemic costing industry million 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 incivility in the work setting, this book introduces the concept of civility, its importance to a company, as well as its typical causes and effects. Skills needed to effectively practice civil behaviour, as well as different ways organizations can systematize civility in the workplace will also be discussed.



*Civility costs nothing, and buys everything.*

Mary Wortley Montagu

# Chapter One: Introduction

Failing to smile at co-workers, or even just a tendency to smirk at a client's unusual request, may not seem like much at first glance. But these seemingly innocuous behaviours can be costly in the long run. It's important then to be appraised of the nature of civility, its behavioural indicators, and why its practice is imperative within an organization.

In this chapter, 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 uncivil behaviour, its costs and rewards, as well as the case for promoting civility in the workplace will also be discussed.

## What is Uncivil Behaviour?

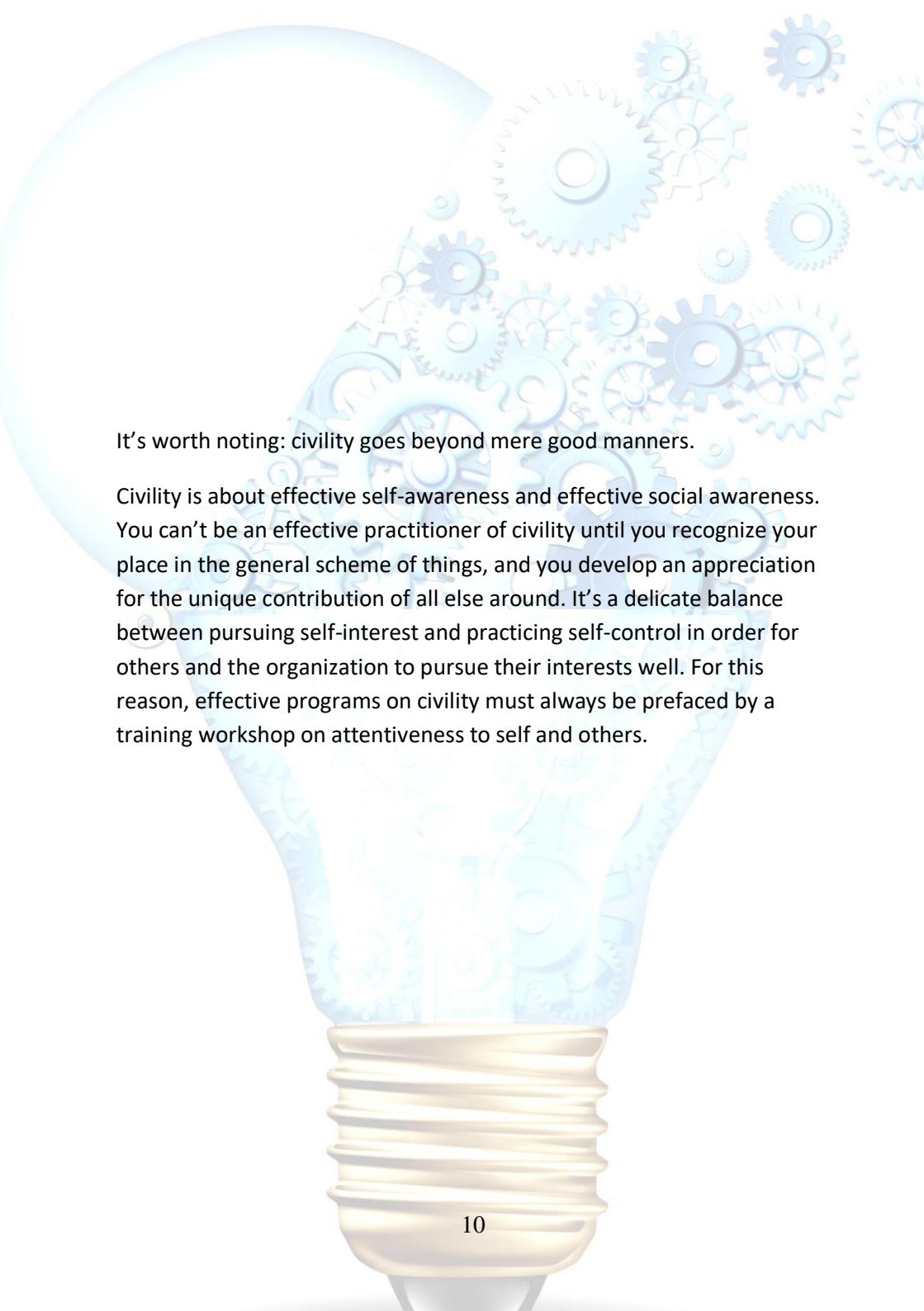
Civility represents the social norms and rules that must be followed in order to positively and productively relate with others. When people hear the word "civility," words that come to mind include *respect, courtesy, tolerance, consideration, and a rational approach to conflicts*. Behaviours that threaten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

You can be uncivil 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 uncivil intentionally, e.g. you verbally attack a co-worker because you can't be bothered to provide reasonable accommodation.

What behaviours can be considered as uncivil? 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 uncivil behaviour to both instigate and spread rumours 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 behaviour.
- **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.
- **Sabotaging individual and company efforts:** Intentionally not informing a co-worker who is in 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-worker's 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 company 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**

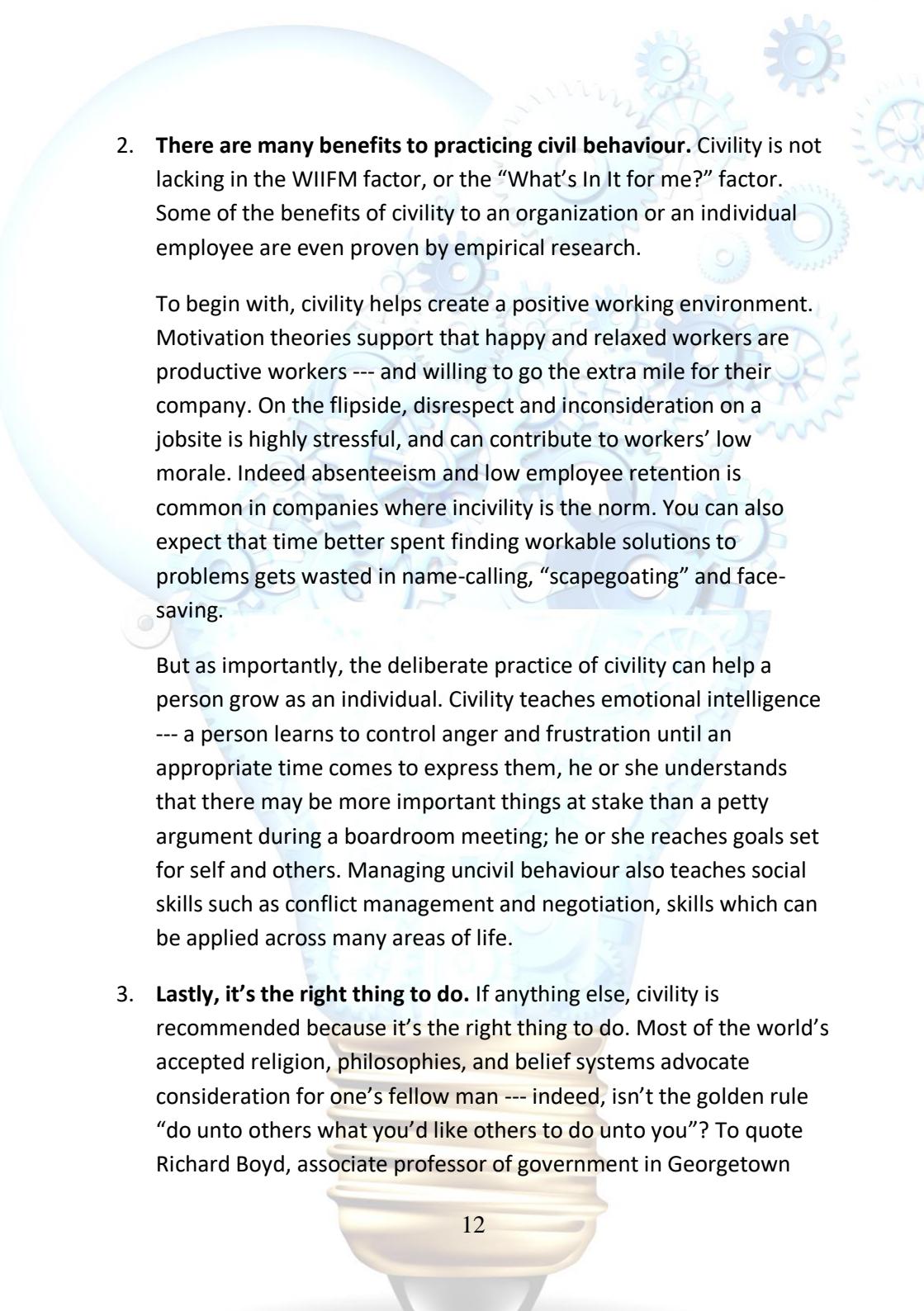
The case against the stronger forms of uncivil behaviours, such as bullying and racial discrimination, is easy to build. After all, violence in the workplace can get an employee fired, if not arrested and sent to prison.

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 neighbour's work station? For the more subtle acts of consideration, the case for engaging in civil behaviour seems harder to present. But not impossible.

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

- 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.

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2. **There are many benefits to practicing civil behaviour.** 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 company. 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 incivility 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.

But as importantly, 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 boardroom meeting; he or she reaches goals set for self and others. Managing uncivil behaviour 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”? To quote Richard Boyd, associate professor of government in Georgetown

University, “*To fail to be civil to someone — to treat them harshly, rudely or condescendingly — is not only to be guilty of bad manners. It also, and more ominously, signals a disdain or contempt for them as moral beings.*”

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, where self-interest is pursued at all cost. We can afford to be more polite and above irrational reactions.

## **Dealing with Difficult Personalities**

A huge source of stress at work is the need to adjust to different personalities. Each person is unique, and even when you’re dealing with a responsible and emotionally mature co-worker, friction is inevitable simply because the other person will never be 100% similar to you. But the stress of interacting with co-workers gets multiplied a hundredfold when the other person doesn’t just have a different personality, but also a difficult one.

What may be considered as a difficult personality?

The answer is subjective; a difficult personality for one person need not be a difficult personality for another. But usually, people perceived as difficult are those who manifest *inflexible extremes* of personality traits.

For instance, while being controlling is a desirable trait in a manager (after all, a manager’s job is to control what is happening in a workplace.), being excessively controlling would just make the people

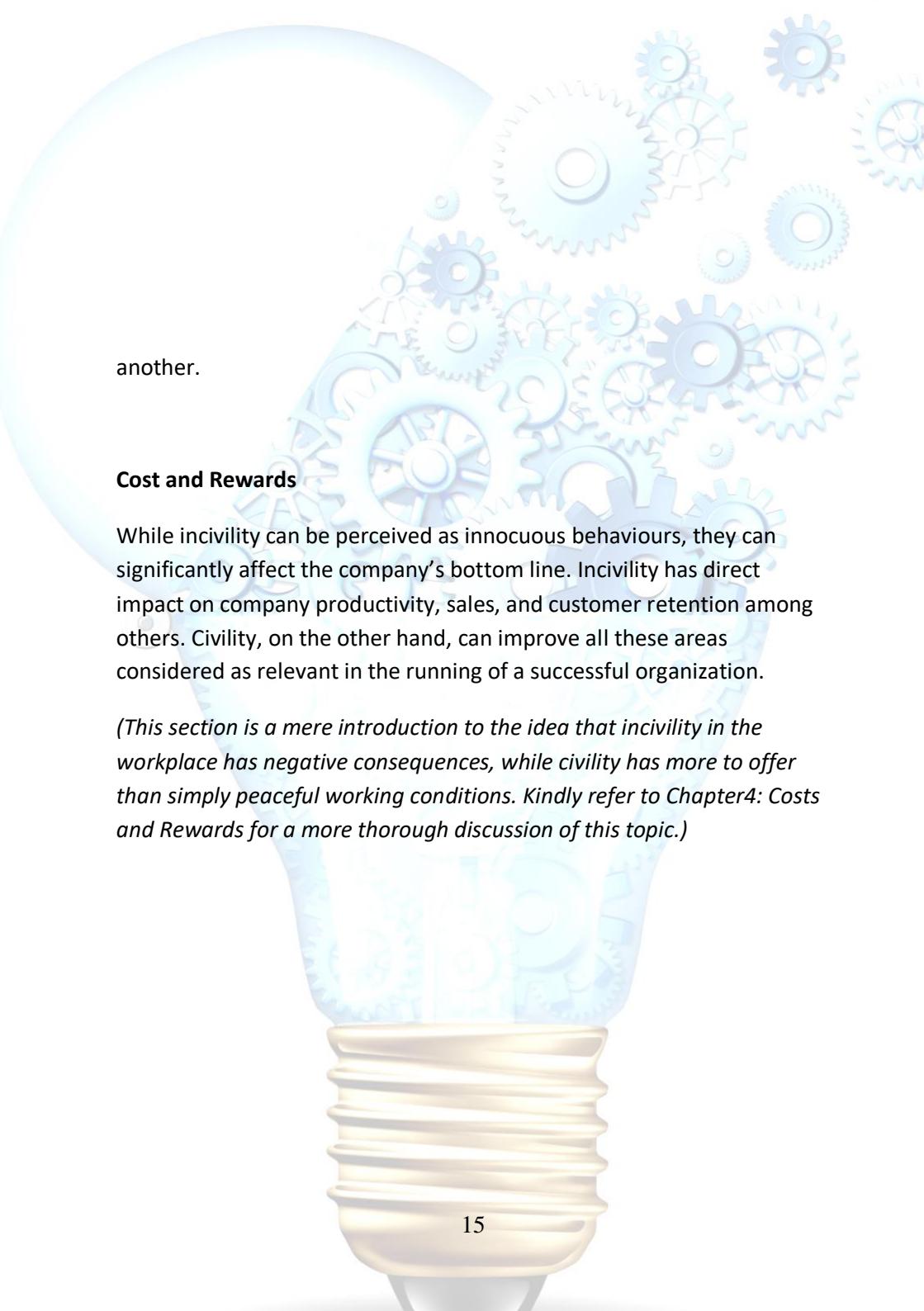
under the manager's care feel stifled and even abused. Recognition of the need to consult co-workers about major company decisions is a good thing. But when an employee consults everyone else on almost everything, to the point that the constant "consultation" is already dependency in disguise, then the person becomes difficult to work with.

When working with a difficult personality, most people's immediate response is an unhelpful one: a response aimed more at relieving personal stress than creating a more workable relationship. For instance, there is a tendency to avoid dominant personality types, lecture the overly dependent, and exact vengeance on the passive-aggressive. The result is an endless cycle of dysfunctional relating that creates more problems than it solves.

Civility is one of the best ways to deal with difficult personalities in the workplace.

Civility sets the stage for effective communication --- in many ways, dealing with difficult personalities is simply a matter of setting and negotiating boundaries. After all, difficult personalities are not "bad people." They just have a fixed way of relating and may need feedback from peers in order to adjust.

As importantly, civility creates a positive atmosphere which allows people to see beyond the obvious implications of people's behaviour. For instance, many supposedly difficult personalities are simply people who have needs that are not being functionally addressed. You may see your co-worker as annoying when he or she simply craves attention and recognition. It's also possible that your difficult co-worker is merely channelling anger and frustration from their personal life into their workplace. When you engaged in civil behaviour with your co-worker, you provide more opportunities for supportive interaction and empathy --- which opens the door to fixing your problematic interaction with one



another.

### **Cost and Rewards**

While incivility can be perceived as innocuous behaviours, they can significantly affect the company's bottom line. Incivility has direct impact on company productivity, sales, and customer retention among others. 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 incivility in the workplace has negative consequences, while civility has more to offer than simply peaceful working conditions. Kindly refer to Chapter4: Costs and Rewards for a more thorough discussion of this topic.)*

## Practical Illustration

The following is a case account that can help you understand the concepts presented in this chapter better:

*Jane Smith is a 33-year-old newly hired provider of administrative support to a manager of a financial consulting firm. While generally competent at the demands of her job, Jane is not skilled in self-presentation, particularly in dressing up and styling hair and make-up appropriate for the formal atmosphere of a consulting firm. Her boss berates her for this, often in full view and hearing of other staff members. The boss calls her "ugly, frumpy and a disgrace to good reputation of the company." Jane has even heard her boss refer to her as a "hag", for instance the boss would instruct a subordinate to "leave the report at the hag's table when done."*

*Jane has made several attempts to improve on her manner of styling and dressing, but the result never meets her boss' satisfaction, mainly because Jane lacks understanding of what is required of her in appearance. The constant reprimand about her looks gave Jane much stress, and lowered her self-esteem to the point that she finds ways to avoid entertaining her boss' clients. Jane even interacts little with co-workers.*

*Jane resigned from the job within 7 months of accepting the position.*



*Men are respectable only as they respect.*  
Ralph Waldo Emerson

## Chapter Two: Effective Work Etiquette

Promotion of civility within the workplace starts with at 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 company law, but ignoring etiquette guidelines have considerable consequences for an employee or a business entity.

In this chapter, 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, client, or business partner.

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 is 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:**

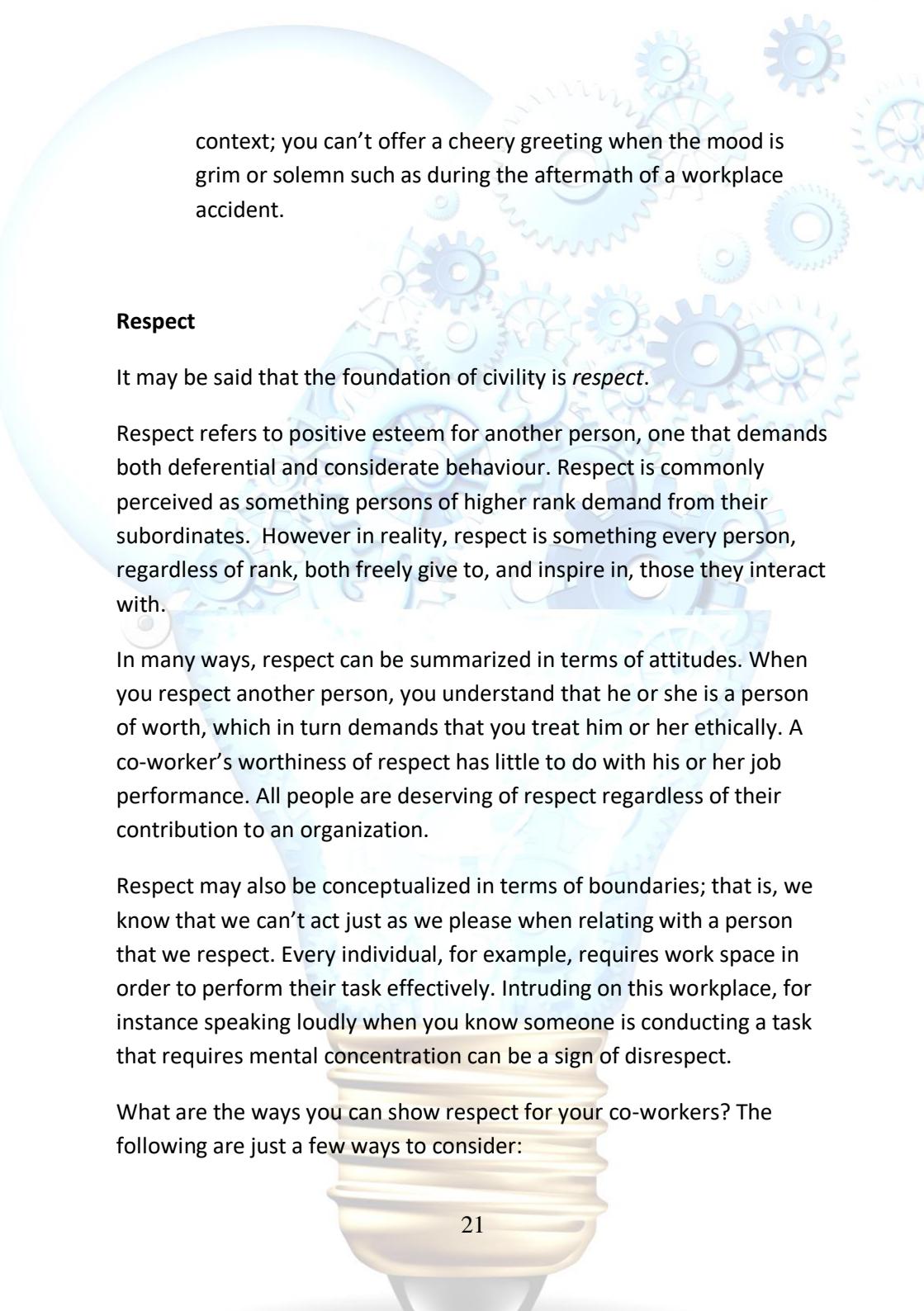
Greeting etiquette can be a book on its own; the topic can’t be comprehensively covered in one chapter. It helps, however, to remember a few simple rules when sending and receiving greetings:

- 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 uncivil

instead of civil behaviour. 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 behaviour. Respect is commonly perceived as something persons of higher rank demand from their subordinates. However in reality, 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.

