

How to hire a respectful employee

Key interview questions can better guarantee you have a civil environment

Question: We've recently had to let go of someone for disrespectful conduct. This person was uncivil from the get-go and, in hindsight, it was a hiring mistake in the first place. What should we do when hiring to ensure we're getting people who align with our "respect" value?

Answer: Civility is a competence, just like any attitude-related workplace skill. If you want to strengthen the fabric of civility and respect within your organization, one key piece of the puzzle is to make sure you hire the right kind of folks to begin with.

Getting the wrong people in the door can result in a negative ripple effect — incivility breeds incivility. You might see a souring of relationships and deterioration in team dynamics. And a spillover into relations with customers and stakeholders is also likely.

You should be looking for evidence of competence in three key domains. For starters, select candidates who demonstrate civility and respect in their own conduct. Equally as important, look for the ability to respond effectively to incivility that is directed at them.

Finally, incivility thrives on silent bystanders — folks who observe incivility happening between co-workers and do nothing about it, so you should check for the ability to respond to bad behaviour that occurs in the work environment around them.



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TOUGHEST HR QUESTION

Here are some ideas to incorporate into your hiring interviews:

- Describe a scenario where the interviewee would be on the receiving end of incivility. Ask how they would respond. A desirable candidate is one who would address things constructively— directly, professionally and respectfully.
- Ask for an example where the person was treated in a rude or discourteous manner by a manager or colleague. What was his internal reaction? What was his response on the ground? What transpired? Did it go well — or perhaps not — and why? What did he learn and how did he apply it? Explore the details. You're looking for candour, for an ability to reflect on one's own reactivity, and for the capacity and willingness to take mature action.
- Ask for an example of when the person had been himself uncivil

(you may want to provide a loose definition of the term, and emphasize that anyone can be unintentionally uncivil — let the interviewee feel it's OK to "admit" his own flaws). If he can't come up with one, then he is either not human or not truthful. If he does describe a situation, explore the details and learning, and how he would apply that in your workplace.

- Did he ever work in an uncivil environment or team? What did he observe and experience? In hindsight, what part did he play in contributing to this environment, either positively or negatively? You're looking here for an ability for insight about the effect the incivility had on him personally, on the team, on collaboration and, of course, on clients and stakeholders.
- Describe a situation where the interviewee would be a bystander, observing a colleague being uncivil toward another colleague. How would he respond? How would he analyze the situation? A desirable candidate is one who is able to listen to his inner canary that alerts him when the line of dignity and respect has been violated, demonstrates insight into the complexities of the dynamics of incivility, and has the willingness (and courage) to take an active stance.
- If your organizational values include a "respect" value (as yours

indeed does), share that with the candidate and ask him to describe what "respect" means to him: Why is it important to him? How, specifically, would he live that out if he was to get the job (ask for past examples)? What would he do if he encountered behaviours that are not in line with this value? What has he done in the past?

- In your reference check, ask specifically about civility and respect. Share that your organization is committed to respect, civility, diversity and the like, and inquire about the reference's perspective on the extent to which the candidate's interpersonal conduct aligns with these aspirations. If you have a Code of Conduct, consider sharing a few salient points with the person to illustrate the type of accountability and modelling you are looking for in prospective employees.

There are numerous advantages to having a civil work environment. Hiring the right people will save you lots of future headaches and challenging experiences, including having to let the person go.

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