Building Civility and Collegiality in Higher Ed.

CUPA - HR

Responsible organizations manage employee conduct issues such as sexual harassment, threats of violence and other egregious behaviors through reliance on policy and procedures that have become well defined over time. However, there are many forms of inappropriate behaviors in the workplace that cannot be so readily regulated.

These are the uncivil behaviors to which employees are subjected every day. No list can be exhaustive, but includes general rudeness; malicious gossip and "water cooler" talk; subtle, non-verbal expressions of disrespect; nasty and abrasive e-mails; harsh and abusive language; inappropriate humor; and manipulative and passive aggressive behaviors. Even the failure to say "good morning" or "thank you" can be interpreted as uncivil if part of a consistent pattern of rudeness and disregard for others.

For many of these behaviors, organizational policies are either unclear or silent, leaving organizations in a quandary over how to respond. Are there any solutions?

Common Sense Approaches to Every Day Challenges

What is Civility?

What is Civility?

1) connected with citizenship, a community of citizens collectively;
2) behavior proper to the intercourse of civilized people;
3) ordinary courtesy or politeness, as opposed to rudeness of behavior;
4) decent respect, consideration;
5) an act or expression of politeness;
6) decency, seemliness

Oxford English Dictionary (2nd. ed.)

What Civility Involves

- Citizenship

- Community

- Civil Discourse

- More than manners

Civility Involves

- **Mutuality**: "By treating you the best way I know how, I appeal to the best in you, urging you to do the same." (Forni, 2002, 27)

- **Moral choices**: "Civility . . . is the sum of the many sacrifices we are called to make for the sake of living together. We should make sacrifices for others not simply because doing so makes social life easier (although it does), but as a signal of respect for our fellow citizens. . ." (Carter, 1998, 11)

- **Skills and practice**: "[Civility is] the set of verbal and non-verbal behaviors reflecting fundamental respect for others and generating harmonious and productive relationships. . . . [It] is observable [and] practical." (Troester & Sargent Mester, 2007, 10)

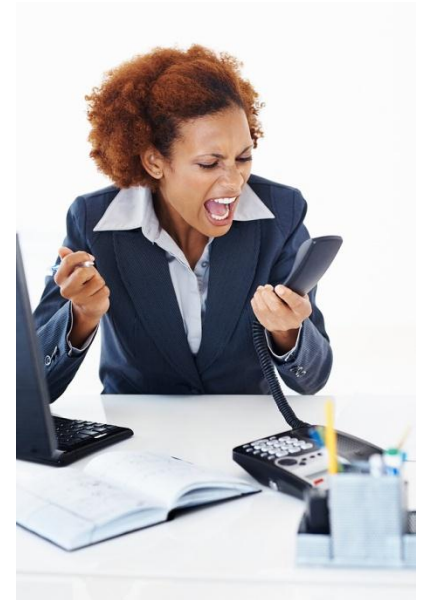# *What are Uncivil Workplace Behaviors?*

Uncivil Workplace Behaviors
One Definition

Uncivil workplace behaviors are:
- Low-intensity
- Deviant behaviors
- With ambiguous intent to harm the target
- In violation of workplace norms for mutual respect (Anderson, Pearson, 1999)

- Examples: Rude, discourteous behaviors that display a lack of regard for others

Uncivil Behaviors

- Passive Incivilities (what we don't do, e.g., don't say "Good Morning," "Please," etc.)

- Subtle disrespect (non-verbal/para-verbal messages)

- Breaches of etiquette, common courtesy

- Pet peeves (e.g., microwave/copy machine issues)

Uncivil Behaviors

- General rudeness (noisiness, disruption, disrespect, condescension, arguing, etc.)

- Gossip (e.g., water-cooler talk about absent third-parties)

- Inappropriate electronic communication (email, texting, etc.)

- Verbally abusive behaviors (foul language, defamatory and accusatory remarks, etc.)