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.
- **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 company. 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.

## **Involvement**

Involvement refers to an active participation in the activities of an organization and its community of people. For instance, employees who practice involvement make it a point to get to know what programs their HR Department is doing for them, and participate actively in these programs. There is a feeling of personal investment in how the company is doing; great sales are a source of personal pride because you know you have helped make the company's success happen.

Involvement also demands that you don't just content yourself with getting the tasks in your job description done. Instead, you're on the constant look-out for ways to make yourself an active part of the system. When the system is experiencing problems, you don't view yourself as merely "caught in the crossfire" or a "victim." Instead, you see yourself as a potential "agent of change." You jump at opportunities to better your group as soon as the opportunity presents itself. And you don't wait to be told what must be done; you take the initiative to inquire how you can be of help.

## **Being Politically Correct**

Political Correctness, commonly abbreviated as PC, is a way of addressing, and at times behaving towards other people that takes special care in not creating offense against others, especially against potential victims of discrimination.

Political correctness is based on the idea that language captures attitudes, and potentially insulting language, even if delivered unintentionally by a speaker, can communicate and perpetuate prevailing negative attitudes against people commonly discriminated

against.

An example of political correctness is the use of the term “persons with disabilities” instead of “disabled person.” This is to ensure that the premium when addressing persons with hearing, visual, mobility impairment, and any other disability, is their personhood instead of their limitations. In fact, the word “challenged” is preferred in some social circles as opposed to “impaired” (e.g. vertically challenged instead of height impaired) in order to communicate the idea that a disability need not mean lack of capability.

Another example of political correctness is the use of gender-sensitive language. Titles that specify a particular gender, when a position can be held competently by both man and woman, need to be reframed in order to be gender-neutral. For example, the chairperson is preferred to chairman, and cleaner is more acceptable than cleaning lady.

Contrary to popular belief, political correctness is not lying. Neither is it sugar-coating the harsh truth for people concerned, or patronizing individuals who could otherwise defend themselves. Instead, it's a way of positively reframing statements that box some members of the population into negative stereotypes.

It is, however, possible to overdo political correctness, to the extent that the positive spirit behind it becomes an object of ridicule.



NOTE: Political correctness doesn't just cover language but behaviour and other non-verbal communication as well. For example, it is considered as politically correct to take away activities that favour one belief system or religion when conducting activities aimed for the general public. Using "Jesus" or "Allah" in community prayers designed for an audience composed of not just Christians and Moslems is politically incorrect behaviour.

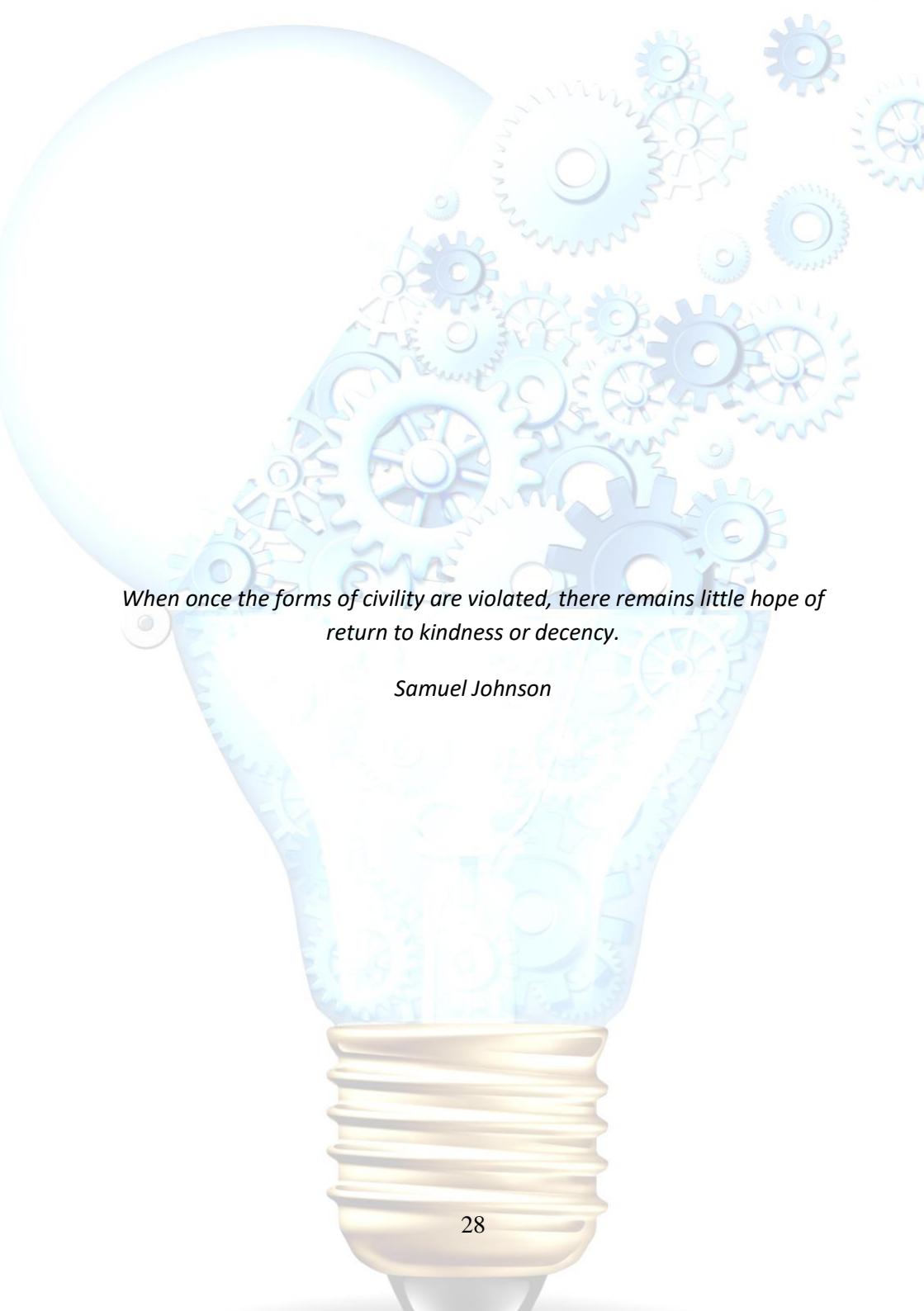
## **Practical Illustration**

The following is a case account that can help you understand the concepts presented in this chapter better:

*Joseph A. Micelli, in his book “The Starbucks Experience: 5 Principles into Turning Ordinary to Extraordinary” illustrated how involvement is a critical component of the success of the Starbucks franchise.*

*Starbucks employees are encouraged to be observant, and to act on their observations. For instance, in a California Starbucks store, baristas volunteered to learn sign language after having noticed that a considerable number of their customers are persons with hearing disability. Employees are also encouraged to report problems that they encounter in daily operations alongside concrete proposals on how these problems can be addressed.*

*But the premium on involvement in Starbucks goes beyond involvement in the store. The management of the hugely successful coffee chain is on the constant look-out for advocacies the company can support, and encourages their staff members to actively take part in these advocacies.*



*When once the forms of civility are violated, there remains little hope of return to kindness or decency.*

*Samuel Johnson*

## Chapter Three: Costs and Rewards

This Chapter 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 Chapter will also present how the opposite is true: that civility in the workplace means greater profits, higher employee engagement, and harassment-free working conditions.

### Incivility and the Costs

As mentioned previously, uncivil behaviour 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 incivility in an organization is more serious than what meets the eye.

Consider the following negative effects of incivility in the workplace:

- **High Employee Turnover.** Fact is: incivility in the workplace is a top reason for employee resignation; 1 in 8 targets of incivility leave their jobs to escape the stressful situation (Pearson, Anderson, and Porath, 2001). Even individuals who enjoy their company'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 company 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 company productivity.** Even if employee turnover rate remains stable, incivility creates roadblocks to the maximization of company 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 incivility 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, incivility can create a chain reaction that will ultimately lead to company loss. Consider the following quote from a study on incivility 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 uncivilly 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 incivility will exit."*

- **Health Costs.** Health-related costs due to workplace stress mean financial losses for companies, and incivility in the workplace is a significant cause of workplace stress. The financial liability of a company 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.

- **Low customer retention.** Incivility in the workplace doesn't occur in a vacuum, as employees don't just interact with one another, they also interact with customers and clients. The importance of quality customer care has been underscored in many writings --- quality customer care adds to the company brand and ensures that customers don't just feel engaged in patronizing a company but also eager to come back for repeat business. In today's age when a consumer has many options to choose from, it may just be civility from company employees that will serve as a business' competitive advantage.
- **Lawsuits and settlements.** Let us not forget: incivility in the workplace can also result to critical incidents that can progress into a court case. Persons victimized in the jobsite are encouraged by many today to act on their situation and file a lawsuit in defence 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 company. A 2005 Time Magazine article, for example, reported that the average executive of a Fortune 1000 company spends as much as 13% of his or her time mediating worker disputes.
- **A steady decline in company 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

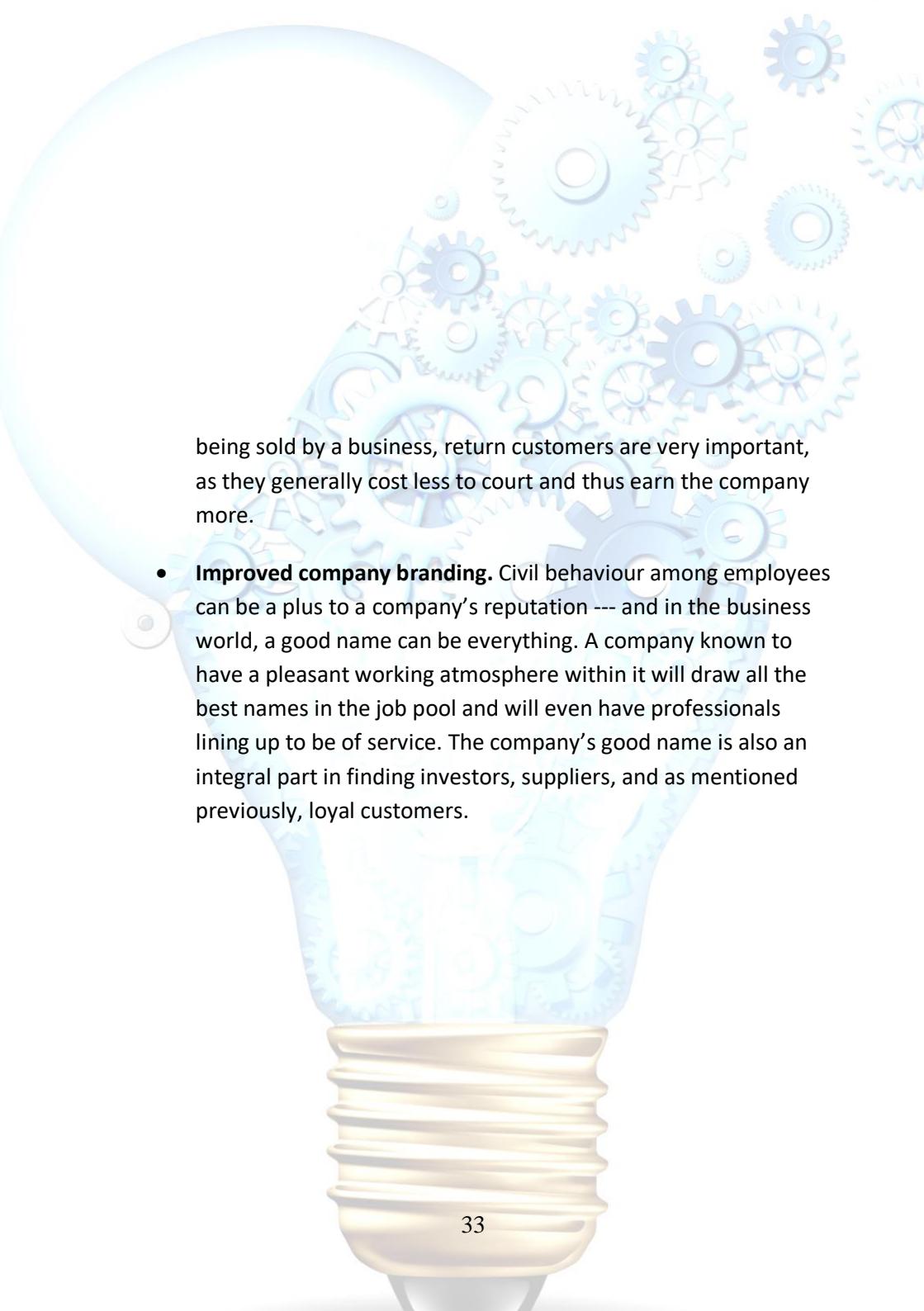
that disrupt work if unattended. And over time, the repeated protection of instigators by management can erode the company culture and communicate that incivility is not just tolerated, but also considered as a way to become “part of the team.”

## Civility and Rewards

Incivility in the workplace can cost companies a lot of money. On the flipside though, civility can also save organizations on costs. In fact, civility can help companies earn greater revenue and survive in the cutthroat world of competitive business.

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 company is less likely to incur the turnover losses mentioned in the previous section.
- **Increased Customer Return.** If incivility can turn a company's patrons sour, the opposite can guarantee a company a solid and loyal market base. And regardless of what product or service is



being sold by a business, return customers are very important, as they generally cost less to court and thus earn the company more.

- **Improved company branding.** Civil behaviour among employees can be a plus to a company's reputation --- and in the business world, a good name can be everything. A company known to have a pleasant working atmosphere within it will draw all the best names in the job pool and will even have professionals lining up to be of service. The company's good name is also an integral part in finding investors, suppliers, and as mentioned previously, loyal customers.

## Four Causes of Incivility

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

- **Lack of self-restraint.** Incivility, 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 behaviours 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 local Barista who can still spike your coffee. 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 renter 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 vitriol.

- **Stress.** A considerable amount of incivility 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 it. 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 suggest a more philosophical root of incivility 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 lavatory 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 favour of an acerbic boss or judge reinforces this way of thinking.

## **How to Overcome It**

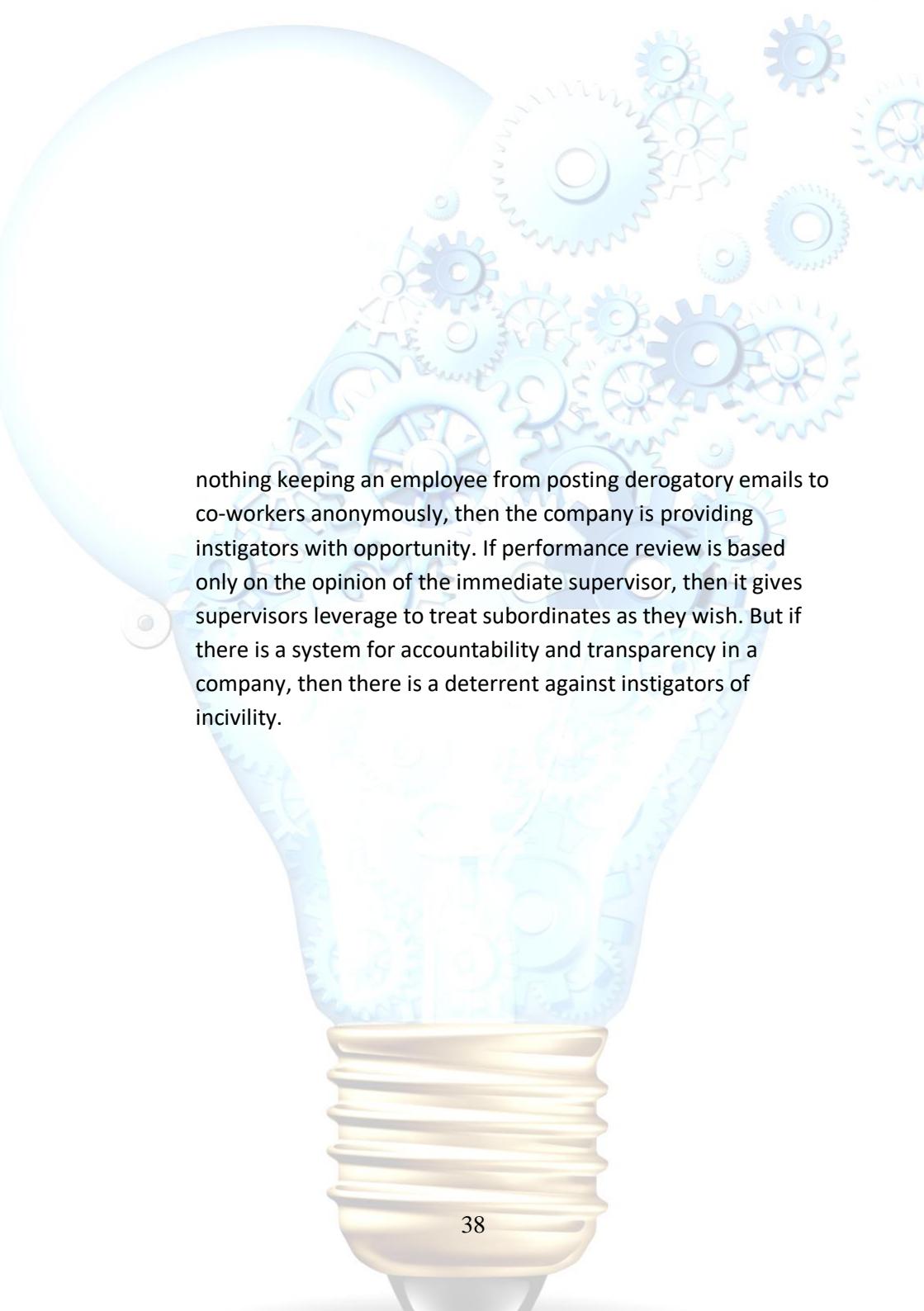
Overcoming civility in the workplace can be a big challenge, especially in companies where blatant tolerance for explicit and implicit acts of rudeness is already the norm. But this doesn't mean it's impossible to create a civil workplace.

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

- **Create, communicate, and enforce policies regarding civil behaviour in the workplace.** Organizations have the power to create the kind of culture they desire by making the practice of civil behaviour part of company policy. The key is in being explicit from the very onset what is desired and expected behaviour from managers and staff members alike. These policies should be included in the training program of each incoming employee. Pre-determined consequences of uncivil behaviour in the workplace must also be consistently enforced to ensure that civility ideals don't remain just words on paper. The creation of a company civility policy will be discussed in later chapters.
- **Screen job applicants for tendency towards uncivil behaviour.** 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 uncivil behaviour when faced with an employee with impressive credentials and experience. Most instigators of incivility in the workplace are those in management, and competent managers are hard to find. It wouldn't be surprising if business owners and stockholders turn a blind eye on incivility just to keep top brass.

- **Provide continuous education and training on civility.** Civil behaviour is a skill, and many cases of incivility are simply the result of lack of knowledge and/or practice of skills needed to navigate the workplace in a respectful and considerate fashion. Companies are encouraged to regularly raise awareness on the costs of incivility, 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 behaviour and identify the ways you contribute to workplace incivility. All people are guilty of uncivil behaviour, some regularly, others on occasion, but this doesn't make it ok. Modelling civil behaviour in your workplace can be the beginning of organizational change.
- **Increase accountability and transparency in the company.** Incivility in the workplace may persist because company set-up makes it easy for acts of incivility to go unnoticed. If there is



nothing keeping an employee from posting derogatory emails to co-workers anonymously, then the company 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 company, then there is a deterrent against instigators of incivility.

## Practical Illustration

The potential high cost of incivility 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 favour 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/vancouversun/features/civilsociety/story.html?id=feebff03-e545-4275-8994-42ea98dc8caa>



*Don't find fault. Find a remedy.*  
Henry Ford

## Chapter Four: Conflict Resolution

Conflicts in the workplace are inevitable. To begin with, each person is different, and no two people will ever agree on everything. This is a good thing --- creativity and synergy in a team is often borne from the ability to make the most of diversity. Second, the workplace can be a high-pressure environment where anger, frustration, and disappointment can take hold. When deadlines are right around the corner, when profits are not coming in, when ideas are all sub-par, you can expect clashes with workmates to rise. But more so, some issues are just by nature so complicated, that debate and discussion is the only way to go.

The best way to deal with conflicts is to manage them. In this chapter, you will be presented with the different styles of conflict management as enumerated by Thomas and Killman in 1972. The pros and cons of each conflict management style, as well as their impact on civility in the workplace will also be discussed.

### **Collaborating**

As the term implies, the objective of the collaborating style of conflict management is to work together in coming up with an integrative resolution equally satisfying to the parties in conflict. It is closely related to the concept of finding a win-win solution to a problem; that is, no one party gets away as winner, but instead all parties walk away with a concession favourable to their interest.

In the collaborating style of conflict management, there is a high premium on cooperation, supportive dialogue, recognition of each

person's point of view and the merging of ideas to come up with solutions. Responsibility in the execution of the resolution is also shared by the parties in conflict.

