

## The Top 5 Ways to Tame Workplace Incivility\*

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When it comes to workplace incivility, we're all sinners. We're each fallible and we all come with our own blind spots.

But workplace incivility is far from harmless, particularly in a hospital setting. Incivility often elicits our "Velcro response," causing us to worry and obsess about the interaction in a way that wastes precious mental energy and distracts us from performing at our best. It can even lead us to engage in "getting even" tactics and impact teamwork, causing coworkers to become less inclined to work effectively together.

In fact, the impact of being less than civil can actually be deadly. According to researcher Christine Porath<sup>1</sup>, a large percentage of mistakes made by hospital personnel are due to the effects of incivility. It's a glaring problem in terms of patient care, and its effect on service is palpable.

A patient's recovery is impacted by the quality of care they receive. Bad moods and bad feelings caused by instances of workplace incivility inevitably impact quality of service. Whether you admit it to yourself or not, being uncivil or being preoccupied by an unpleasant interaction you just had with a coworker changes both your demeanor and performance.

But here's the good news: incivility can be tamed, and it begins with practical choices that you can make today and everyday. Here are five things that you can do to step up and create the workplace that you want to have, and that patients and their families expect and deserve:

1. **Adopt the rule, "If it can't be on our banner we've got to change the manner."** Think about the way you and your coworkers treat each other. Ask yourself if you'd feel comfortable if the behaviour in question were displayed on video screens above all entrances to the hospital. If the answer is no, initiate change.
2. **Take an honest look at yourself.** You are the part of the equation that you *can* control, so commit to being your best self. If you're a physician, don't take advantage of your inherent power. If you're a nurse, researcher, technician or allied professional, don't assume that the high-pressure environment in which you're working justifies a lack of cordiality.
3. **Be the change you want to see.** Practice what you preach. Strive to be more Teflon-like and give people the benefit of the doubt, for your sake and for the sake of your patients, coworkers and team members. Modeling is particularly important for those in leadership positions because it's your responsibility to create a psychologically safe environment that paves the way for superior patient care.
4. **Deal with issues constructively.** Rather than using dismissive comments, rolling your eyes or venting behind someone's back, respond in an emotionally mature, constructive and professional way.

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5. **Trust your inner canary.** Like canaries once used in coalmines to alert miners when the air became poisoned, trust your inner canary to let you know when the line between what is respectful and what isn't has been crossed. When you feel that inner sense of discomfort, step up and do something to respond and stop the incivility in its tracks.

Hospitals are intense workplaces. The hours are long, the stakes are high, and the interdependence between professionals is ever present. It's only human to let civility slip and forget that patients are impacted, and that the person working right beside you might experience distress as a result of your fleeting lapse. The important thing is to continue making a conscious effort to make civility a priority in every interaction, even if you do falter every now and then. By doing so you're committing to making yourself and your workplace better. It's worth the effort.

*Sharone Bar-David, LLB, MSW, Canada's leading expert on workplace incivility, president of Bar-David Consulting and author of *Trust Your Canary: Every Leader's Guide to Taming Workplace Incivility*, will be offering her audience key strategies for maintaining civil work environments that result in exemplary care on November 3 at HealthAchieve in Toronto.*

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