Uncivil Behaviors

- Actions not otherwise proscribed by policy (e.g., some privacy and ethical violations, culturally insensitive remarks)

- Potential issues of bullying and harassment (first time incidents, issues more amenable to quick correction, etc.)

Why Focus on Workplace Civility?

Why Focus on Workplace Civility

Workplace Incivility is Serious. Organizations can start addressing everyday incivility by first recognizing the serious issue that it is.

Why Focus on Civility

Impact on Women and Minorities
- ▫ Discriminatory conduct has become "covert"
- ▫ Many forms of incivility suggest discrimination

Basic Management Theory/Practice
- ▫ Employees want to be partners, not "subordinates"
- ▫ Younger generations expect civil environments

Why Focus on Civility

- *Broken Windows Theory*
  - Small infractions lead to more severe conduct

- *Impact on Performance*
  - In survey of people reporting on rudeness at work:
    - 48% decreased work effort
    - 80% lost work time worrying about the incident
    - 63% lost time avoiding the offender
      (Porath, Pearson, 2009)

How Do We Typically Respond to Workplace Incivility?

Typical Responses…

- Implement policy and procedures to address specific offenses (actual or anticipated)
- Progressive discipline
- Negative ratings/remarks in performance reviews
- Impose sanctions as outcome of formal investigatory and adjudicatory processes
- Training focused on "do's" and "don'ts" and reinforcement of adverse consequences

Theme: Reliance on policy and procedure

Questions to Ponder

- Are these responses effective for managing uncivil behaviors?

- Is civility "enforceable?"

Obedience to the Unenforceable

(*Term used by Lord John Fletcher Moulton, British Judge, to refer to the "Domain of Manners" (1924))

Three Domains

1. *Domain of Positive Law*: ". . .[O]ur actions are prescribed by laws binding upon us which must be obeyed."
2. *Domain of Free Choice*: ". . . [T]hose actions as to which we claim and enjoy complete freedom."
3. Between these domains is the *Domain of Manners*:

"I prefer to look at it as all one domain of obedience to the unenforceable. The obedience is the obedience of a man to that which he cannot be forced to obey. He is the enforcer of the law upon himself."
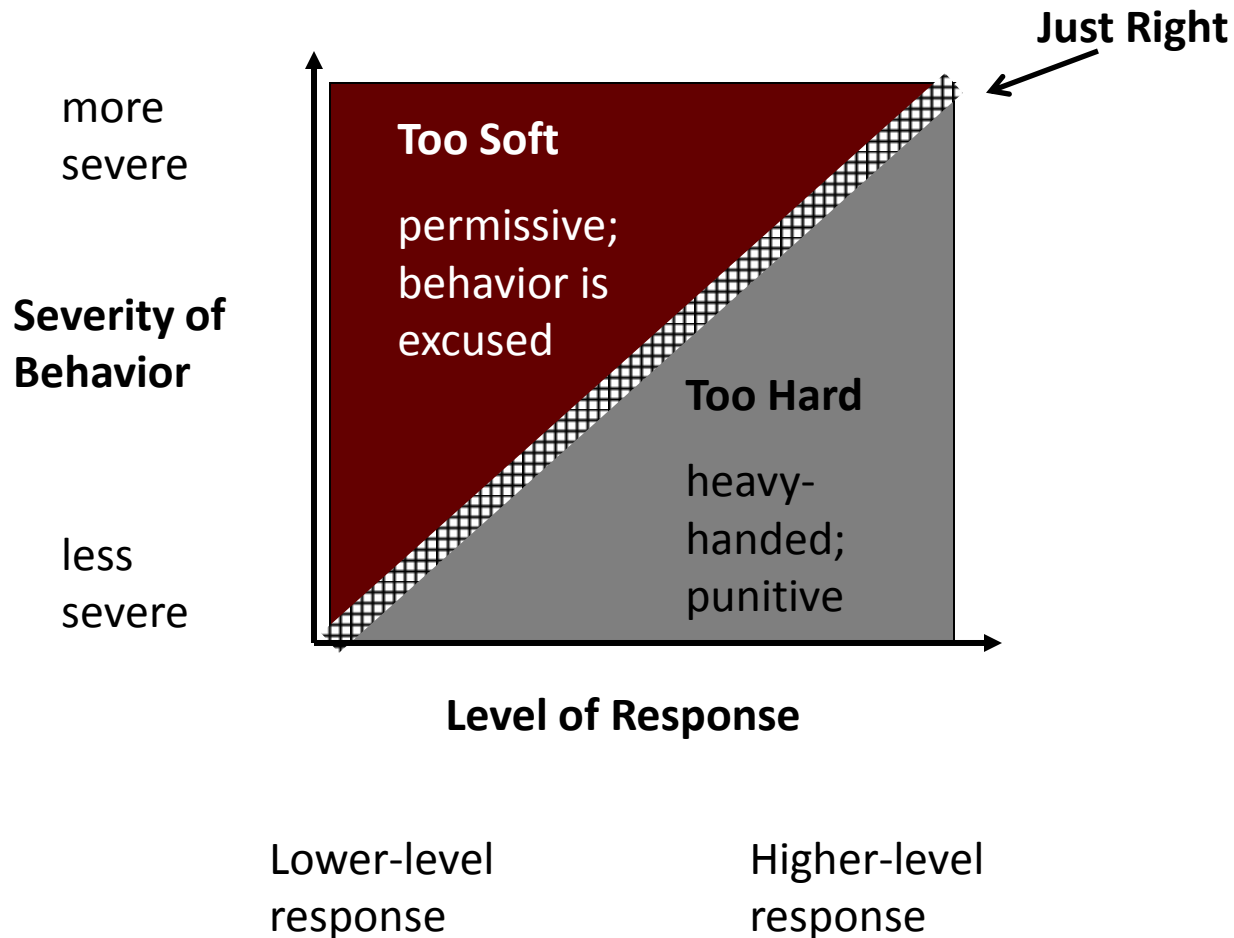
The Goldilocks Theory for "Enforcing" Civility

1. The bed is <u>too hard</u> (punitive)
   - "The rules" applied harshly for conduct that doesn't warrant such action

2. The bed is <u>too soft</u>   (permissive)
   - No action taken in the absence of clear "rules"

3. The bed is <u>just right</u>
   - Proper balance between rules and common sense to address uncivil conduct as warranted

The Goldilocks Theory for "Enforcing" Civility

Too Hard

Just Right

Too Soft

Rules, Rules, Rules – Applied to every situation, no matter how inapplicable

Self-Regulatory Measures – Balance between rules and the commonsense, goodwill and judgment of individuals