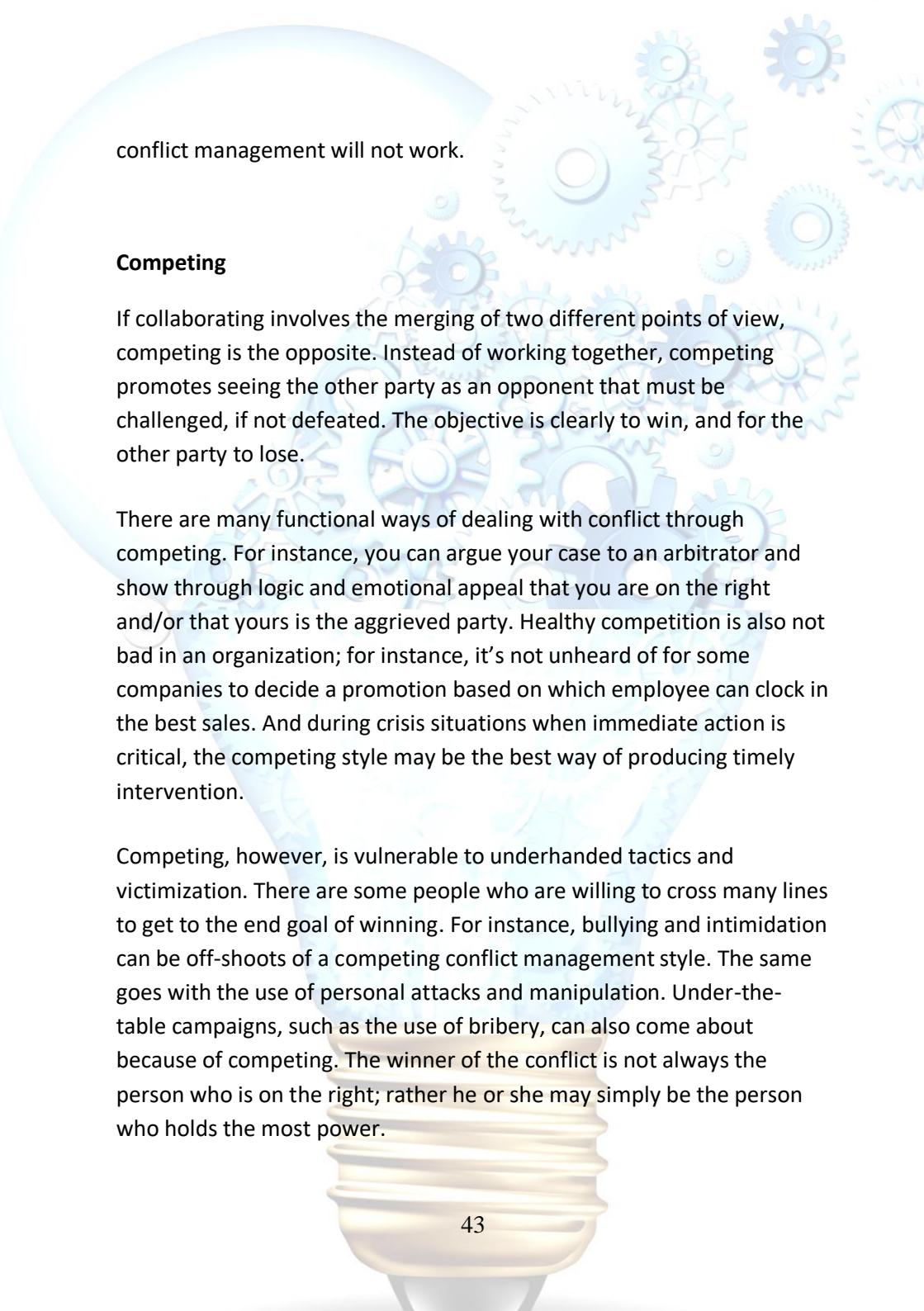
According to the Search for Common Ground, a non-profit organization that aims to transform conflict into cooperative action, there are four steps to cooperative conflict management:

1. Raise the issue with the other person in a way that invites cooperation.
2. Listen to each other to discover your interests.
3. Create options: possible ways to solve the problem.
4. Develop an agreement that meets as many as possible both of your interests.

As a conflict resolution style, collaborating has many advantages.

For one, it may be considered as the most respectful, as it takes great pains in making sure that each side is listened to, and each point of view is carefully weighed and considered, before coming up with a solution. It also promotes positive feelings among parties in conflict: a key element in improving relations among those engaged in a divisive issue. Most importantly, collaborating communicates the idea that a solution can be reached if people will simply put their heads together.

The main disadvantage of the collaborating style is that it is time-consuming and presumes that the parties involved are willing to consider and are skilled in assessing their opponent's point of view. Unless those in conflict are open to investing not time but also attitudes of open-mindedness and consideration, the collaborating style of



conflict management will not work.

## Competing

If collaborating involves the merging of two different points of view, competing is the opposite. Instead of working together, competing promotes seeing the other party as an opponent that must be challenged, if not defeated. The objective is clearly to win, and for the other party to lose.

There are many functional ways of dealing with conflict through competing. For instance, you can argue your case to an arbitrator and show through logic and emotional appeal that you are on the right and/or that yours is the aggrieved party. Healthy competition is also not bad in an organization; for instance, it's not unheard of for some companies to decide a promotion based on which employee can clock in the best sales. And during crisis situations when immediate action is critical, the competing style may be the best way of producing timely intervention.

Competing, however, is vulnerable to underhanded tactics and victimization. There are some people who are willing to cross many lines to get to the end goal of winning. For instance, bullying and intimidation can be off-shoots of a competing conflict management style. The same goes with the use of personal attacks and manipulation. Under-the-table campaigns, such as the use of bribery, can also come about because of competing. The winner of the conflict is not always the person who is on the right; rather he or she may simply be the person who holds the most power.

## **Compromising**

Compromising, also referred to as bargaining, is the middle ground between collaborating and competing.

When you compromise, just like when you engage in collaboration, you're willing to see the other person's point of view. But unlike in collaborating, you don't aim to go so far as find that ultimate solution equally favourable to both sides. Instead, you're willing to find even just the minimum workable solution, and allow the sacrifice of some interests.

A compromise is recommended when two parties are in a deadlock, and neither side has plans to back down from the stand that they have taken. It is also recommended during the search for temporary solutions to a problem, such as during the time when the immediate goal is to pacify aggressive individuals. Compromise is also first choice for times when there's need or desire to find a quick resolution to a conflict.

## **Accommodating**

The Accommodating Style of conflict management involves sacrificing most, if not all of your interests in order to satisfy or gain the favour of the other party. Basically, accommodating is deliberately taking a loss on the bargaining table.

Accommodating can come about because a person feels threatened or intimidated by the other person, or perhaps from a lack of skills in assertiveness and negotiation. If this is the case, frequent use of accommodation can do more harm than good in a working environment. It tolerates abusive behaviour, and prevents long-term and effective resolutions from being implemented.

But accommodating can also be a strategic move. Some parties choose to take a loss for some other gain, including courting the goodwill of the other party for future negotiations or to simply maintain peace in the workplace. Accommodating is also the most advisable approach to take when you have realized that you are in the wrong, or that what you're fighting for is not that relevant in the general scheme of things.

## Avoiding

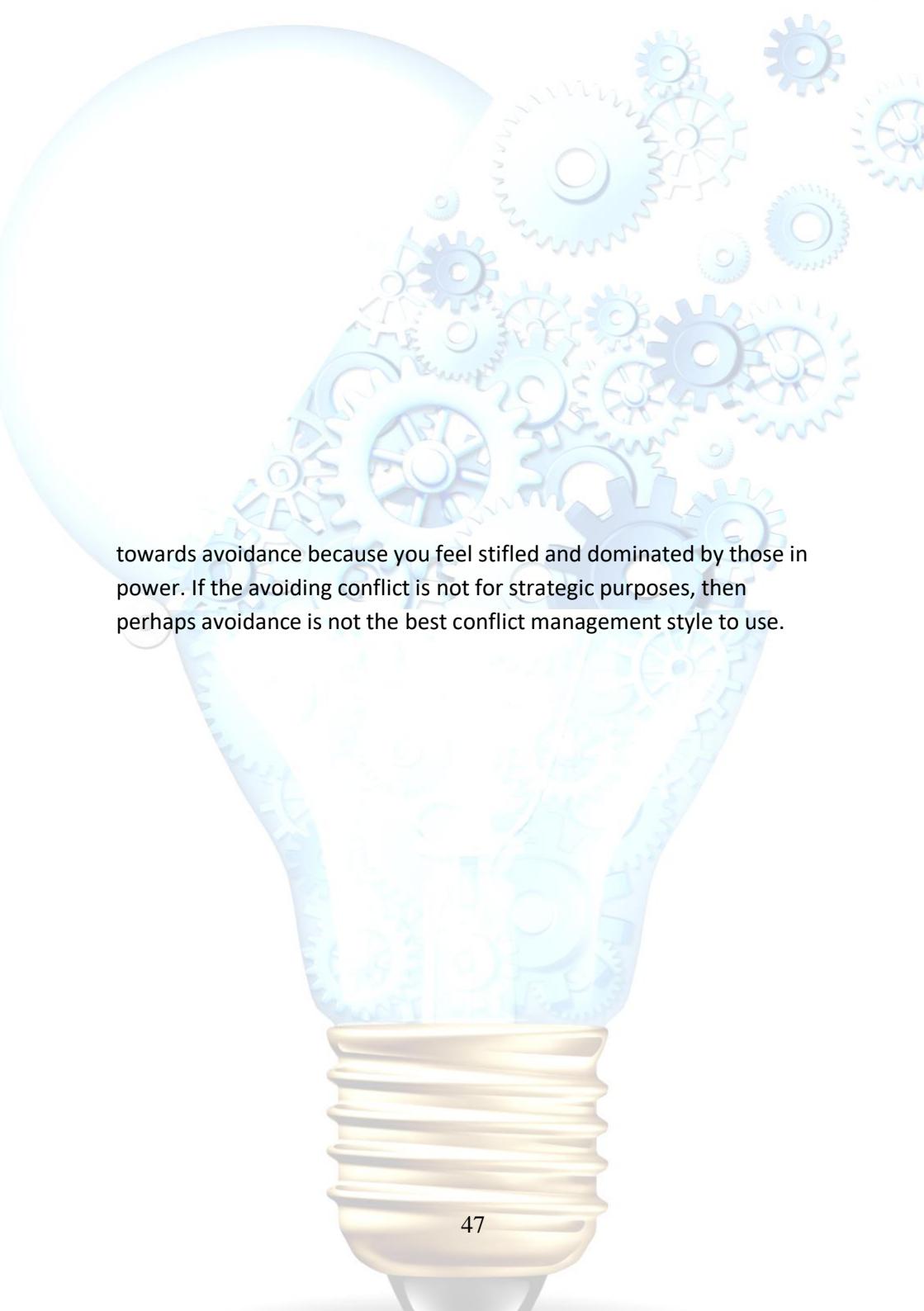
As the term implies, the avoiding style of conflict management involves actively finding ways to steer clear of a problem situation and/or simply not acting on the issue in contention.

At first glance, avoidance seems like an immature and ineffective approach to handling disagreements in the workplace --- and there are many cases when this is true. For instance, if you choose to pretend that bribery doesn't exist in the workplace means that a serious problem within the organization gets ignored. Not speaking to your boss, simply because you're scared of getting reprimanded for your poor performance, is also an example of avoiding that does more harm than good.

But there are cases when avoidance is strategic and recommended.

When the issue in contention is petty and lacks bearing in the general scheme of things, then perhaps avoidance is the better choice. For instance, if you know that your co-worker is snapping at you because you're all very tired and pulling in overtime, then it's better to disengage from the conflict. After all, the rude behaviour you're experiencing is just a symptom of the moment's stress. Avoidance is also recommended when the act of engaging an opponent will result to more harm than good. Lastly, avoidance is recommended when the issue in contention is best postponed, and/or when parties in conflict need time and space to cool their heads down.

When one is prone to using avoidance as a conflict management style, it's important to discern there are larger personal and systemic issues that must be addressed. Avoidance, for example, is common among people suffering from low self-esteem and lack of assertiveness. It may also be indicative of authoritarian management --- perhaps you tend



towards avoidance because you feel stifled and dominated by those in power. If the avoiding conflict is not for strategic purposes, then perhaps avoidance is not the best conflict management style to use.

## Practical Illustration

The following is a case that you can use for the participants to better understand the concepts presented in this chapter:

*The Security Department of Company XYZ is composed of both the security guards and the clerks who attend to administrative duties. For the past month, the department is getting heat from the company's management because of the high rate of the tardiness and/or lack of complete data when submitting incident reports. The creation of the incident report is work that involves both the guards and the office personnel.*

*The administrative staff members who work in the office blame the guards for not having the initiative to go to the office and inquire what is required of them, which in turn results to late submission of the data the admin staff needs to create the write-up. For the admin staff, they feel that it's not their duty to go after each and every guard especially since they tend to be scattered all over the large building and ground area of their company. There also seems to also be a tendency among the guards to not be present within the area assigned to them to patrol, which makes looking for them a headache.*

*Meanwhile, the guards blame the admin staff members for not having an effective information dissemination campaign, so that all guards on duty will be informed of what is required of them ASAP. According to the security guards, while the admin staff is effective at communicating with the guards who work the same hours they do, they neglect the guards who patrol the office building early in the morning, late in the evening outside regular office hours. Worse, the guards complain of the bad reception that they get from the admin personnel every time they do submit their requirements. Sometimes they are made to wait for very long, which gets them into trouble as the areas they are meant to be*

*watching gets abandoned. The guards also complain of the office personnel's tendency to "shout" and "talk down" to them --- something the office staff members admit and attribute to the stress of having to prepare several case reports within a day.*

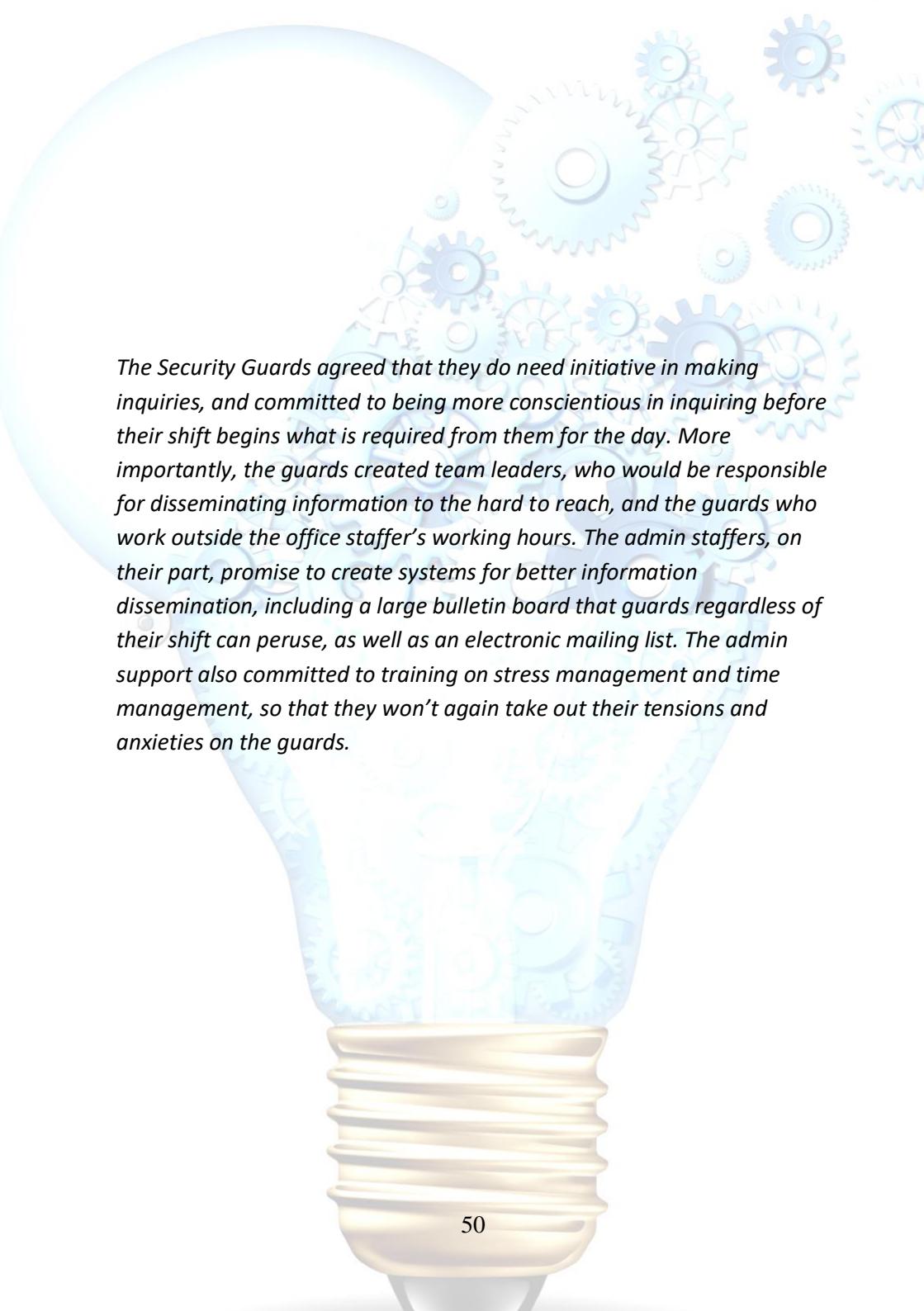
*A facilitator was invited to help the parties find resolution to their dilemma. To help both parties air their grievances, as well as provide a venue for listening to each other's side of the story, both groups were invited to a dialogue. The facilitator encouraged both parties to see the interests that are most important to their "opponent."*

*Here are the interests that surfaced:*

*The Security Guards do want to submit their requirements on time, but as they work on different shifts, some guards never get to communicate with the staff members, and hence, do not get updated on what they need to provide. More so, the guards who do work the same shift as the admin staff members don't feel that they are treated with respect whenever they initiate a communication with the office personnel.*

*Meanwhile, the Office Personnel said that they would appreciate greater initiative from the guards when it comes to making inquiries. Most of the office personnel are overworked and managing several deadlines, they can't afford to go out and search for the particular guards lacking in paperwork. They also can't be asked to stay in the office outside their office hours as they have families to attend to.*

*After the dialogue, the feeling of antagonism and frustration between the two parties lessened. The facilitator emphasized that both parties seem to want the same thing: complete and timely reports, better communication with one another. What's just next then is to find that win-win solution where all the parties' interests will be served.*



*The Security Guards agreed that they do need initiative in making inquiries, and committed to being more conscientious in inquiring before their shift begins what is required from them for the day. More importantly, the guards created team leaders, who would be responsible for disseminating information to the hard to reach, and the guards who work outside the office staffer's working hours. The admin staffers, on their part, promise to create systems for better information dissemination, including a large bulletin board that guards regardless of their shift can peruse, as well as an electronic mailing list. The admin support also committed to training on stress management and time management, so that they won't again take out their tensions and anxieties on the guards.*



*It is common error to infer that things which are consecutive in order of time have necessarily the relation of cause and effect.*

*Jacob Bigelow*

## **Chapter Five: Getting to the Cause**

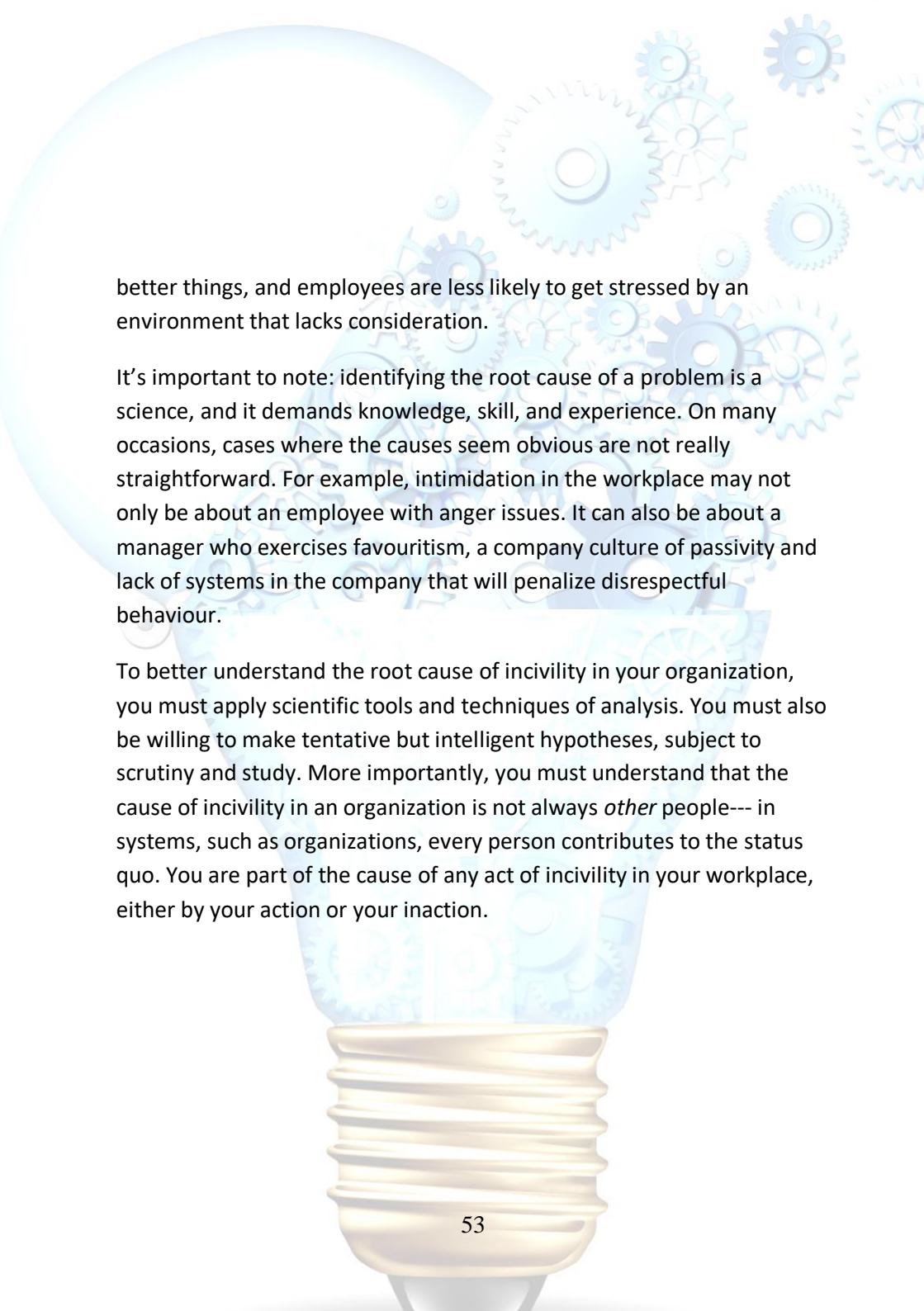
Cases of incivility in the workplace do not exist in a vacuum. Most of the time, incivility is caused (or at least maintained) by a bigger problem --- perhaps in the system, perhaps in the individuals involved. Going straight to the root cause of the problem is one of the best ways of managing incivility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

In this chapter, you will learn about the importance of getting to the cause of incivility, and some tools that can help in understanding the elements behind incivility in your 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, incivility in the workplace is rarely ever an isolated event. There are factors that directly and indirectly cause the act of incivility, and if the incident is a recurring event, there are factors that maintain it. Analysis of the root cause of incivility in the workplace may even reveal systemic issues that the whole company must addressed immediately.

