



CIVILITY AND RESPECT: A BEHAVIORAL SPECTRUM

Guidelines for Using the Civility Spectrum

The Civility Spectrum was developed over the course of several years, as a result of working with people who have experienced racial and ethnic harassment or have sought assistance for incivility and harassment. The “Spectrum” presents specific behaviors as part of a continuum of behaviors, a concept that most people are able to understand and identify with, given their experience with the positive and negative sides of civility in organizational life. The following paragraphs provide a guide for reading the Civility Spectrum and may be used for training purposes.

Respect, the Keystone

In this model, the focus is on respect, the keystone of civil behavior. Civility is not to be confused with proforma politeness, formality, the use of titles, or adherence to rules. Civility is grounded in respect, an attitude that knows no cultural boundaries and is not dependent on hierarchy. Civil Behavior is engendered by respect and by an attitude of inclusiveness. For example, someone who is respectful automatically acknowledges the presence of a new person or greets his or her coworkers in a genuine way each day. People, who are asked, not told, feel that they are respected and that their human dignity is being affirmed. When respect is present, concerns are more easily expressed and accepted.

The Civility Spectrum represents a range of behaviors that occur in organizational life. When using the “Spectrum” to evaluate or identify behavior, it is important to remember that human interactions are not always unidirectional. It is possible for the behavior of either or both parties to vacillate back and forth in any section of the “Spectrum.” In moving through the “Spectrum,” one starts with “respect,” the center or keystone of all human interactions. Moving to the right from the center one can see the stages of positive interaction that occur in a relationship when respect is present. Each step sets the state for the next level of interaction in the relationship.

- Tolerance and Inclusion: Differences are tolerated and are not used as a basis of exclusion from the group.
- Cultivation, Interest and Caring: A relationship is cultivated with the other person(s), in which both interest and caring are present.
- Sympathy and Empathy: There is a sense of sympathy and empathy for painful experiences, whether they occur in the organization or at home.
- Mutuality and Dialogue: There is a mutual give and take between people, who dialogue with one another.
- Collaboration and Partnership: There is a willingness to collaborate and to work together, as well as an awareness of the contributions made to the work group by each of its members.
- Synergy and Symbiosis: Where equity and balance exist in a relationship, as well as a personal sense of esteem.
- Inspiration: There is a feeling of belonging in the workplace—people are inspired to contribute to the team and to each other.

Moving to the left from center, one can see the stages of negative interaction, resulting from behaviors that show a lack of respect. As Professor Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot says in her book, *Respect: An Exploration*; “Respect is most noticeable in its absence.” In the absence of respect, a relationship tends to deteriorate in stages.

- Apathy and Distance: Apathy is either a lack of interest (in investing) in the relationship or a withdrawal from an existing relationship. Apathy—as the lack of interest in developing a relationship or the distancing behavior designed to keep another away—has a certain oppressiveness about it, because the humanity of the other person is not brought into play. Apathy—when marked by a sudden withdrawal from an existing relationship—signals that some tear or fragmentation has occurred in the relationship that needs to be explored by the person who experiences the withdrawal. A genuine and tentative exploration may increase the communication and thus enhance the relationship.

- **Benign Neglect**: The person affected reports a sense of helplessness, isolation, alienation, exclusion and anger. Examples of benign neglect include: overlooking someone in meetings, giving credit for work done by one person to others, reducing or minimizing the work and contributions of someone in a way that reduces that person or shrinks his/her psychological size. An individual can feel excluded and disrespected in comparing the treatment he or she receives with the way his/her peers are treated. The individual in question, and most definitely others in the milieu, is aware of the differential treatment. In most instances, nothing is aid or done by the members of the group to change the dynamics. Benign neglect may reflect an unconscious behavior or, indeed, a blind spot of the neglectful person.
- **Abject Neglect**: Abject neglect signals the beginning of a serious fracture in the relationship and is identified by the intentional nature of the behavior, e.g., an intention to overtly neglect a person despite his or her role or expertise in a particular area. Thus, a customer relations manager may not be invited to a departmental meeting on customers, or a regional specialist may not be asked to participate in a discussion where the region is the critical focus. Abject neglect in some settings is the proverbial writing on the wall. Unlike benign neglect, it is a conscious effort to undermine the individual. It is also a signal to other onlookers in the organization that a person does not matter. To the extent that it is a signal to leave, it violates the organization rules of due process and, in most cases, a fair hearing. Such exertion of power is privileging to the person who is allowed to neglect the human and professional needs of individuals in the workplace. To the extent that it privileges one party, it is an unfair organizational practice and prevents the manager from being held accountable. Here, too, there can be a tentative exploration between aggrieved parties and an invitation for intervention by a neutral third party like the Ombuds Office. If the invitation, itself, is rejected, there is an increase in the chasm of social distance.
- **Disrespect**: Disrespect leads to a further discounting of the experience of the other person. An attempt is made to injure the other party and to show that he or she is undeserving of respect. Other disrespectful behaviors may ensue, including verbal abuse, name calling, stereotyping based on race or gender, racial joke making, and so on.
- **Exclusion and Discrimination**: The disrespectful behavior of the previous stage leads to a polarization of the two parties, resulting in exclusion and/or discrimination.
- **Manipulation, Shaming, and Intimidation**: Manipulation and shaming are covert ways to consciously control the behavior of others. Intimidation is a more overt approach to control and may involve the direct use of power. When the exclusion of the previous stage is based on race, ethnicity, or gender. This inevitably results in intimidation.
- **Domination, Emotional Abuse and Harassment**: Domination is a flagrant use of power and is experienced as emotional abuse. Although harassing behavior does not necessarily follow a trajectory, it engenders feelings of powerlessness, helplessness, and anger. In some cases, the situation degenerates rapidly, while other situations deteriorate over a longer period of time. The dynamics of harassment are complex and can be approached with legal and managerial solutions.
- **Hostility or Physical Assault**: When harassment is not addressed, the conflict may escalate into assault or other forms of physical violence.

Note: Although the "Spectrum" was designed to depict the experience of the complainant, the respondent has matching feelings and experience at each stage.

For further information or consultation, please contact Dr. Anu Rao at M. D. Anderson Cancer Center Ombuds Office, by telephone, email or letter.

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