Abdication and permissiveness in the absence of clear rules and guidance

Choosing the Right Response

Just Right

more severe

Severity of Behavior

less severe

Too Soft

permissive; behavior is excused

Too Hard

heavy-handed; punitive

Level of Response

Lower-level response
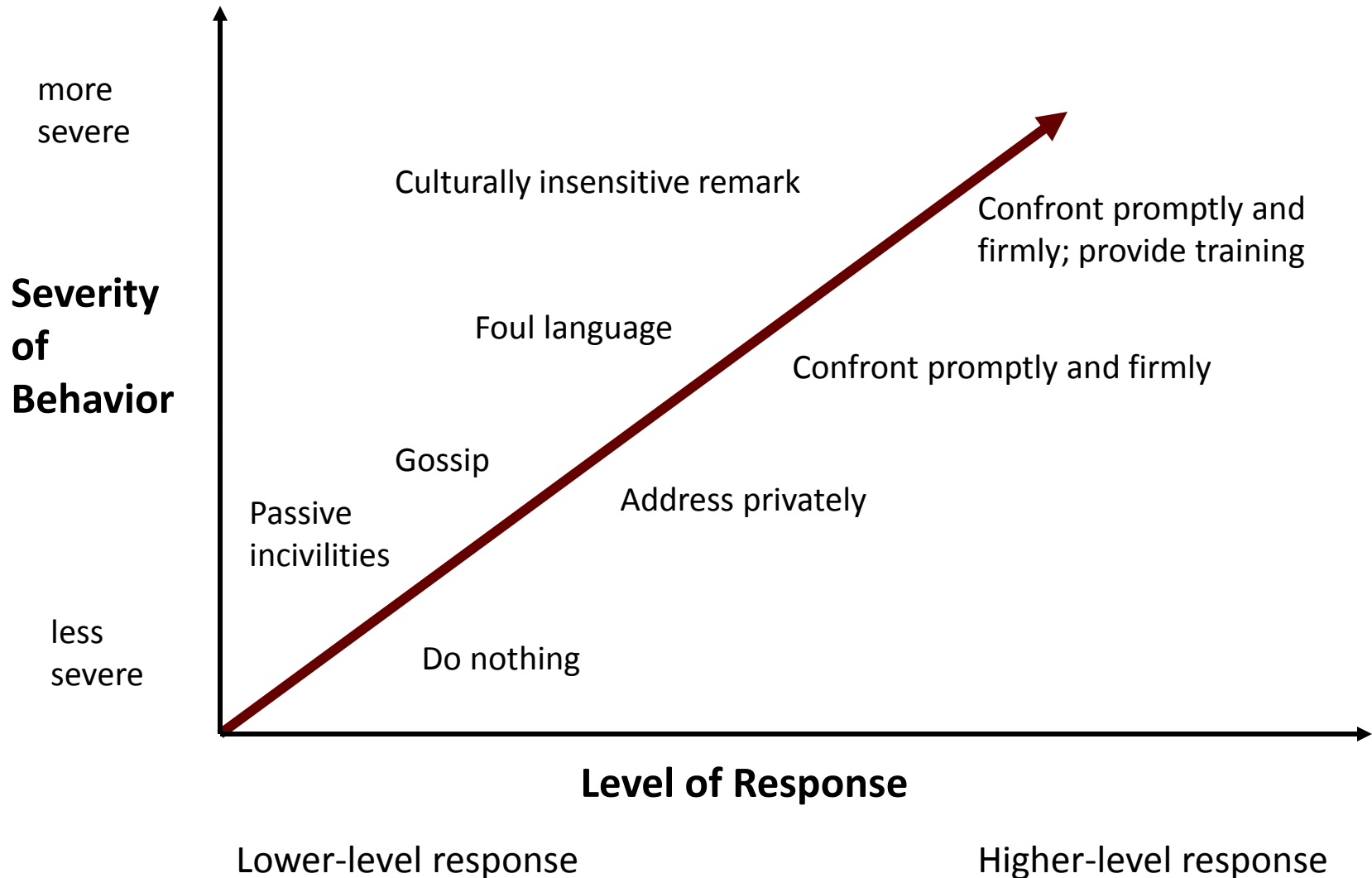
Higher-level response

"Self-Regulatory" Measures

- Do <u>nothing</u>
- Establish <u>"house rules"</u> and discuss situations as they arise
- Offer <u>support</u> and <u>counsel</u> to help person change behavior
- Impose <u>social consequences</u>
- <u>Confront</u> behavior in supportive manner and <u>insist</u> on change
- <u>Seek help</u> from <u>manager</u> who intervenes
- Seek third party to <u>counsel</u>, <u>mediate</u>
- Provide training focused on <u>scenario</u> discussion & <u>problem-solving</u>

Every Incivility Requires a Response

more severe

Severity of Behavior

Culturally insensitive remark

Confront promptly and firmly; provide training

Foul language

Confront promptly and firmly

Gossip

Address privately

Passive incivilities

less severe

Do nothing

Level of Response

Lower-level response

Higher-level response

What are Some Organizational Strategies for Fostering Civility?