It is recommended therefore, that managers and staff members don't just address the symptoms of incivility but instead start the hunt for its root cause. As mentioned in a previous chapter, 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 favouritism, a company culture of passivity and lack of systems in the company that will penalize disrespectful behaviour.

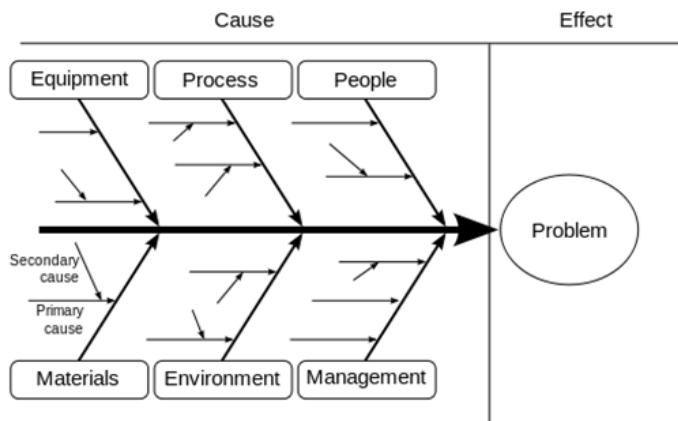
To better understand the root cause of incivility in your organization, you must apply scientific tools and techniques of analysis. You must also be willing to make tentative but intelligent hypotheses, subject to scrutiny and study. More importantly, you must understand that the cause of incivility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

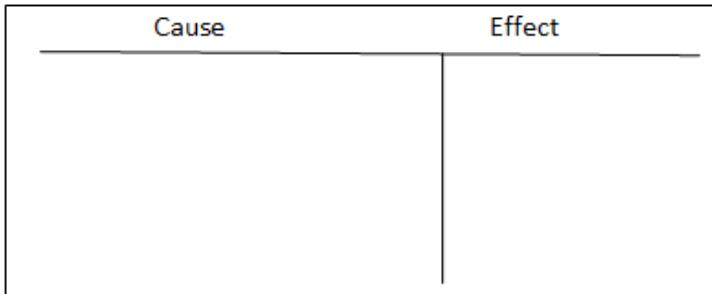
Also called the Ishikawa Diagram (after its inventor Kaoru Ishikawa) as well as the Fishbone Diagram because of it looks like the skeleton of a fish, the Cause-and-Effect diagram is a graphic tool that helps users identify, present and analyse the possible causes of a particular outcome.

From a Cause-and-Effect diagram you 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.

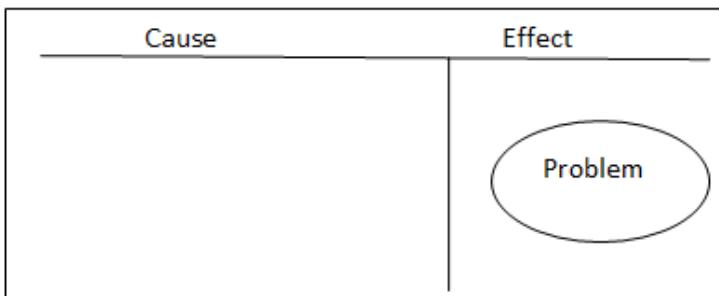


How do you create a Cause-and-Effect diagram? The following are some simple guidelines to follow:

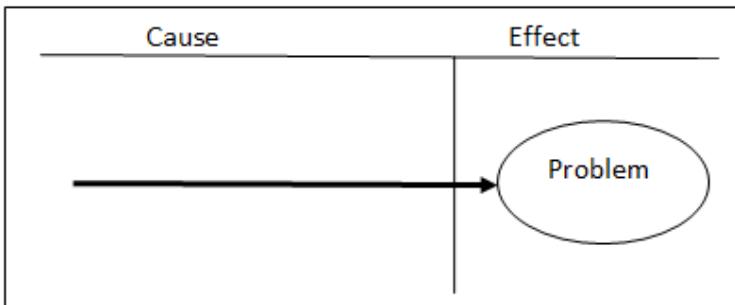
1. Note that the diagram has two sides: the cause side which is on the left and occupies as much as 75% of the drawing space, and the effect side on the right.



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 analyse 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.

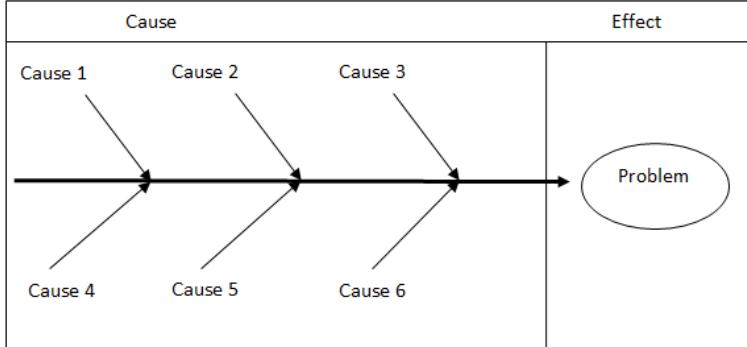


4. Identify as many possible main causes of the effect you are analysing. The causes you will list may be an intelligent guess, or it may be born of empirical research. A problem in production, for example, may be caused by issues in the process of making the product, poor management of resources, inferior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

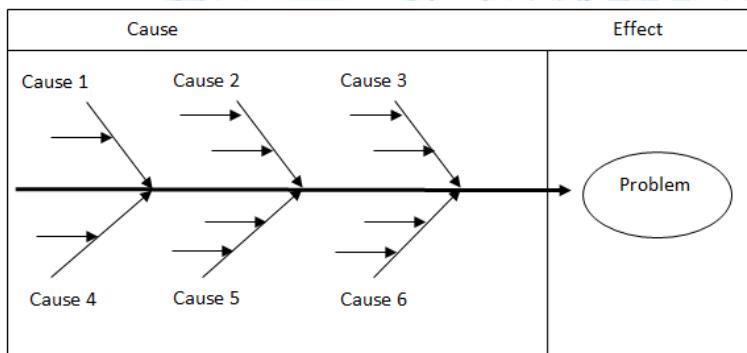
Here's a hint: some researchers have ready categories that they use when coming up with the causes of particular situations. For instance, there are those who keep these six ready categories in mind: Equipment, Process, People, Materials, Environment, and Management. Others use easy-to-remember categories,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

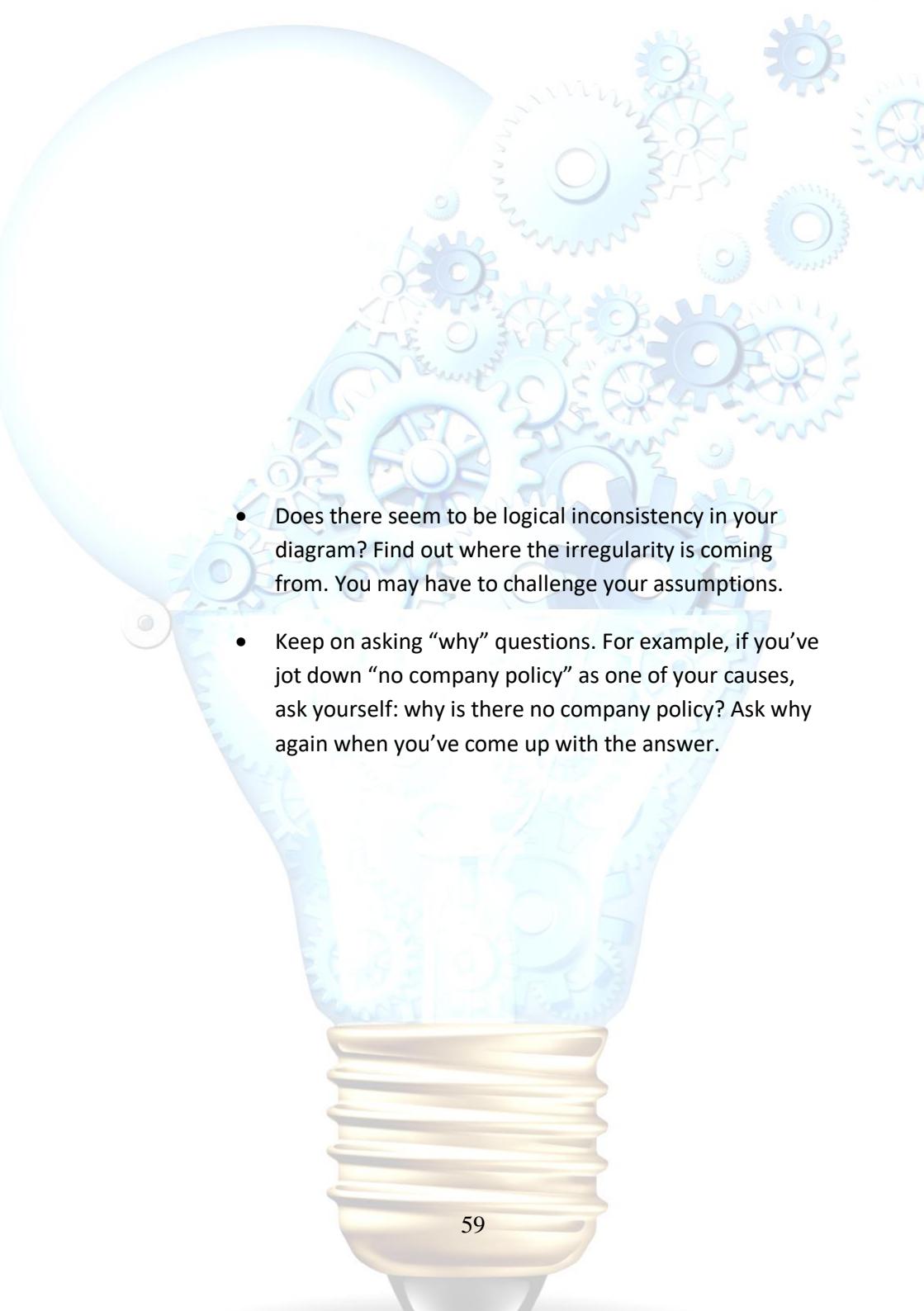
your diagram's spine. If done correctly, your diagram will look like a fishbone, with smaller bones branching out from the main vertebrae.



- 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.



- Now it's time to analyse your cause-and-effect diagram. Tips in analysing 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 company policy” as one of your causes, ask yourself: why is there no company policy? Ask why again when you’ve come up with the answer.

## **Forgiveness**

Very rarely is forgiveness included in soft 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.

Many personal and interpersonal development gurus advocate what is called active forgiveness. 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 behaviour. 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.** You deserve to live a full life free from emotional baggage and reactivity --- letting go of anger and resentment clears your mind and allows room for more positive thoughts and emotions. 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 black 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 titbit 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 behaviour 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 their 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 incivility in the workplace, and resolving it competently, has the following benefits:

- **It points to what needs correcting.** Analysing cause-and-effect is basically looking for feedback: you want to know what works in a company, 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 skirmished can be lessened.

- **It creates a culture open to change.** It is company culture that is rigid and resistant to change that often gets into trouble. But when you are constantly analysing root causes of uncivil behaviour in your organization, you communicate a positive attitude towards implementing changes that is the best for everyone. Done correctly, it may even install 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 company 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.

## Practical Illustration

The following is a case that can be used to illustrate the concepts presented in this chapter:

*ABC is a non-profit organization that provides free health services to disadvantaged communities. It is staffed mostly by individual volunteers and members of interest groups with the same advocacy.*

*A long-term problem in the organization is the amount of interpersonal conflict among its staffers. Because the group is staffed by people from different organizations, there is a tendency for some members to hijack a project's PR to promote their own advocacy.*

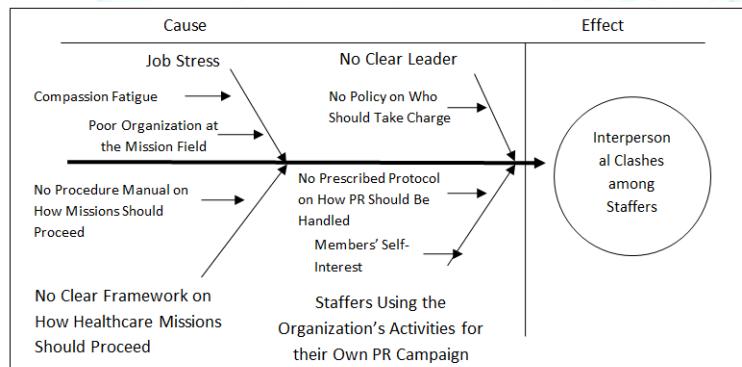
*There is also a constant struggle when it comes to determining who is in charge. For while the staffers also share the view that health care services are important to the communities they serve, they differ on the way delivery of services should be conducted. For instance, there are those who insist that beneficiaries must pay at least half of the services fee, to discourage the dole-out mentality. While others believe that making beneficiaries pay defeats the purpose of the program. The bickering and arguments can get so bad that at one point some of the staff members walked out just minutes before an important program.*

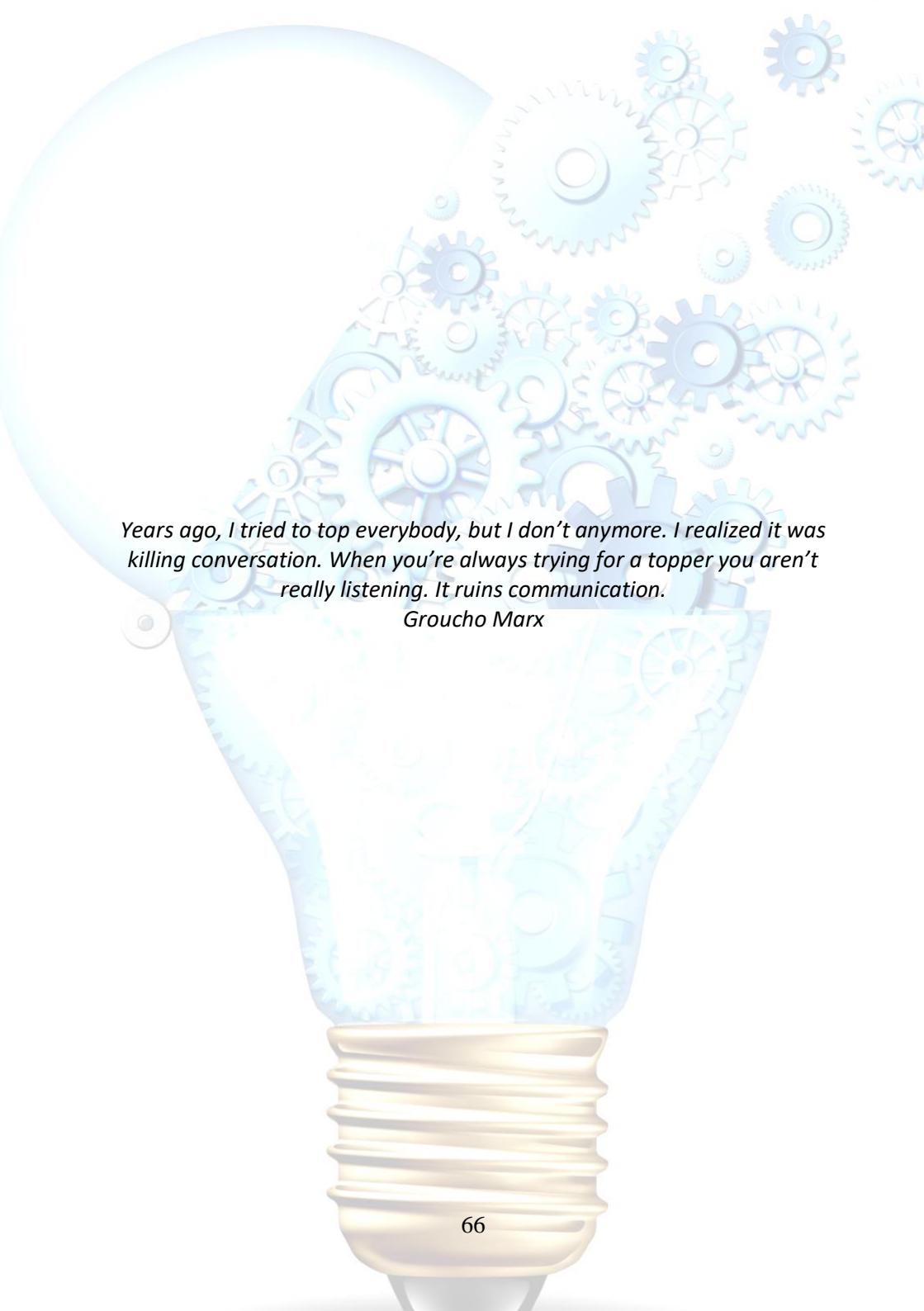
*The stressful nature of the job adds to the tension between the members. Most of the flare-ups occur after the group has been exposed to the gruelling work of catering to hundreds of patients in a day.*

To have a clearer understanding of the causes of the incivility in ABC, a cause-and-effect diagram was created.

From the Cause-and-Effect Diagram, one cause of the problem seems to be consistent: a lack of pre-established procedures/ protocols and policies for doing things.

Perhaps the best way for the organization to sort their problems out is by having a planning meeting where all staff members determine how to proceed about the work that they do. For instance, a list of officers can be created, based on their knowledge and experience in the field, so that there'll be a definite chain of command. The officers can be changed every 3 years so that there'll be a chance for every member organization to take the lead. Staff members can also sit down and debate the correct procedure in handling missions, with the understanding that ABC is a separate entity from their own respective organizations. The hijacking of the ABC project to further the image of the volunteers' organizations can be easily addressed by finding that win-win situation where collaborators can be recognized while the objectives of the mission are not jeopardized.





*Years ago, I tried to top everybody, but I don't anymore. I realized it was killing conversation. When you're always trying for a topper you aren't really listening. It ruins communication.*

Groucho Marx

## Chapter Six: Communication

Civility is not rocket science. To a large extent, civility is all about effective communication: sending messages clearly and completely, and receiving messages accurately. But while many presume that communication occurs naturally, the reality is: communication is a skill that must be studied, practiced, and developed. There are many nuances to communication that would take time to understand.

In this chapter, we will discuss two kinds of communication that often result in misunderstandings in the workplace: para-verbal communication and non-verbal communication. We will also present two skills that can help significantly improve communication in a company or organization. These two skills are listening and appreciative inquiry.

### 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 dress.”

“*I didn’t know* that you wanted to buy that dress.”

“*I didn’t know that you* wanted to buy that dress.”

“*I didn’t know that you wanted to buy* that dress.”

“*I didn’t know that you wanted to buy that dress*”

Depending on the word you choose to emphasize, you can be chastising someone for failing to inform you of wanting to buy a certain dress, or expressing shock that a particular individual likes a particular outfit. 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; it’s not at all times that we are 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 in 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 80% of the message people received from others come from their non-verbal behaviour. This result implies that effective non-verbal communication may, in fact, be more important than 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.

## 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 clasping 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’?”

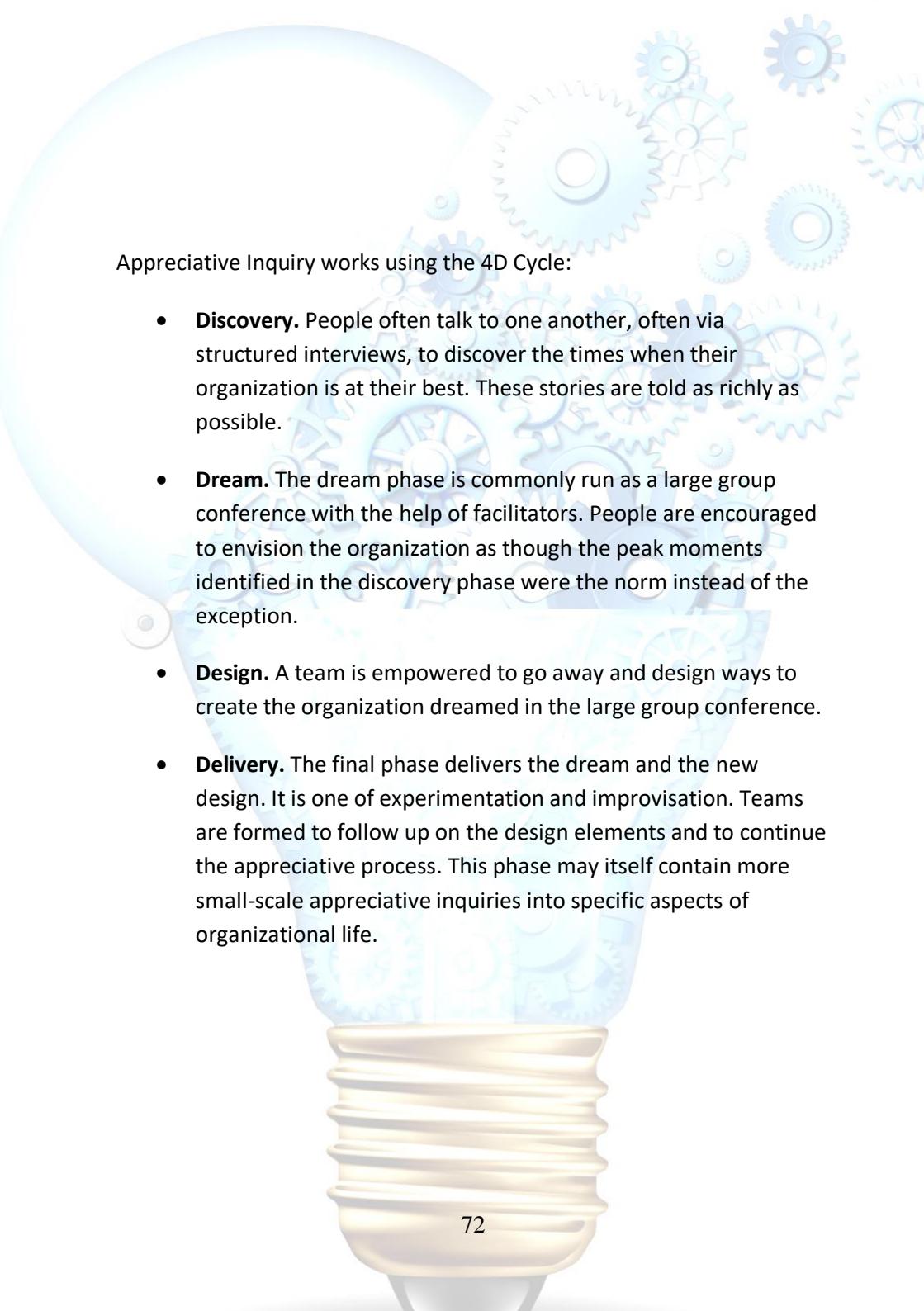
## **Appreciative Inquiry**

Appreciative Inquiry is a research technique commonly used in organizational development and community building. Its main distinction from other methods of inquiry is its premium on surfacing and affirming positive dynamics among groups of people, as opposed to looking for problems and/or dysfunction. Indeed, for practitioners of Appreciative Inquiry, every organization has done something right --- something worth doing all over again. So instead of asking "*what is wrong with us?*" facilitators practicing Appreciative Inquiry ask: "*what have we been doing well?*"

For the process of Appreciative Inquiry to work best, it's important that researchers solicit the input of all members of the organization from the highest ranking of management to the person sitting on the bottom-rung of the company structure. Each opinion must be given equal weight in the development of company policy.

Two basic assumptions form the bedrock of Appreciative Inquiry. These assumptions are:

1. Organizations always move towards the direction that their members ask and the things they talk about.
2. Energy for positive change is created when organizations engage in continually remembering and analysing circumstances when they are at their best rather than focusing on problems and how they can be solved.



Appreciative Inquiry works using the 4D Cycle:

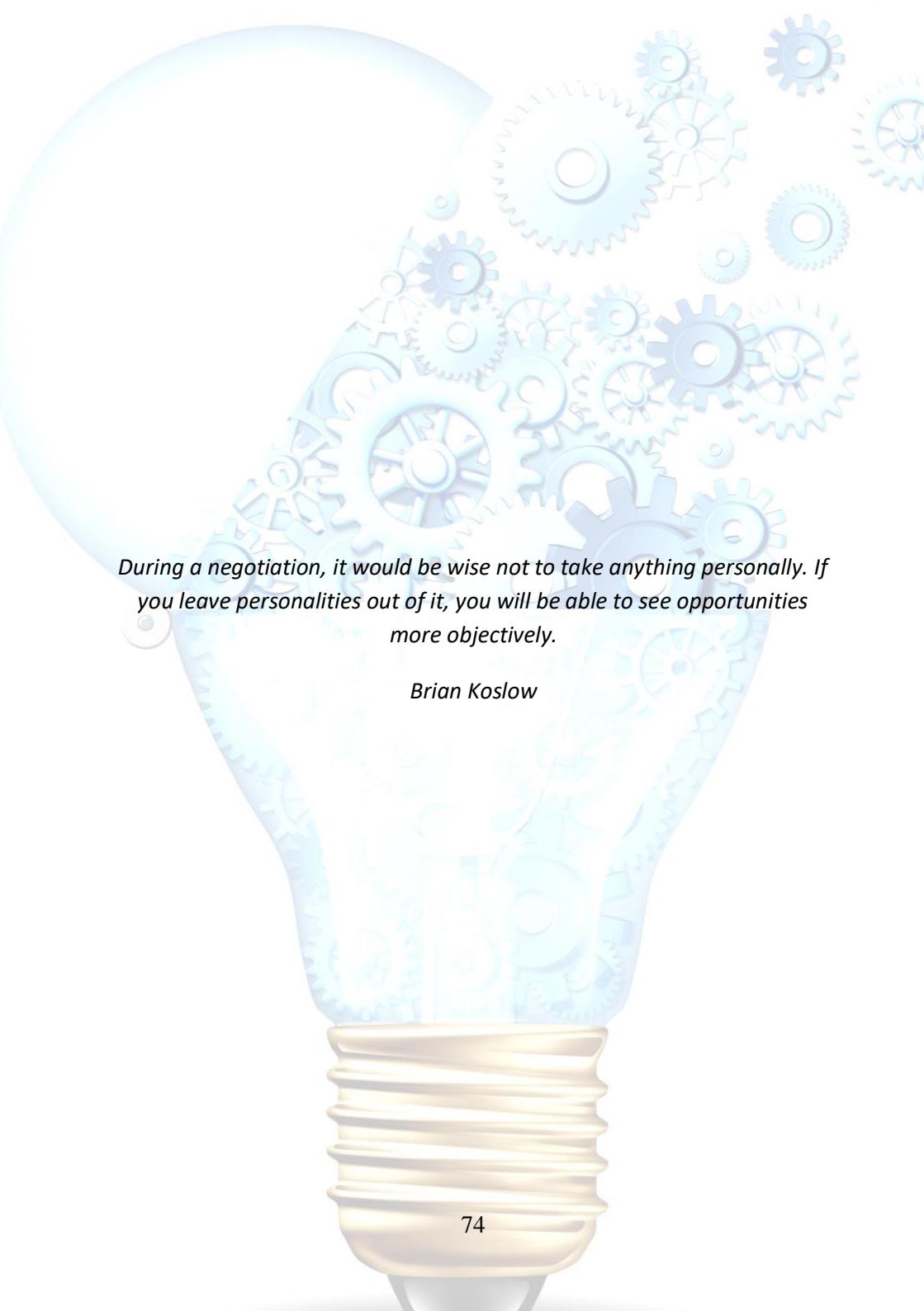
- **Discovery.** People often talk to one another, often via structured interviews, to discover the times when their organization is at their best. These stories are told as richly as possible.
- **Dream.** The dream phase is commonly run as a large group conference with the help of facilitators. People are encouraged to envision the organization as though the peak moments identified in the discovery phase were the norm instead of the exception.
- **Design.** A team is empowered to go away and design ways to create the organization dreamed in the large group conference.
- **Delivery.** The final phase delivers the dream and the new design. It is one of experimentation and improvisation. Teams are formed to follow up on the design elements and to continue the appreciative process. This phase may itself contain more small-scale appreciative inquiries into specific aspects of organizational life.

## Practical Illustration

*John Smith is a newly-hired manager at XYZ Company. A retired military officer, John Smith is used to hierachal organizations, and expects his staff members 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.) ran like the military. He starts a focus group discussion to get what the staff members think of the company's current performance. He researched the right questions to ask so as to encourage the participation of his staff. 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 analyse John's problem in dealing with his staff members. The coach gave John feedback on his non-verbal and para-verbal behaviour. According to the coach, even if the words that John uses favour a more democratic style of leadership, he still appears and sounds like an army general barking order. After gaining awareness of his non-verbal and para-verbal communication, John trained on how to be more congruent to what he wants to say. Eventually, he was able to build solid rapport with his staff members.*



*During a negotiation, it would be wise not to take anything personally. If you leave personalities out of it, you will be able to see opportunities more objectively.*

*Brian Koslow*

## Chapter Seven: Negotiation

In an ideal world, it's easy to come up with a solution that would 100% satisfy the interests and needs of parties in conflict. In reality: few issues are cut-and-dried. Each party will have a valid point to be acknowledged, and some sacrifices must be made. In order to ensure that the position of parties in conflict are communicated clearly and argued persuasively, each person must have negotiation skills in his or her arsenal.

In this chapter, you will be presented with ways you can manage conflicts, which are a common source of uncivil behaviour, in your workplace. Among these ways are mediation, arbitration, and creative problem-solving.

### Three Sides to Incivility

Whenever you're in disagreement or conflict with another person, it always helps to remember that there are always three sides to an issue:

- Your side
- The other person's side
- The truth

**Your side vs. the other person's side:** First off, it's important to recognize that you have a unique point of view of a situation, and the other person also has his or her own unique take. What is true for you is not necessarily true for the other person. This is because we all have different life experiences, personalities, ways of interpreting and valuing what is happening around us. For instance, you may not be accusing

your work partner of slacking off by joking about his extended lunch break; but your office mate may have felt insulted by what he perceives is a dig at his work ethics.

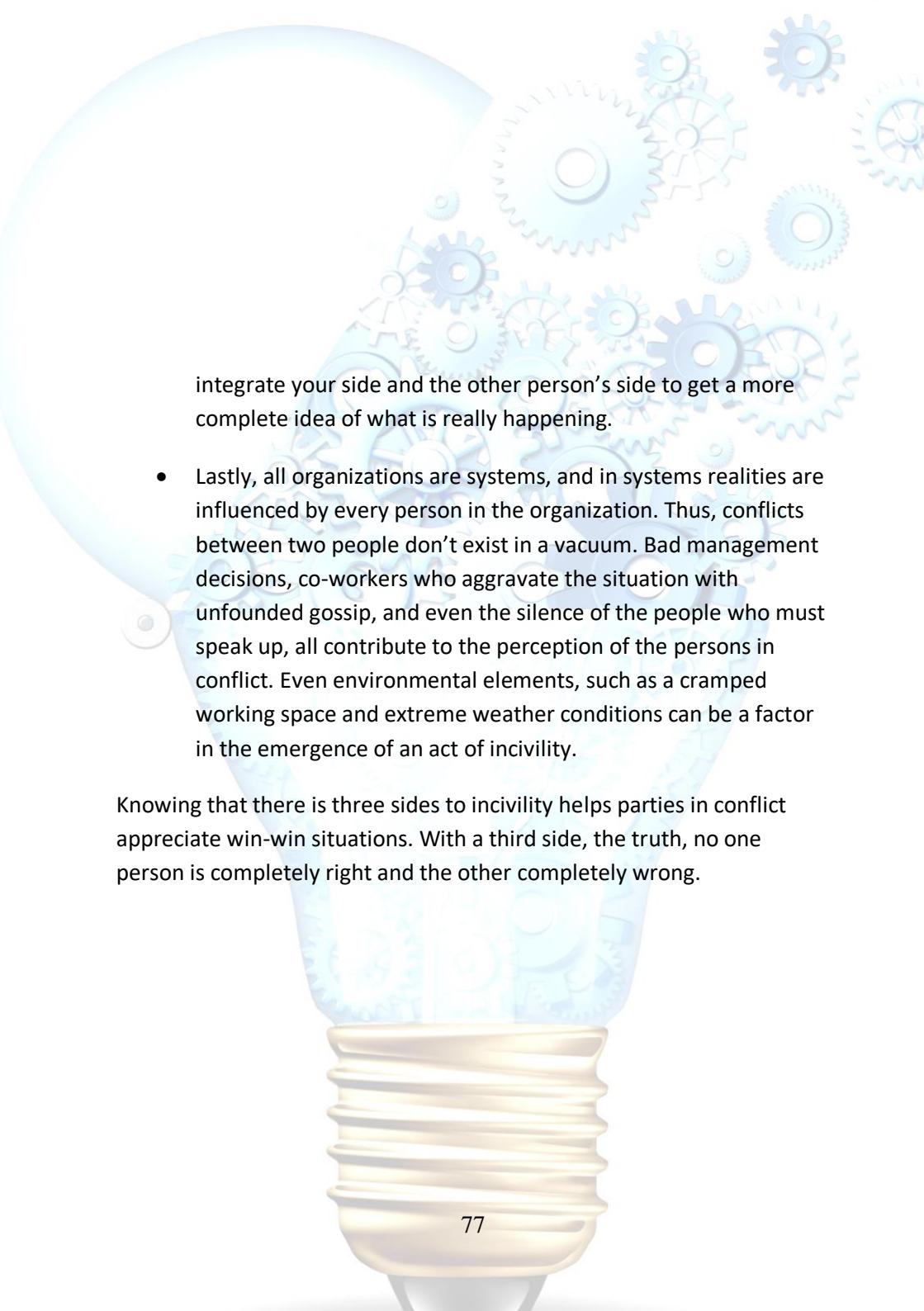
More so, no one is all-knowing; there'll always be information that you may have missed.

That there are at least two sides to a story makes dialogue critical when managing workplace incivility. You can't make an informed judgment about a situation unless you've heard the other party present his or her case, and you're able to make yours. As with the example raised in the previous paragraph, dialogue could clarify that no offense was intended with the joke you made. Dialogue can also appraise of needed boundaries when it comes to making jokes at co-worker's expense, e.g. What's funny to you is not necessarily funny to others.

**The Truth:** Remember, it's not enough to just listen to the sides of the individuals or groups in conflict. You should also consider the possibility that what *actually* happened is more, less or even totally different than what you both think.

How come a third side, the truth, is possible? There are many reasons.

- For one, parties in conflict are not always objective when it comes to perceiving situations where they are affected. Anger, frustration, and biases can colour one's view of the situation that it's no longer accurate. It's easy, for example, to vilify a co-worker who has hurt you, to the point that you perceive his or her offense as graver than what it actually is.
- Second, because there are at least two sides to a story, each person's account is just a piece of the puzzle. There is a need to



integrate your side and the other person's side to get a more complete idea of what is really happening.

- Lastly, all organizations are systems, and in systems realities are influenced by every person in the organization. Thus, conflicts between two people don't exist in a vacuum. Bad management decisions, co-workers who aggravate the situation with unfounded gossip, and even the silence of the people who must speak up, all contribute to the perception of the persons in conflict. Even environmental elements, such as a cramped working space and extreme weather conditions can be a factor in the emergence of an act of incivility.

Knowing that there is three sides to incivility helps parties in conflict appreciate win-win situations. With a third side, the truth, no one person is completely right and the other completely wrong.

## **Mediation**

Mediation is a way of dispute resolution wherein an objective third party, called the mediator, is invited to assist parties in conflict come to an accord.

In some cases, the mediator is merely there to facilitate process, e.g. get both sides to sit together and have a constructive dialogue regarding the area in contention. But in other cases, mediators are called for their expert opinion. At the end of the day, however, a mediator's opinion is only suggestive in nature and doesn't carry legal weight unless the parties in conflict concede that the mediator can create or suggest legally enforceable actions. Regardless, decisions reached through mediation can still be contested in court.

Done correctly, mediation can create a collaborating style of managing conflict between parties in disagreement.

Mediation is an excellent way of addressing cases of incivility in the workplace. For one, it is relatively inexpensive compared to litigation. It can also keep sensitive disputes in a company private --- a court case runs the risk of damaging the organization's reputation. Mediation also has room for atypical solutions to a conflict, as in a court case, the judgment is limited to the bounds of law.

Mediators can come from within the company, or you can hire professional consultants for the job. There are mediators who specialize in work-related disputes, and can provide insight on not just the issue in contention but also related concerns such as legalities based on labour laws, effective techniques for solving the problem as experienced by other companies with similar problems and industry-specific considerations.

## **Arbitration**

Arbitration, like mediation, is a form of alternative dispute resolution. Like mediation, arbitration requires the presence of a third party to help settle the conflict; this third party is called the arbiter. However, unlike mediators who sometimes merely facilitate dialogue, arbiters are required to make a judgment on the case, and their judgment is final and binding. Because of this, arbiters must have expertise on law, adjudication and when applicable, company policy.

In order to have a constructive conflict resolution procedure through arbitration, it's important that many key issues regarding the process are settled before the arbitration proper. For instance, it must be decided and agreed-upon how the arbiter is going to judge the matter: Is he or she going to weigh interests? Would the arbiter be using a particular contract or policy for reference? Making this information clear from the onset can help ensure fairness and prevent allegations of being placed at a disadvantage.

Like mediation, arbitration is a less costly alternative to going to court. It also tends to be speedier and more private.

However, there is a big risk in arbitration. In an ideal world, parties in conflict must volunteer for the process. In actual practice, there is the possibility of persons in power bullying the disadvantaged to sit in an arbitration procedure and passively accept its results.

## **Creative Problem-Solving**

There are occasions, when the best way to handle conflict or

disagreement in the workplace is by coming up with an original and/or out-of-the-box solution. Sticking to systems one is used to, and refusing to try out something new, is often the reason why real and lasting change in a company doesn't happen. This is why, as much as possible, organizations must utilize the Creative Problem-Solving Process or CPS.

The Creative Problem-Solving Process, also called the Osborn-Parnes Process based on the names of its developers, is a structured method for coming up with novel and yet effective solutions to problems. As the term implies, the process is a marriage of using one's imagination to come up with something novel and getting the issue resolved.

Like many other scientific techniques of problem-solving, CPS relies on the process of:

- Careful analysis of the problem
- Development of potential solutions
- Selection of a workable solution
- Testing and implementation

An example of a creative problem-solving technique is Synectic's. It was developed by William Gordon, and it is an approach to generating ideas that involves the use of analogies and metaphors.

Here's an example: Synectic's has a procedure called Transfer of Analogy: the analysis of two seemingly unrelated processes to check if they are comparable in some respect. You can compare, for example, fighting cancer to fighting gossip. A manager can tell his staff members: *"If gossip is a cancer and we are oncologists, how will we approach the situation?"* Transfer of analogies help groups come up with solutions they otherwise wouldn't have come up with.