Strategy 1: Discuss Crucial Civility Issues with Team

- Before Incidents or Situations Arise
  - Discuss how team demonstrates stated values expressed in policies, service standards, etc.
  - Discuss workplace environment and areas for improvement
  - Walk through hypothetical situations

- When Incident is Occurring
  - Jump in immediately to address behavior and avoid escalation
  - Engage in appropriate crucial conversations

- After Incident or Situation has Occurred
  - Remind team members of values they agreed to respect and abide
  - Discuss what occurred and how to respond differently next time
  - Stress non-punitive learning environment for discussions

Strategy 2: Impose Appropriate Social Consequences

- Send implicit messages that offenders are not welcome and will feel uncomfortable by continuing their uncivil behaviors

- *Examples:*
  - Send message that good humor and polite interaction are where the "fun" is
  - Ignore lesser forms of incivility aimed at getting your attention (it may go away on its own)
  - Allow team members to correct offenders in the natural course of team interactions
  - Highlight team members who model civility

Strategy 3: Develop Conflict-capable Employees

- Develop proficiency in providing assistance with workplace conflict, climate assessments, etc.
- Provide opportunities for managers and employees to develop skills in:
  - Listening, interpersonal communication
  - Difficult conversations
  - Conflict coaching
  - Mediation and group conflict facilitation
- Goal: Create capability throughout organization rather than solely among "specialists"

Strategy 4: Pursue "Second Chance" Options

When conduct is less "enforceable:"

- Resist "knee jerk" reactions to impose formal discipline
- Counsel employee and set clear expectation that behavior must change to avoid discipline
- Continue counseling when employee is making sincere efforts to improve
- When behavior improves, ensure "clean slate" and restore employee to "good conduct" status

Rationale for Avoiding Discipline (if possible)

- Discipline implies control and removes employee's free choice to change behavior

- Employees tend to fight discipline

- Discipline suggests that second chances are not possible

Strategy 5: Evaluate Existing Discipline & Grievance Processes

- Employees often want to avoid making "a federal case" out of matters
  - Do existing policies allow for informal resolution processes?

- Consider more flexible procedures that avoid harsh outcomes that often occur through formal policies:
  - Consultation
  - Counseling
  - Mediation

Strategy 6: Adopt "Jerk" Avoidance Strategies

- Adopt a "no jerk rule"
- Include clear standards for leadership, citizenship, etc. in job descriptions, postings, etc. Evaluate accordingly.
- Advise hiring managers and actively participate in search process
- Use multiple evaluators
- Challenge candidates with behavioral-based questions
- Pass on candidate if background/character checks leave the slightest doubt

Further "Jerk" Avoidance Strategies

- Upon hire, make expectations for good behavior and citizenship clear immediately (e.g., new employee orientation)
- Support new hires as they begin work in challenging environments
- Include civility and citizenship standards in performance reviews
- Take full advantage of probationary periods
- If discipline becomes necessary, use it consistently and follow through

Strategy 7: Incorporate Civility Content into Training

- Don't do traditional etiquette training with lists of "dos" and "don'ts"
- Incorporate scenario discussions and exercises focused on problem-solving
- Compliance training - Help managers:
  - Distinguish between situations requiring policy enforcement vs. "self-regulatory" measures
  - Understand when to confer with HR, EEO, other offices and when there is more leeway
  - Make choices and find solutions beyond compliance measures

Strategy 8:
Develop a Statement of Civility

- In our organization/team:
  - We value . . .
  - "Civility" means . . .
  - We affirm . . .
  - We oppose or reject . . .
  - Civility is demonstrated by . . .
- An aspirational statement, not a policy document
- Policy-sounding statement could be interpreted as infringing on student/faculty free speech rights

Key Points to Remember

- The **challenge**: Uncivil behaviors are serious and require as much attention as more egregious behaviors
- The **approach**: Uncivil behaviors often require different responses than what "the rules" allow
- The **solution**:
  - "Self-regulatory" responses that can more effectively address uncivil conduct
  - Organizational strategies that foster a climate for civility