## Practical Illustration

The following is a case that can illustrate the value of arbitration in managing workplace dispute. The case is an edited excerpt of an article written by Mullen Taylor and published in 2000 at the website Mediate.com. The complete account of the case, including the details of the arbitration process, is available at <http://www.mediate.com/articles/taylor.cfm>

*"Laura was hired as a copy editor for one of the many journals produced by the company. Seven other employees worked on this team editing this Journal, including a senior editor named Tim. Laura had worked there for about a month when she and her fellow co-workers went for happy-hour after work. Everybody had a great time and had consumed a fair amount of alcohol. When everybody was leaving the bar to head home, Tim, who had been secretly attracted to Laura since she started work at the journal, hailed a cab and offered to share the ride with Laura. Laura accepted the offer. Once she was inside the cab, Tim then suddenly made an aggressive sexual advance toward her. Horrified, Laura pushed him away and told him to get out of the cab. Mortified, Tim slinked out of the cab.*

*The next day, Laura came to work with some apprehension. How would she deal with Tim? Would the cab incident affect her job? Although Tim did not supervise her, would he try to get her fired? Tim immediately went to her office and apologized for his extremely inappropriate behaviour in the cab. Relieved at his apology, Laura decided not to pursue the matter through any formal channels in the office.*

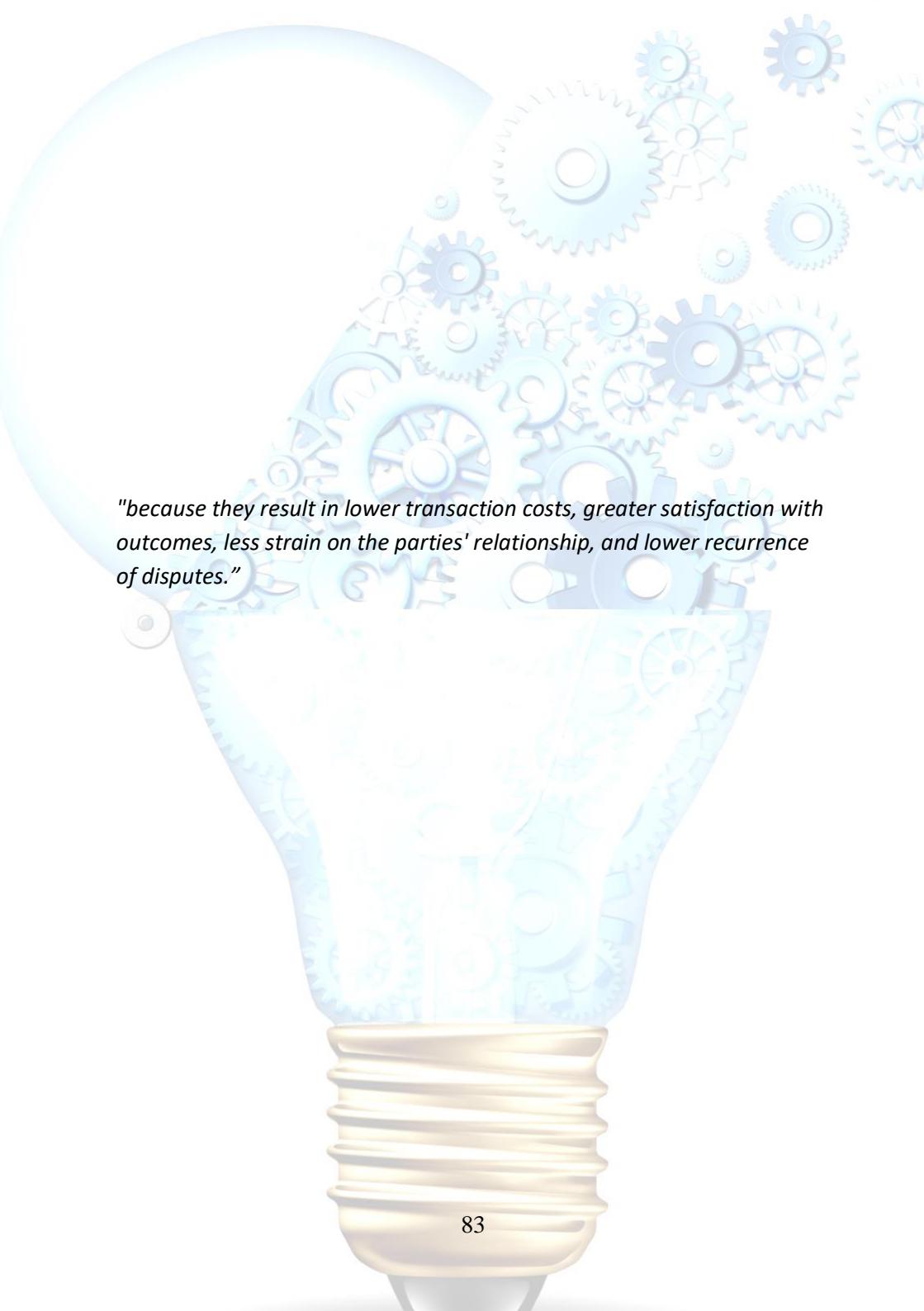
*Everything would have been okay if Tim had stopped at just one sincerely expressed apology. However, whenever he found himself alone with Laura, Tim apologized again, and again. He said he was sorry about*

*the incident at every opportunity he had for three months. This constant apology was awkward and annoying to Laura. Ironically, by Tim apologizing continuously for his unwanted attention in the cab, he was foisting another form of unwanted attention upon Laura. When he first started apologizing, Laura told him that "it was okay". After three months of many apologies, she reached a point where she asked him to stop apologizing, to no avail. Frustrated, she confided in a few co-workers about her unusual dilemma. Consequently, these co-workers lost respect for Tim.*

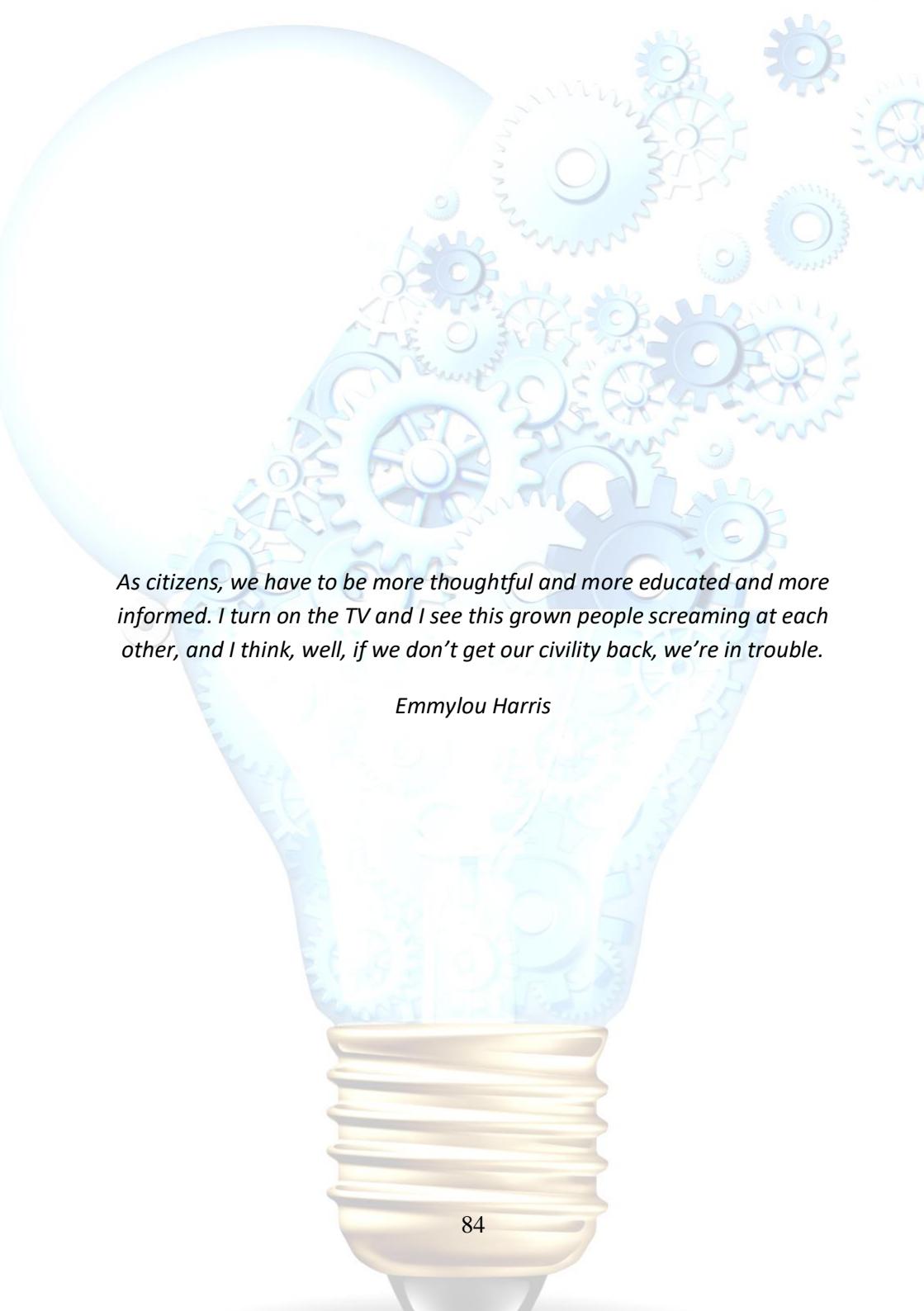
*The ethical issues surrounding Tim and Laura's negotiation tactics are not clear cut. On the surface, we may view Tim as well-meaning in his apologies yet socially inept in his ability to gauge when to stop apologizing. Nevertheless, we can look upon Tim's apologies as intrusive, which cause his apologies to lose their meaning of goodwill. It could be a form of wherein Laura cannot escape, for she is dependent upon her job to support herself. Removing herself from the situation would cost Laura her income. Laura did not possess the economic freedom to quit her job.*

*The first step toward finding a resolution of the conflict is to discover what Laura truly wants. She could choose to pursue the matter through a rights-based mechanism to seek redress for sexual harassment. It is unlikely that the rights-based approach of a lawsuit would serve any useful purpose. For one thing, Tim's sexual advance in the cab may not fit the legal description of sexual harassment.*

*An interest-based approach is better suited to the conflict between Tim and Laura because focusing on interests can help them better understand each other. [An] Ombudsman can help bring about greater understanding through listening, facilitation of dialogue between Laura and Tim, problem-solving, and mediating the conflict. These interest-based techniques are considered better methods of dispute resolution*



*"because they result in lower transaction costs, greater satisfaction with outcomes, less strain on the parties' relationship, and lower recurrence of disputes."*



*As citizens, we have to be more thoughtful and more educated and more informed. I turn on the TV and I see this grown people screaming at each other, and I think, well, if we don't get our civility back, we're in trouble.*

Emmylou Harris

## Chapter Eight: Identifying Your Need

Creating a civil working environment begins with knowing what exactly are the needs of the organization and its employees. While general principles about civility can always be created, different companies have different needs. In this chapter, you will be presented with tools you can use to identify the need for civility in your organization. These tools are: observation, focus groups, and anonymous surveys.

### Completing a Needs Analysis

If you want to design a program on civility that is customized to the unique needs of your workplace, the first thing that you need to do is to conduct a Needs Analysis.

**What is a Needs Analysis?** Needs Analysis is the process of gathering, interpreting and evaluating data related to the requirements of the company in terms of accomplishing a certain goal. Needs Analysis is typically associated with the development of training and coaching programs.

Consider the following illustration: To address the high rate of absenteeism in the Accounts Department of a company, a Needs Analysis can be conducted. Perhaps the company can interview the “top absentees” to find out if they have something in common: a problem that has to be addressed. If, for example, low motivation due to low compensation is the most common reason for employees failing to turn up at work, then perhaps it’s time that management comes up with a much more attractive compensation package.

There are many techniques that you can use to conduct needs analysis,

and three of them will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. Among the most common techniques for data gathering that is being used in Needs Analysis are:

- Survey Questionnaires
- Interviews
- Focus Group Discussion
- Observation
- Consultation with Team Leaders and Supervisors
- Standardized Examinations
- Case Reports
- Project Debriefings
- Review of Related Literature

## **Focus Groups**

A Focus Group, also called focus group discussion (FGD), is a research method that aims to gather qualitative data through non-threatening semi-structured discussion of a specific topic or question.

A focus group discussion is managed by a skilled facilitator who both attends to content and process. The latter is particularly important as the quality of data gathered can be heavily influenced by group dynamics, such as the monopoly of the floor by dominant group members. The average Focus Group Discussion lasts for about 1 hour to

1 ½ hours.

What's good about this technique is that it helps surface answers that can only come about through a discussion. This is as opposed to data gathered through structured interviews and surveys which is limited only to the answers to the questions asked, or as much as space will allow.

Focus Groups can also be a cost-effective way of gathering the opinion of the majority. If you choose your participants randomly, you don't need to ask every employee's take on the situation.

For a Focus Group Discussion to be effective, it's best to limit the number of participants to less than 10 people. Anything more and you sacrifice the fertilization of ideas (that is, the process of ideas building upon each other without straying from the topic). Anything less and you don't get a healthy debate or diverse points of view.

It's also important to carefully choose the focus group question (that is, the topic the group will discuss) and define from the very onset the parameters of the discussion so that the talks will never go outside of topic.

Focus Group Discussions can be an effective method to gather data about critical incidents in the workplace such has harassment and bullying. The relaxed and non-threatening atmosphere during Focus Group Discussions helps establish the rapport needed to approach sensitive topics. If controversial personalities are taken out of the group, then perhaps group members will feel freer in discussing their grievance.

Note that data gathered during Focus Group Discussions are still tentative and must not be considered as fact without further research

and analysis.

## Observations

When it comes to data that may negatively reflect on one's self or on other people, face-to-face interviews and written surveys may yield inaccurate results. If anything, these survey methods measure respondents' attitudes --- attitudes that don't necessarily translate to actual behaviour.

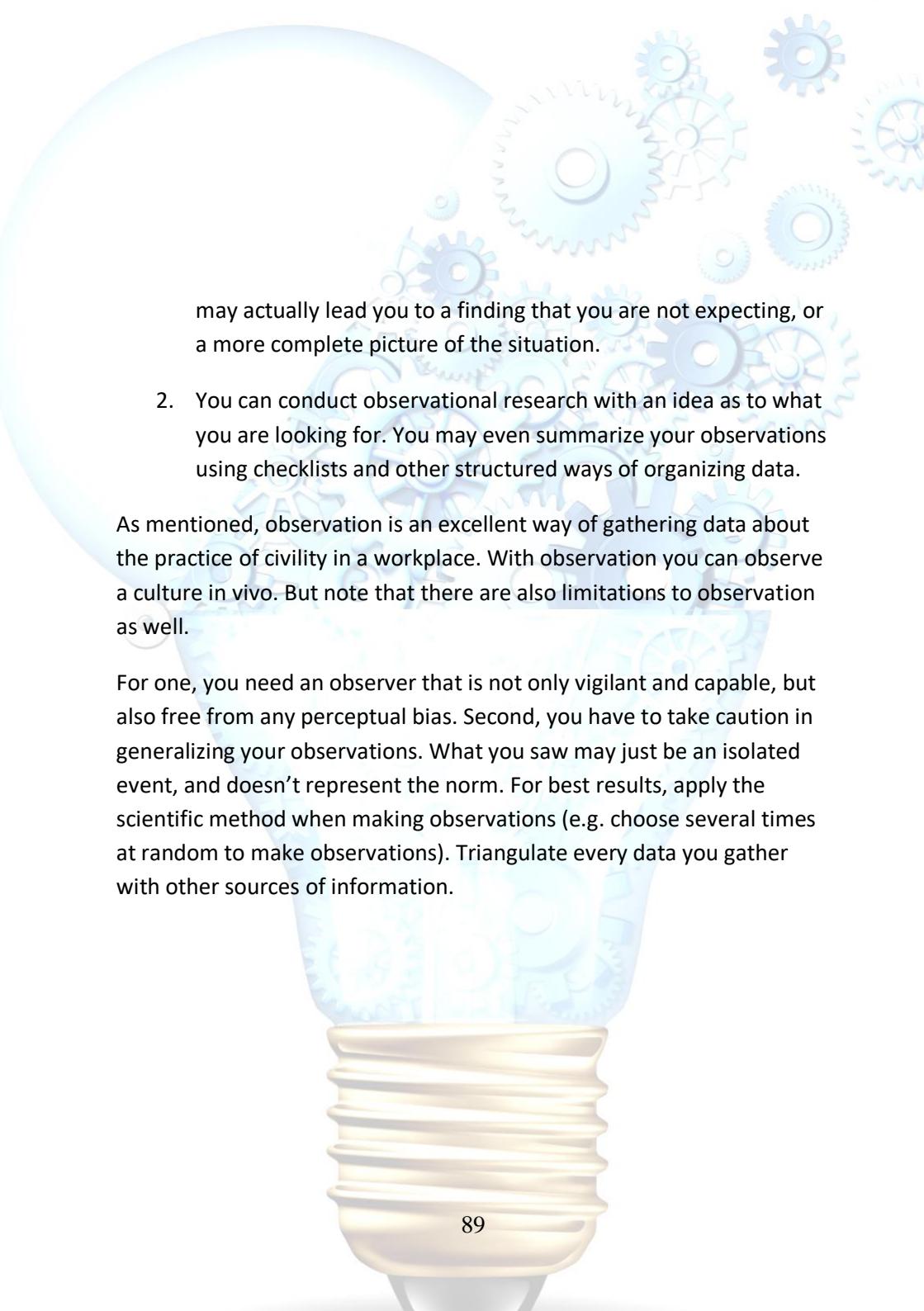
Second, there is also the element of consciously or unconsciously wanting to appear socially acceptable. Responses may skew to side of consistent civil behaviour, when in reality the opposite is true.

And lastly, there are actions that people are just not aware of, or considerations that survey respondents may not find relevant to mention. For example, an employee may be answering a customer's query wrongly all the time said employee thinks his or her answer is right.

To best gather data about the actual behaviours of persons in a workplace, observation as a research technique is recommended. You can observe various areas in the organization incognito, and see how employees react when they think that no one is watching. Or you can pretend to be a customer or visitor and see how you'll be treated.

There are two ways you can go about observation as a research methodology:

1. You can immerse yourself in the company culture and observe behaviours without any pre-conceived notions of what you're looking for or a working hypothesis to direct your study. This



may actually lead you to a finding that you are not expecting, or a more complete picture of the situation.

2. You can conduct observational research with an idea as to what you are looking for. You may even summarize your observations using checklists and other structured ways of organizing data.

As mentioned, observation is an excellent way of gathering data about the practice of civility in a workplace. With observation you can observe a culture *in vivo*. But note that there are also limitations to observation as well.

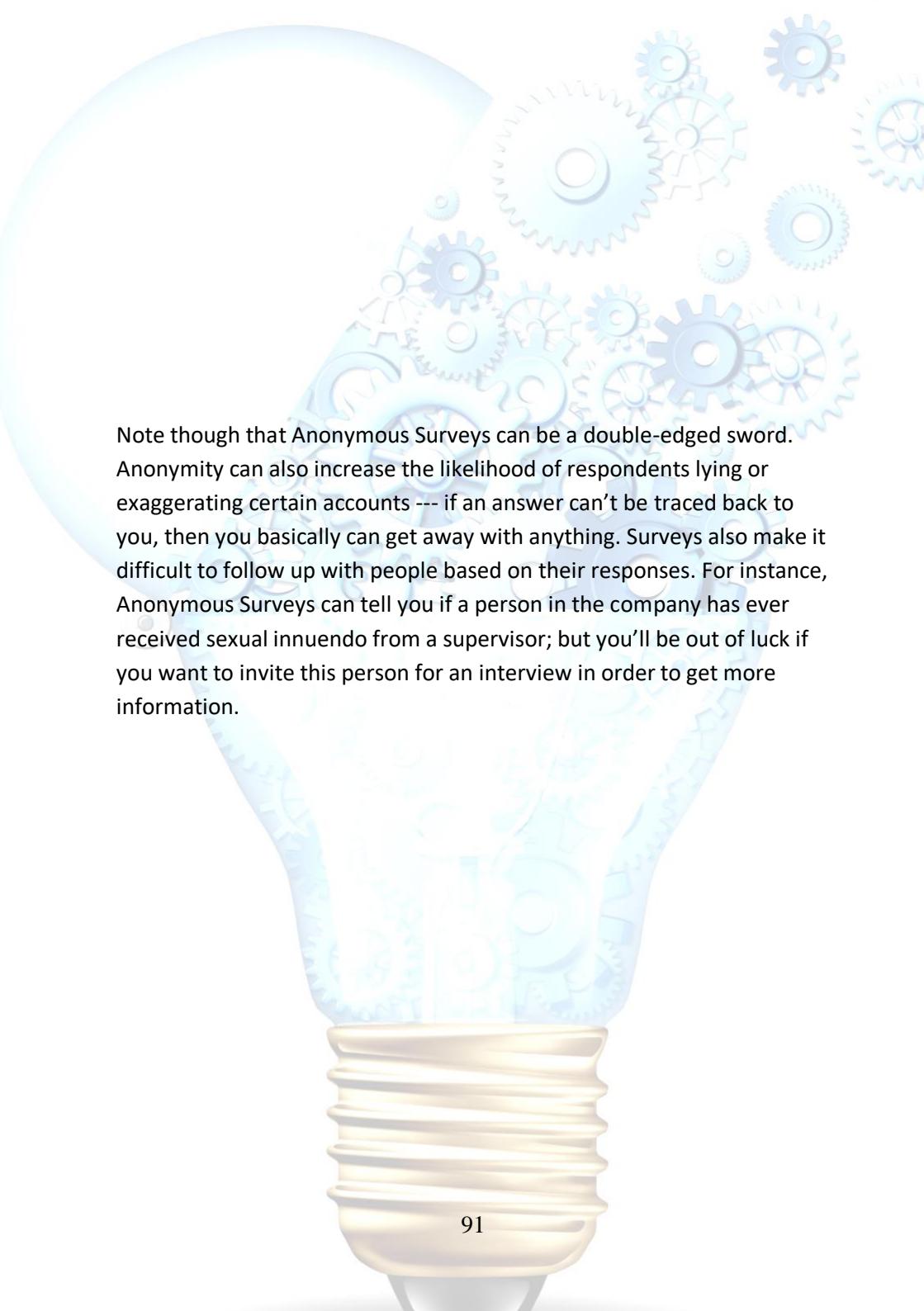
For one, you need an observer that is not only vigilant and capable, but also free from any perceptual bias. Second, you have to take caution in generalizing your observations. What you saw may just be an isolated event, and doesn't represent the norm. For best results, apply the scientific method when making observations (e.g. choose several times at random to make observations). Triangulate every data you gather with other sources of information.

## **Anonymous Surveys**

Anonymous Surveys, as the term implies, are written surveys or face-to-face interviews where the researcher and perhaps the reader of the final report is kept blind as to who gave the particular responses. A survey can be made anonymous by simply omitting space for the name of the respondent in the survey form. Anonymous surveys can also be conducted by asking a third-party consultant to conduct interviews.

Anonymous Surveys are highly recommended when gathering data about uncivil behaviour in the workplace. Respondents are not always willing to volunteer information about uncivil behaviour in a company for fear that instigators will get back at them for reporting their transgressions. Given that most instigators are persons in authority, being identified as a whistle-blower can result to getting fired or receiving a scathing performance review.

Anonymity can also encourage a respondent to provide responses that represent socially unacceptable behaviour. For instance, asking an employee whether or not they have ever delivered obscenities to a client can be tricky business; anonymity will make it more likely that a respondent will say yes.



Note though that Anonymous Surveys can be a double-edged sword. Anonymity can also increase the likelihood of respondents lying or exaggerating certain accounts --- if an answer can't be traced back to you, then you basically can get away with anything. Surveys also make it difficult to follow up with people based on their responses. For instance, Anonymous Surveys can tell you if a person in the company has ever received sexual innuendo from a supervisor; but you'll be out of luck if you want to invite this person for an interview in order to get more information.

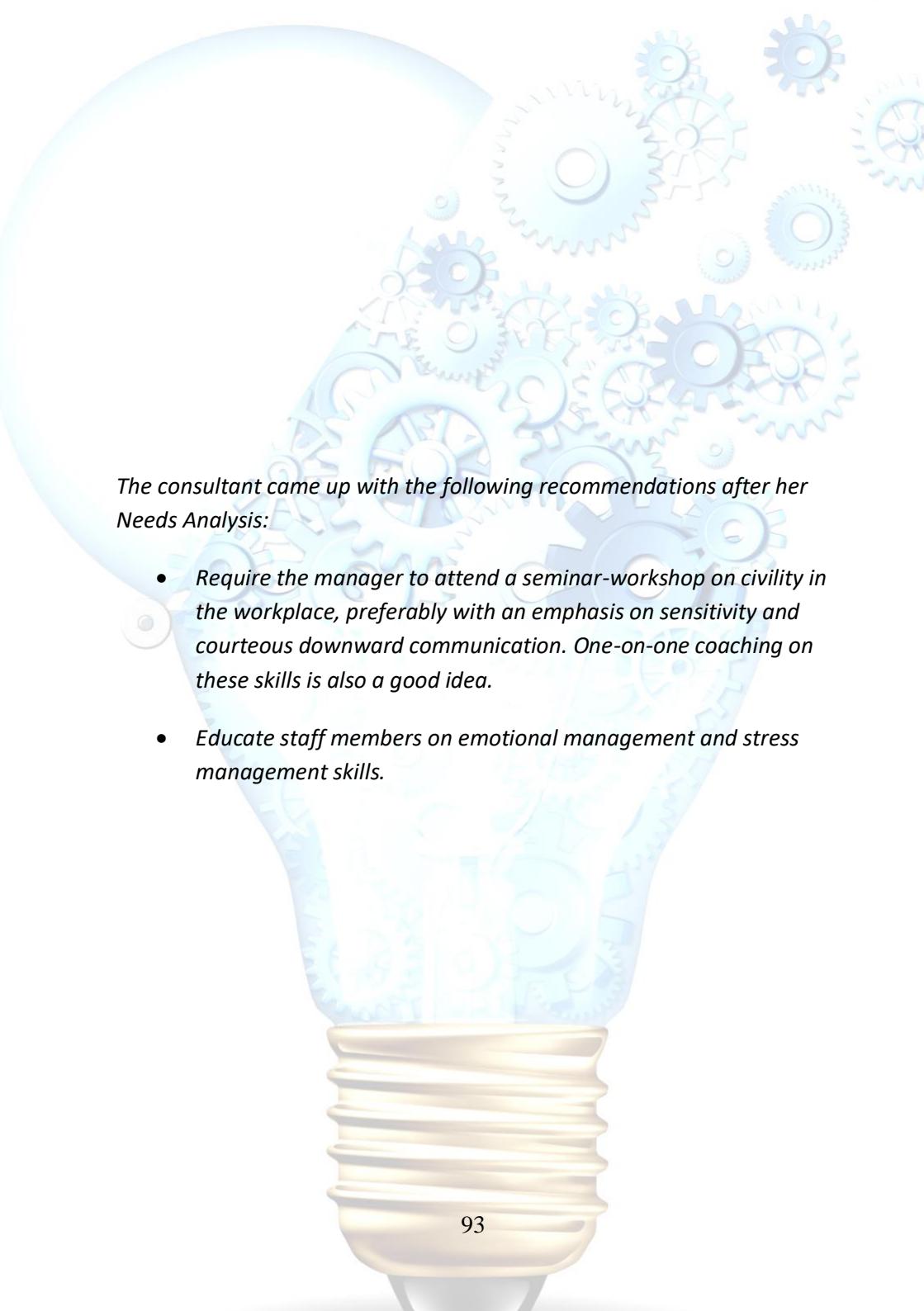
## **Practical Illustration**

*Company ABC has been referred to a training consultant because of the high rate of stress-related illness among its employees. The stress is hypothesized to be due to something happening in the organization, as the employees had lower stress levels before starting work for the company.*

*To assess training needs, the consultant asked every employee to accomplish a daily stress log for a period of 4 weeks. In the stress log, employees must document the stress symptom that they experienced, the exact time and place they experienced the symptom, and what was going on around them at the time. The consultant also interviewed the company physician to get his take on the situation.*

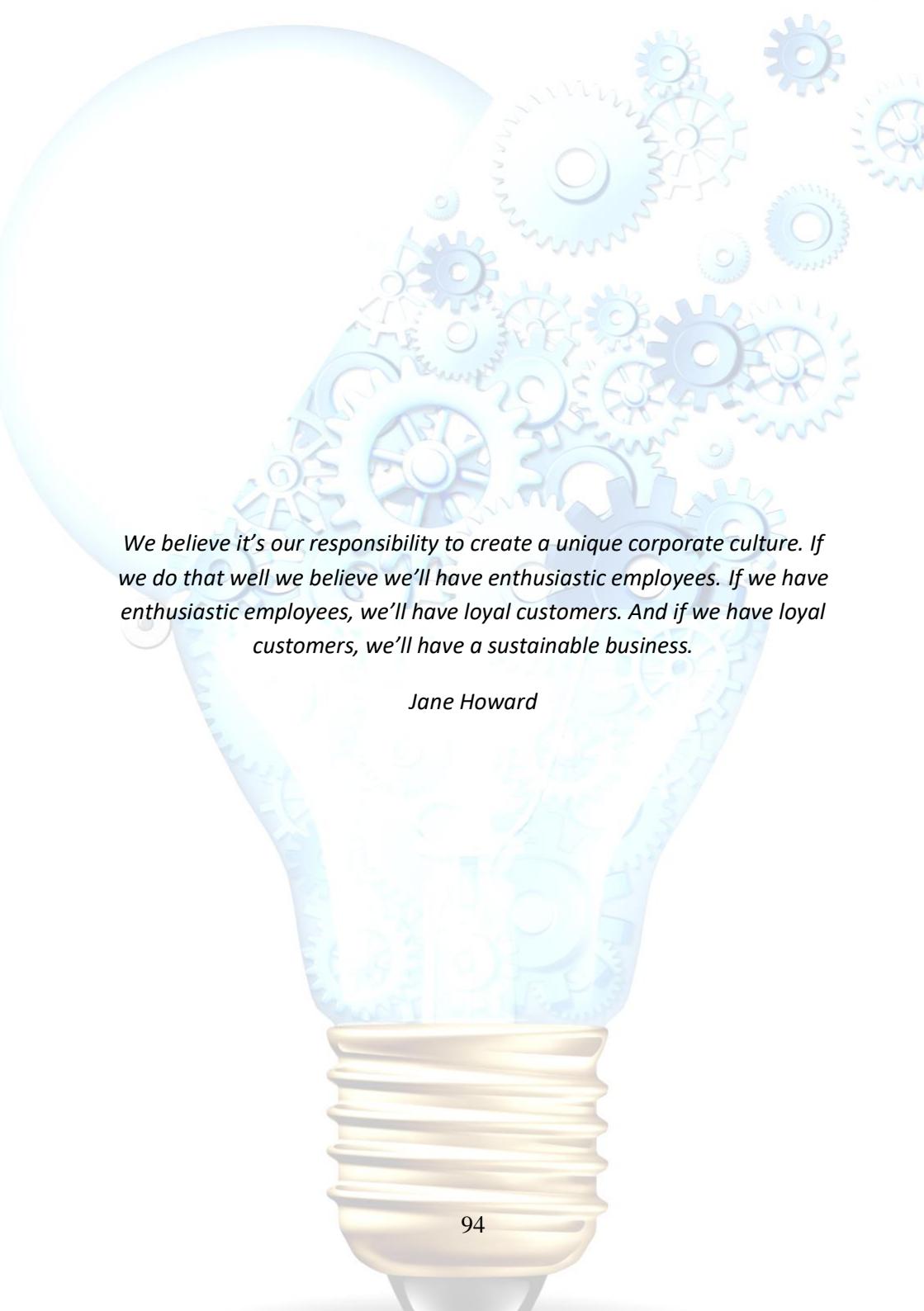
*From the stress diaries, it seemed that the most common trigger of stress among the employees is the presence of a particular supervisor. Follow-up interviews of the respondent reveal that said supervisor tends to shout orders at his staff, even when the staff is within distance that is conducive to a conversational tone. The supervisor also tends to get personal when it comes to his feedback. For example, he wouldn't hesitate to attack an employee's intelligence when judging his or her performance.*

*The interview with the physician confirmed that the employees' symptoms are more from emotional than physical stress.*



*The consultant came up with the following recommendations after her Needs Analysis:*

- *Require the manager to attend a seminar-workshop on civility in the workplace, preferably with an emphasis on sensitivity and courteous downward communication. One-on-one coaching on these skills is also a good idea.*
- *Educate staff members on emotional management and stress management skills.*



*We believe it's our responsibility to create a unique corporate culture. If we do that well we believe we'll have enthusiastic employees. If we have enthusiastic employees, we'll have loyal customers. And if we have loyal customers, we'll have a sustainable business.*

*Jane Howard*

## **Chapter Nine: Writing a Civility Policy**

Company 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 company policy. When an organization is serious in creating culture deeply rooted in civil behaviour, the latter is the better option to take. When expected behaviour from staff members is explicitly stated in the company manual, there is little room for second-guessing.

In this chapter, you will be introduced to civility policy as a tool in institutionalizing civil behaviour in the workplace.

### **Designating the Core Group**

When creating a policy on civility, a recommended first step is organizing a core group.

A core group is a team of people who will take charge of conceptualizing, writing, refining and sometimes implementing the company's policy on civility. Ideally, core group members represent the characteristics of the population; it's recommended to persons from the different rungs of the company ladder, of all ages and gender, in the core group. Doing so can guarantee that the opinions of the different sectors in the company will be represented.

There's no standard number of core group members. Core groups can start very small, but can grow over time. Ideally, the group should be small enough to facilitate a productive discussion, but big enough to serve a critical mass geared at organizational change. Core group members can be volunteers, elected by their peers or assigned by a

company supervisor.

The task of the core group goes beyond merely preparing a document. Core group members are envisioned to be advocates and change agents --- which is why they must strongly believe in the importance of civility in the workplace, and are known to be models of civil behaviour. They usually serve as trainers, who also train other trainers. Aside from participating in campaigns to increase the awareness of all about the new civility policy, core group members must be able to influence people by example.

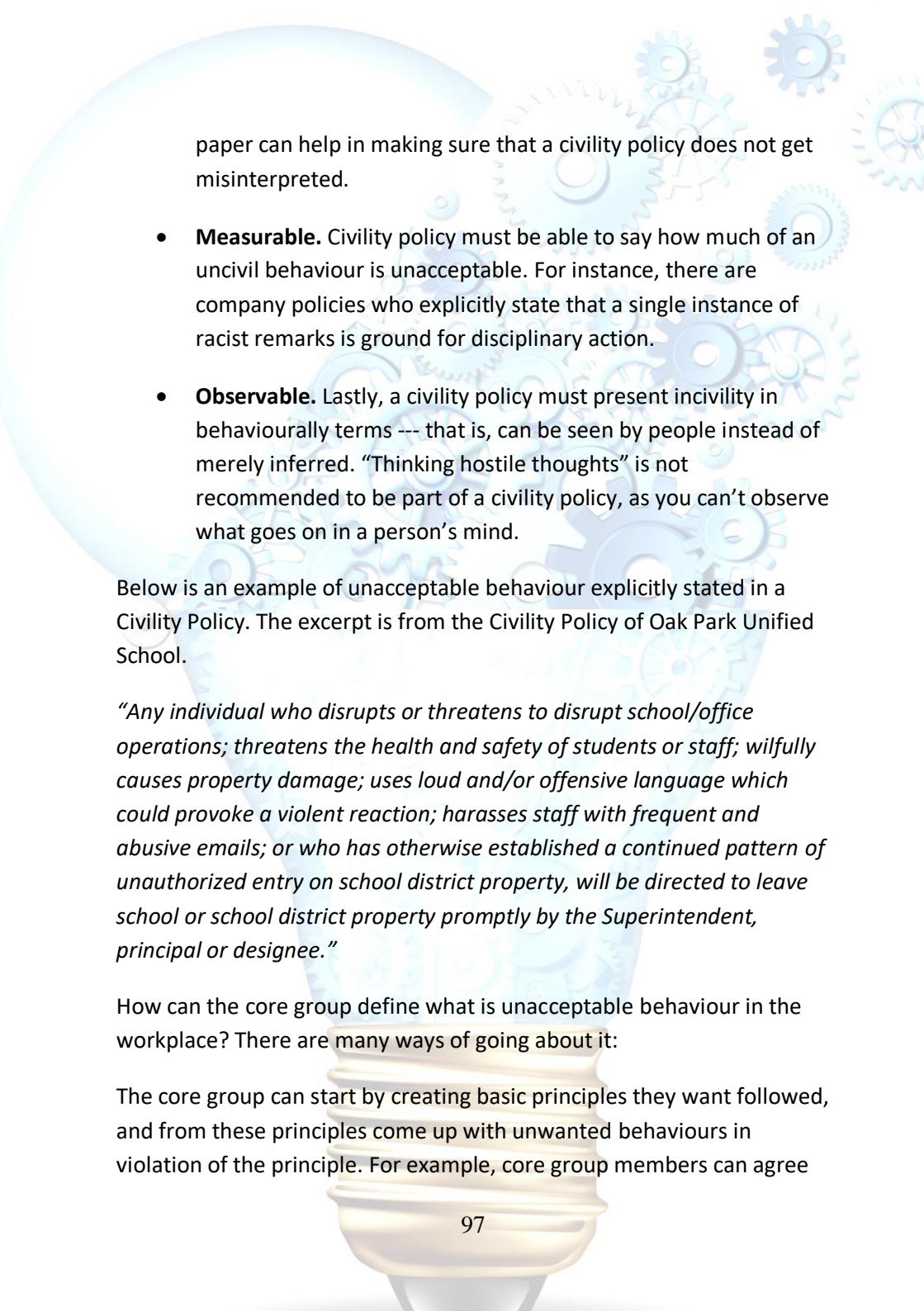
### Defining What is Unacceptable Behaviour

To be effective, a civility policy must contain what it considers to be unacceptable behaviour in the workplace.

While a generic, motherhood statement on the value of civility can be satisfactory, having incivility defined will make the policy easier for management to implement and for employees to follow. Stating outright that the company has a *zero-tolerance* policy on incivility will emphasize that civility is being taken seriously, and company members are required to toe the line.

When defining incivility in company policy, it's important to describe the unacceptable behaviour in specific, measurable, and observable terms.

- **Specific.** Civility policies must describe the unwanted behaviour in explicit and particular terms. For example, it's not just enough to say that the company will not tolerate rude behaviour. What constitutes rude behaviour? Does it include not answering a customer's question? How about the use of someone else's working area without permission? Getting these behaviours in



paper can help in making sure that a civility policy does not get misinterpreted.

- **Measurable.** Civility policy must be able to say how much of an uncivil behaviour is unacceptable. For instance, there are company policies who explicitly state that a single instance of racist remarks is ground for disciplinary action.
- **Observable.** Lastly, a civility policy must present incivility in behaviourally terms --- that is, can be seen by people instead of merely inferred. “Thinking hostile thoughts” is not recommended to be part of a civility policy, as you can’t observe what goes on in a person’s mind.

Below is an example of unacceptable behaviour explicitly stated in a Civility Policy. The excerpt is from the Civility Policy of Oak Park Unified School.

*“Any individual who disrupts or threatens to disrupt school/office operations; threatens the health and safety of students or staff; wilfully causes property damage; uses loud and/or offensive language which could provoke a violent reaction; harasses staff with frequent and abusive emails; or who has otherwise established a continued pattern of unauthorized entry on school district property, will be directed to leave school or school district property promptly by the Superintendent, principal or designee.”*

How can the core group define what is unacceptable behaviour in the workplace? There are many ways of going about it:

The core group can start by creating basic principles they want followed, and from these principles come up with unwanted behaviours in violation of the principle. For example, core group members can agree

that they want to promote the respect of a co-worker's property in their organization. The next step then is to identify particular behaviours that violate another employee's property.

The core group can begin by listing down all the uncivil behaviour that they don't want to see in their organization, include the behaviours that they feel must be added to the policy, and weed out those that represent greyer areas of assessment. Note that culture plays a role in what may be considered as civil or uncivil behaviour, and the core group must exert effort to create a policy that is culture-fair.

### Defining the Consequence

In order to give teeth to your civility policy, it's important to provide consequences for uncivil behaviour. After all, with repercussions, there is incentive to obey the policy. More importantly, consequences communicate that you mean business, that incivility is something that the company will not tolerate under any circumstances.

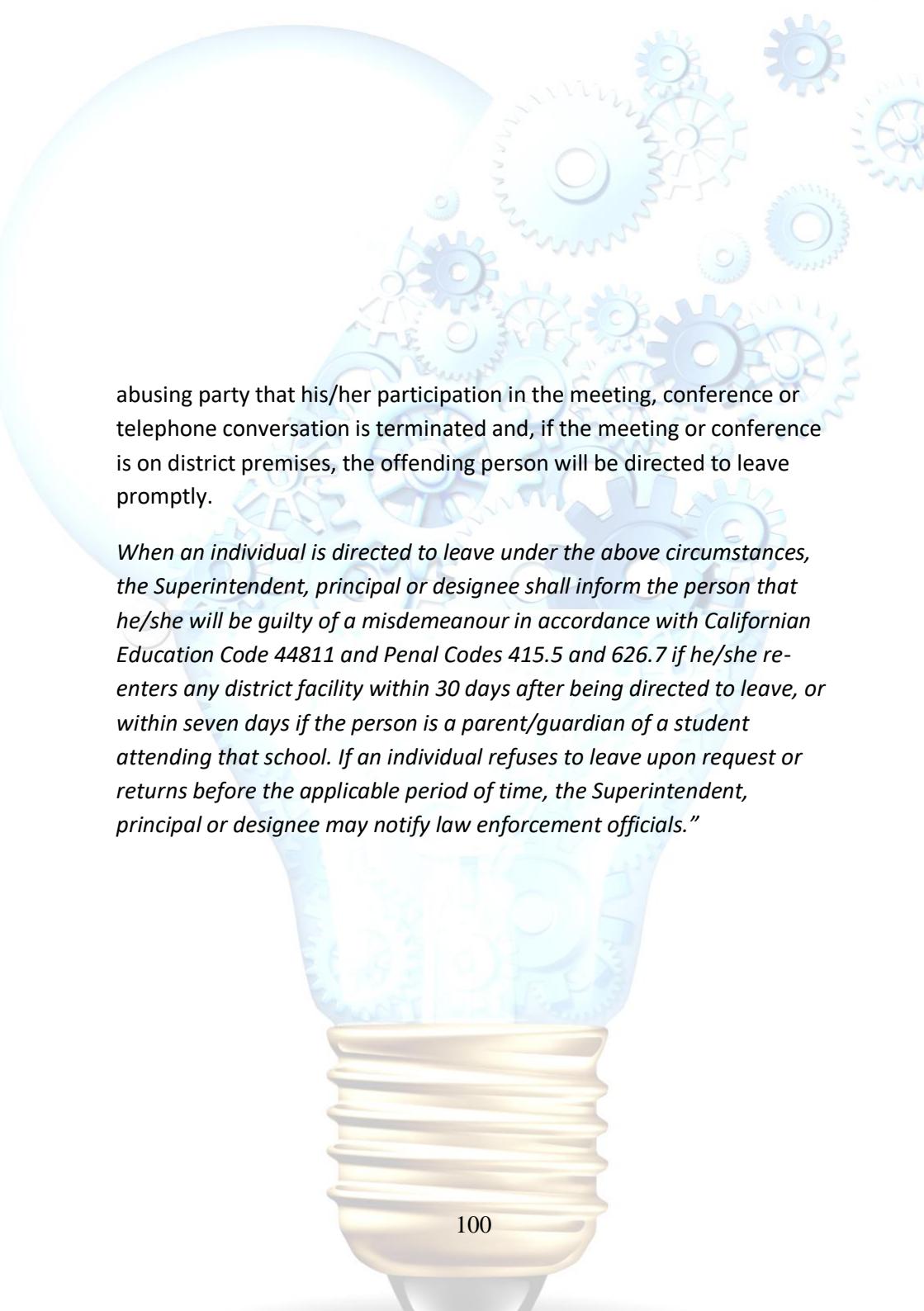
When defining consequences for incivility in company policy, there are three main things that you must consider:

1. **The consequence must be fit the offense.** Core group members tasked with writing a civility policy must always remember that civility exists in a spectrum; there are, of course, softer offenses and offenses that demand a strong response. Offenses that belong more to the latter category include those that relate to verbal, physical or sexual harassment and discrimination.
2. **There must be a ladder of escalation.** Like consequences for other work-related violations, it's very important that consequences for acts of incivility follow a ladder of escalation --

- that is, policy makers must consider the possibility that there are mitigating circumstances that make first offenses more understandable than second or third or even fourth ones. Perhaps the first instance of, say, using expletives when speaking to a co-worker would warrant a verbal warning, while the second instance a written warning explaining that similar behaviour in the future could result in possible termination. This way, companies don't just give their employees an opportunity to change, but it also provides room to study a situation before any irreversible action is taken.
- 3. **Consequences must conform to national and state law.** Lastly, when crafting consequences for incivility in the workplace, it's important to remember that every consequence must conform to national and state law. It's important, for example, to consider labour laws so that the right of employees against wrongful termination will be respected. The same goes with the employee's union's Collective Bargaining Agreement with the company. Similarly, since acts of harassment and discrimination are covered by state legislation, it's important that there are mechanisms that would support the immediate action of a company when these acts are found in their workplace.

Below is an example of consequences for uncivil behaviour explicitly defined in a Civility Policy. The excerpt is from the Civility Policy of Oak Park Unified School. (The paragraph below is a continuation of the paragraph presented in the previous section.)

"If any member of the public uses obscenities or speaks in a demanding, loud, insulting and/or demeaning manner, the administrator or employee to whom the remarks are directed will calmly and politely admonish the speaker to communicate civilly. If corrective action is not taken by the abusing party, the district employee will verbally notify the



abusing party that his/her participation in the meeting, conference or telephone conversation is terminated and, if the meeting or conference is on district premises, the offending person will be directed to leave promptly.

*When an individual is directed to leave under the above circumstances, the Superintendent, principal or designee shall inform the person that he/she will be guilty of a misdemeanour in accordance with Californian Education Code 44811 and Penal Codes 415.5 and 626.7 if he/she re-enters any district facility within 30 days after being directed to leave, or within seven days if the person is a parent/guardian of a student attending that school. If an individual refuses to leave upon request or returns before the applicable period of time, the Superintendent, principal or designee may notify law enforcement officials.”*

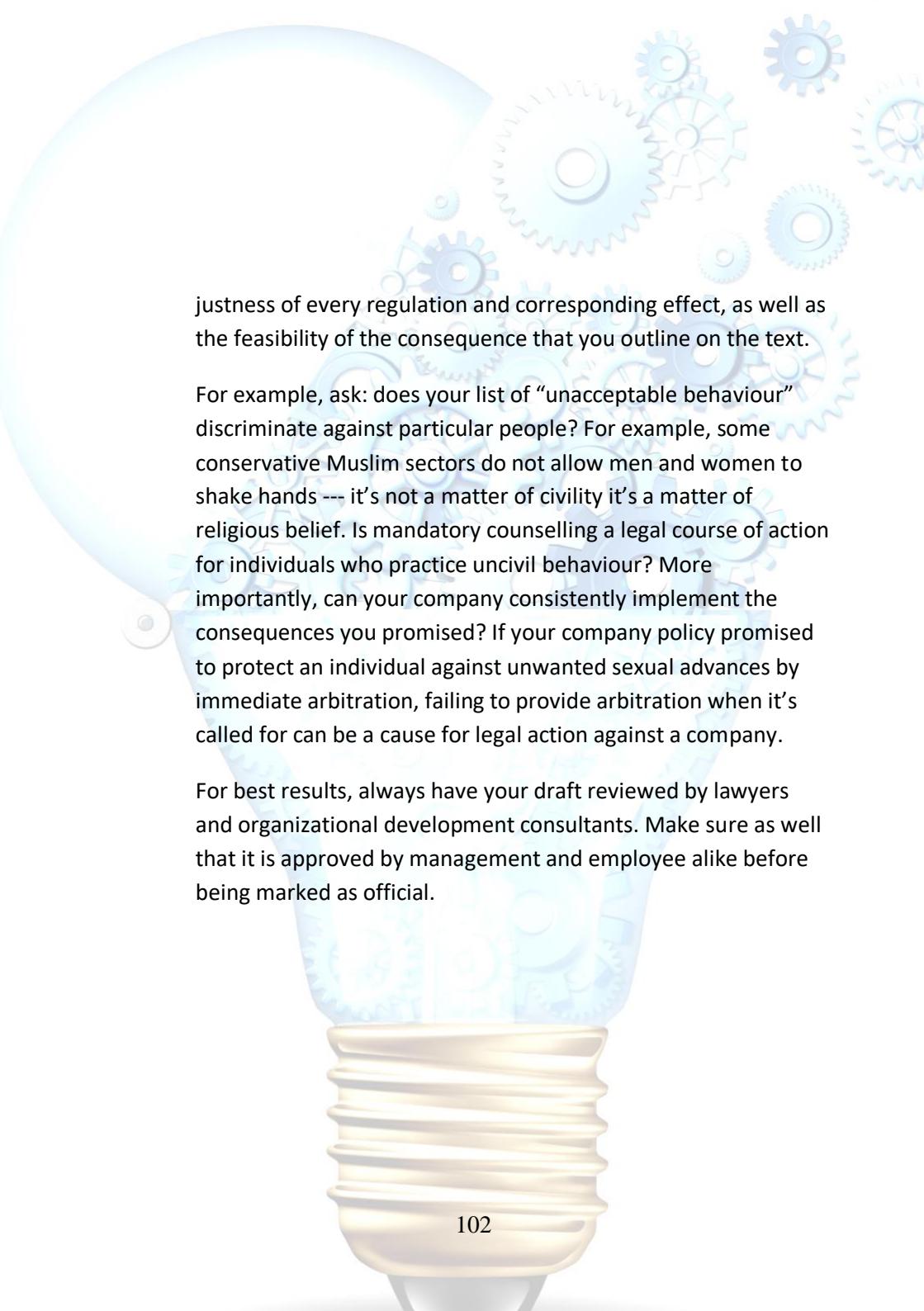
## Writing the Policy

The following are additional tips to consider when writing a civility policy in the workplace:

- **When writing a civility policy, begin by stating how important civility is to the organization.** A civility policy can begin with a statement of value, e.g. “Civility is valued here at Company ABC.” The value statement can be considered as part of the company’s mission and vision, and can serve as an easy-to-recall battle cry when promoting the advocacy within the organization.
- **Use language that is easy-to-understand, while still maintaining a firm and serious tone.** The language of a company policy must be layperson-friendly enough that it can be readily understood by both management and staff members regardless of rank and educational background.

For instance, there is nothing wrong with stating simply that the company “will not tolerate vulgar words and gestures”, then coming up with a fancier statement that mean that same thing. What’s important is that the unacceptable behaviour is defined clearly: following our guideline of being presented in a specific, measurable, and observable form, and that there is no doubt that the company has a very firm stance against said unacceptable behaviours.

- **Remember that company policy is basis for legal action.** Company policy is like a contract that not just prescribes behaviour but also serves as reference when action is needed, so do take writing the civility policy of your company seriously. Carefully discern the appropriateness of every word, and



justness of every regulation and corresponding effect, as well as the feasibility of the consequence that you outline on the text.

For example, ask: does your list of “unacceptable behaviour” discriminate against particular people? For example, some conservative Muslim sectors do not allow men and women to shake hands --- it’s not a matter of civility it’s a matter of religious belief. Is mandatory counselling a legal course of action for individuals who practice uncivil behaviour? More importantly, can your company consistently implement the consequences you promised? If your company policy promised to protect an individual against unwanted sexual advances by immediate arbitration, failing to provide arbitration when it’s called for can be a cause for legal action against a company.

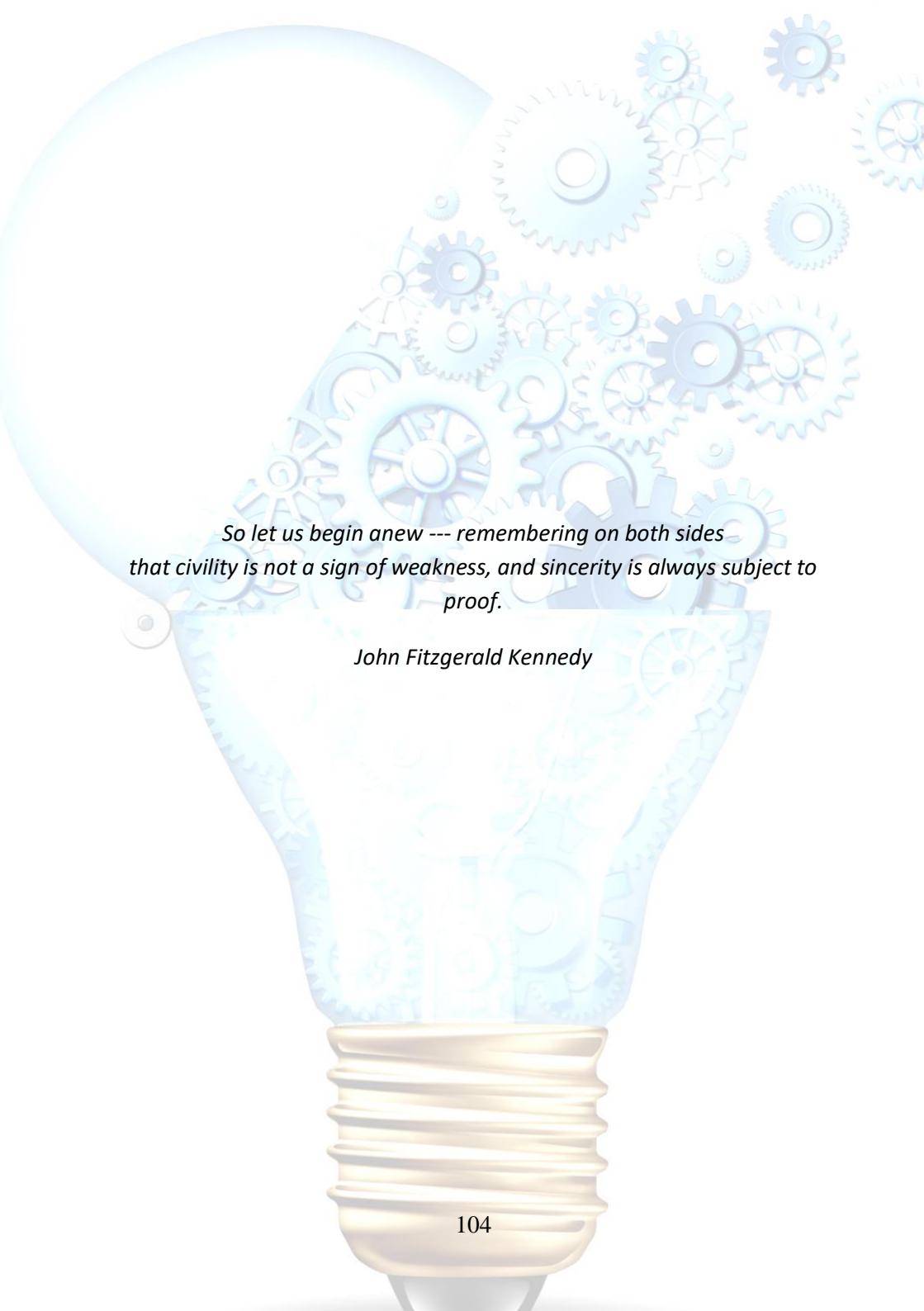
For best results, always have your draft reviewed by lawyers and organizational development consultants. Make sure as well that it is approved by management and employee alike before being marked as official.

## **Practical Illustration**

The following is an excerpt from the Administrative Policies and Procedures Manual of the Delaware Municipal Clerk of Court.

### ***Policy 19. Civil Workplace.***

*Civility is valued here. The Clerk of Court is dedicated to maintaining a workplace that is both productive and civil. An employee shall recognize his or her responsibility as a public servant. Employees must treat colleagues, co-workers, internal/external customers and the public with respect. Courteous and positive communication is expected; belittling, rude, hostile, and volatile behaviour will not be tolerated. Disagreements are to be settled by discussion and/or intervention by the Clerk of Court or designee. No employee shall act in a manner that disturbs the moral of other employees.*



*So let us begin anew --- remembering on both sides  
that civility is not a sign of weakness, and sincerity is always subject to  
proof.*

*John Fitzgerald Kennedy*

## **Chapter Ten: Implementing the Policy**

You've recognized the great value that civility can bring to your company. You've crafted a well-written Civility Policy. You have a core group that is enthusiastic and raring to go when it comes to spreading the advocacy. What next? Implementing the policy, of course.

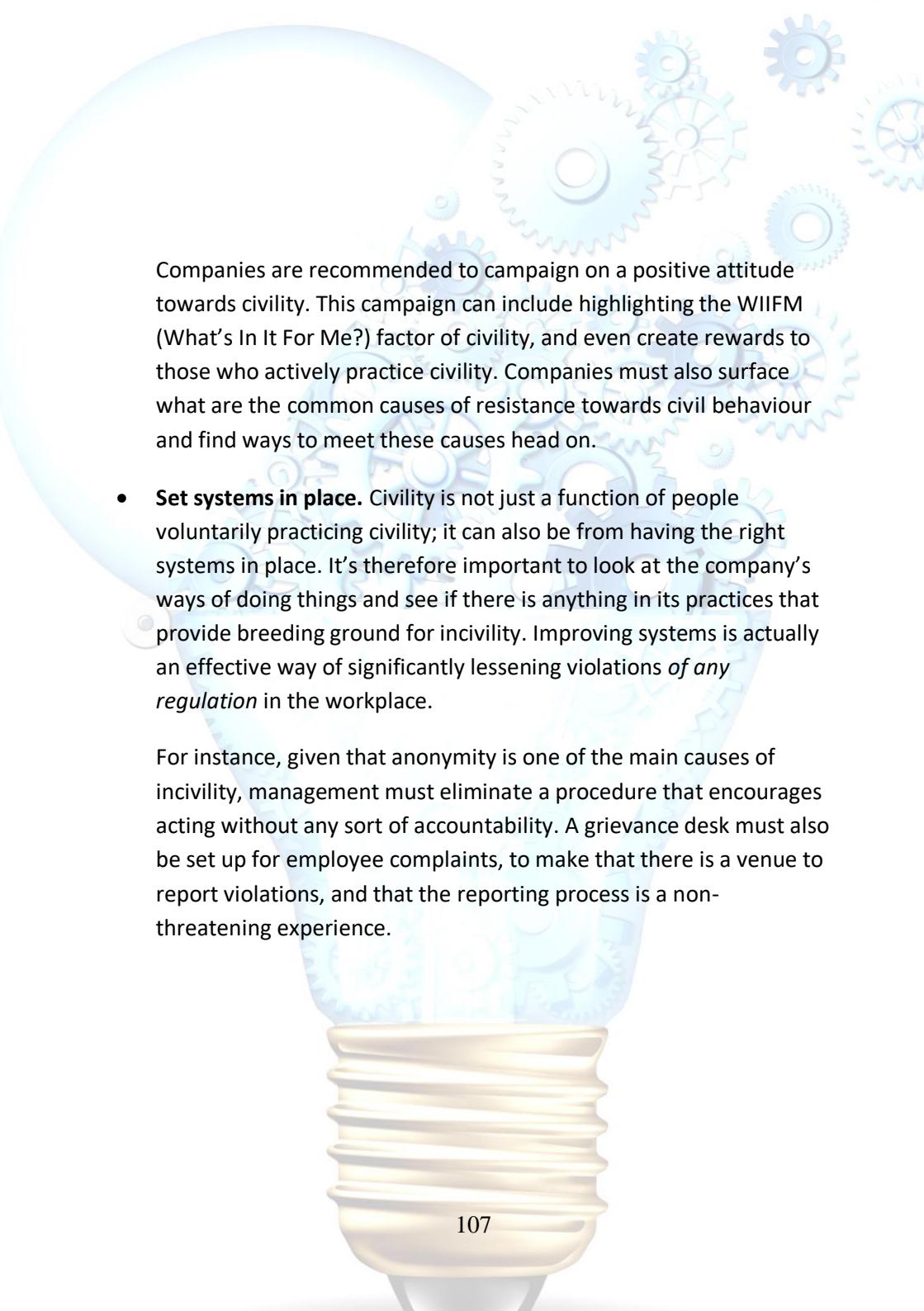
This Chapter discusses how companies and individual employees can go about putting all the positive valuing, planning, and policy-making around civility to action. The initial steps in implementing a civility policy, tips on training employees and managing complaints, as well ways on how to deal with violators will be presented.

### **The First Steps**

Every company policy, the policy on civility included, are only as good as the efforts toward its consistent implementation. After all, you can come up with a civility policy that looks good on paper, but if your core group is not even motivated to spread the word around, then all your hard work remains words on a manual. You need to strategically plan how you can go about making sure that civility policies translate to a culture of civil behaviour.

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 put it into action. You have to spread the word around. There are many possible ways you can raise awareness about civility within your company:
  - You can schedule a presentation of the new company 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 prerequisite 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.



Companies are recommended to campaign on a positive attitude towards civility. This campaign can include highlighting the WIIFM (What's In It For Me?) factor of civility, and even create rewards to those who actively practice civility. Companies must also surface what are the common causes of resistance towards civil behaviour and find ways to meet these causes head on.

- **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 company's ways of doing things and see if there is anything in its practices that provide breeding ground for incivility. 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 incivility, management must eliminate a procedure that encourages acting without any sort of accountability. A grievance desk must also be set up for employee complaints, to make that there is a venue to report violations, and that the reporting process is a non-threatening experience.

## **Training**

As mentioned in a previous chapter, continuous education and training is critical if you want to see concrete changes within a system like a company.

There are many reasons why training is important:

- For one, awareness and attitude change needs to be supported by ability. You can wholeheartedly believe the idea that offering greetings is important in developing great working relationships, but if you have no skills on how to greet properly, you will not be able to live out your attitudes.
- Second, there are skills that need to be built upon the successful practice of other skills, making training on these pre-requisites imperative. For example, a seminar-workshop on effective communication is recommended to go hand-in-hand with sensitivity training if the issue being addressed is communicating effectively with members ethnic minorities.

The section on needs analysis has a list of training topics that can help in building civility in the workplace.

## **Addressing Complaints**

So far, what we have discussed are tips on implementing a civility policy that are prevention in nature. But what must be done when an actual incident of incivility has already taken place, and particular organization members have a complaint?

Consider the following tips on how to address complaints about incivility 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 company 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 incivility (e.g. harassment, bullying), opt to encourage workers to settle their dispute on their own.** Settling a dispute without involving company administration can come in the form of a dialogue or even through counselling 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 counsellor/coach who can help the complainant navigate his or her issues effectively.

- **If the issue has reached the point when company 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 company's written civility policy, e.g. first offense for a minor act of incivility 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 company 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 company policy are dealt with differs from company to company. The following, however, are some ways you can handle violations in your company:

- **Supervision.** Instead of punishing a violator, you provide coaching and modelling of acceptable behaviour. 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 behaviour. 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 effective in managing behaviour.
- **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.

## **Practical Illustration**

The following case account is an illustration of the successful implementation of a civility program. The case is that of the Speak Your Peace Project designed to manage uncivil behaviour during city council and county commission meetings in Wisconsin.

A detailed account of this case is found at

<http://www.htklatzky.com/speak-your-peace>. Below is short summary.

*In order to address the rampant cases of shouting behaviour laced with ad hominem during city council and county commission meetings, a group of leaders from Wisconsin named the Millennium Group launched the “Speak Your Peace” program. The program has the tag line “It’s not what you say. It’s how you say it.”*

*A huge part of the program is a campaign to educate elected officials and the general public on tools of civility including listening skills, respect, and responsibility. The group produced informational materials in print, electronic, and broadcast medium. They even produced a song for the campaign. The campaign was supported by local media and reached a considerable number of the program’s target audience.*

## Closing Thoughts

- **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.
- **Sir David Hare:** This feeling, finally, that we may change things - this is at the centre of everything we are. Lose that... lose everything.