

THE SET FREE LIFE

Your Revenue is Leaking

A long time ago, in a land far, far away, I worked with an attorney (we reported to the same person) who had no head for handling situations requiring leadership or relationship skills. The most morally deficient words and actions emanated from her. When a coworker would point out how ignorant or vicious she was revealing herself to be, she would offer a flippant, "Well, you think about it," grin hugely, and walk away. The president did nothing to address her disruptive behavior even when important contacts avoided the office because of possible encounters with the woman. This is when I learned there are people who are book smart but life stupid.

We've all experienced incivility on the job in varying ways, and we usually just get used to it. We think it's simply part of the cost of being in a 9-to-5 situation with many different personalities. But it doesn't have to be that way and, my friends, it should NOT be that way—because companies that tolerate consistently poor behavior are losing money as quickly as if they shoveled it out the window on a breezy fall day.

This is not just me and my plain old common sense talking. I'm reading a book I happened upon in the library but that will now become a permanent fixture on my shelf: *The Cost of Bad Behavior: How Incivility is Damaging Your Business and What to Do About It*. The authors, Christine Pearson and Christine Porath, both business professors, have catalogued and quantified the toll workplace incivility takes on performance, morale, and the bottom line. They tell us what we already know: workers respond to nastiness, rudeness, childlike posturing, tantrums, and immature management by dialing down their contributions, punishing the organization in various creative ways, worrying about what they're experiencing instead of focusing on their work, seeking revenge, sabotaging others' efforts, withdrawing completely, and looking for work elsewhere on company time, among other things.

What we may not have taken into account are the hours spent on counseling those who have been the target of bad behavior as well as talking to and disciplining the offenders; actions that must be taken to rectify problems that have resulted from bad behavior, such as the associate who cusses out a customer; sick time employees use because of the tyranny of workplace boors; managing residual chaos, such as needing to send out

apologetic emails about incidents or hold meetings to quell gossip or counsel members of factions that arise from uncivil episodes; and folks who quit because they can't take it anymore, thus rolling into the costs of recruitment, hiring, training, acclimating, and the time to develop proficiency. The authors cite one company that has calculated a cost to the firm of \$2 to \$8 million per year.

It's true—you *can* attach costs to the way employees treat one another, keeping in mind what pretty much everyone agrees on: happy employees who treat each other with respect are productive employees. It begins with taking a good estimation of the number of hours of lost work per episode of incivility. You know what "lost work" is—all you have to do is think about what happened to you with the last episode of workplace hatefulness you encountered. How much time did you spend talking to others about it? How many people did you email to detail the incident? How much time did you spend in the bathroom trying to regain your composure, or on a walk around the building to let off steam? How much steam was actually generated, and did you exercise it off or bury it in the landfill of other work-related injustices, thus adding to the effects of stress upon your mind and body? Did you take a long lunch that day, enjoining a coworker to whom you could vent, or did you leave early? Did someone ask you for assistance to whom you gave the response of "Sorry, no time," when you *did* have the time but you were thinking, "Why should I help anyone here when I am treated like this?" Did you take the next day off as a mental health day, and spend the rest of the week at your desk working on your resume? You get the picture.

Multiply those numbers of lost hours in a rather simple equation that provides the revenue per hour per employee and you arrive at the estimated cost of time lost by **one employee** who grapples with the aftermath of an incivility. What has to be considered in the formula is a reasonable guess on how many employees experience rotten behavior from others on a daily or weekly or monthly basis. Some companies are better than others at figuring this out



Sue Thompson is a personality expert, etiquette trainer, and an instructor in life lessons. Her work on recognizing and developing talent, identifying personalities and working effectively with the people who possess them, responding appropriately to difficult experiences, treating others with respect, and behaving like a professional have caused companies and business organizations throughout the country to value her consulting skills. She trains those entering the workforce how to present themselves with style and authority; new employees in the importance of respecting one's work and the workplace; managers in the value of understanding employees' talent and temperament; and everyone in the timeless rules of behavior that will always bespeak excellence.

Quick Links

The Cost Of Bad Behavior
Etiquette Dog
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because management actually cares about how people act (and about how they themselves act) and demand civility and respect in the workforce; they have a greater grasp of when things are breaking down because they pay attention to the complaints.

Others, as we know, can be dismal halls of daily, egregious, childish behavior, with a human resources department and senior executives who do not see any of it as worthy of serious attention. They're busy committing incivilities themselves. (Ever had someone in HR indicate he/she simply *does not care* about your problem? I once pointed out a benefit procedure that personally cost me money, and the attitude I received was, "That's the way it's done." I recognized it was nothing HR could rectify; all I wanted was a sincere apology that I had not been informed of my options. But no.)

I've had my trials with bosses and/or colleagues who were cruel, despicable, conscienceless, and self-absorbed—the extremes of workplace incivility—and while many people have experienced working with a superior who seems to have it out for them, many others never encounter the psychopathic boss or twisted coworker. All of us, however, are hit upside the head by encounters with social violence that stop us right in our tracks. They don't have to be huge to cause us pain. Have any of these ever happened to you?

- You find an email that was sent to a shared office printer, detailing all of the things others hate about you
- You're in a stall in the bathroom when a couple of people enter and, unaware of your presence, make fun of you
- You pass colleagues in the hall who consistently refuse to acknowledge you and you don't know why (or perhaps you do, but either way it's rude, and most often deliberately so)
- Unsigned notes are left on your chair regarding an offense you've committed, or regarding your staff members who are doing something the writer finds offensive (unsigned notes are stupid and cowardly, and they are even more stupid and cowardly when an executive writes them)
- You're smacked down in a meeting with a hurtful rhetorical comment to which you don't respond because you don't want to make a scene
- You receive an intentionally backhanded compliment ("You did your best, no matter what others say")
- You're not invited to an important meeting and you know the organizer left you out on purpose
- A group of whispering colleagues stop suddenly as you approach and none of them will look at you
- You consistently receive emails from a colleague who tells you what they need, expecting you to simply do for them what they do not have the respect to politely ask of you
- You could write a book on the number of times it would have changed everything if you had simply heard the words, "I'm so sorry"
- You could write an encyclopedia on how important it is to have those in power acknowledge that unethical and childlike behavior should not be tolerated, why they should openly address it, and why you have the right to expect they won't be the perpetrators themselves.

"During my eighty-seven years I have witnessed a whole succession of technological revolutions. But none of them has done away with the need for character in the individual or the ability to think."

Bernard Baruch

Contact Sue today to learn how she can meet your business needs

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This truth bears repeating: we are a society that has lost touch with character strengths such as kindness, social intelligence, fairness, self-regulation, forgiveness, and prudence, and we need to reach out and grab them again. These values can be reinforced, and we all know that people generally rise to the level of expectation when we show them what it takes to retain their jobs.

We desperately need to see that someone cares about mature behavior being a job requirement, and that bad behavior will not be ignored because it's just too difficult to confront. This, like so much else, starts at the top. Presidents and CEOs and other execs could create policies of civility with real consequences, or mandate instruction in basic etiquette (i.e., social skills, because we increasingly deal with people who don't have them), or see that new hires are trained in the orientation process regarding the expectations of workplace conduct. (This is why you need *me*.) We have to start somewhere. But such concern is almost impossible to imagine.

Why is that? Because believe me when I tell you, business owners, company presidents, corporate executives, managers: it's costing you. You're either utterly unconvinced, you don't care, or you're afraid to address it—but it's still costing you, big time. 🙄

Teddy Bear and Sierra are on vacation and will return next month. 🐾

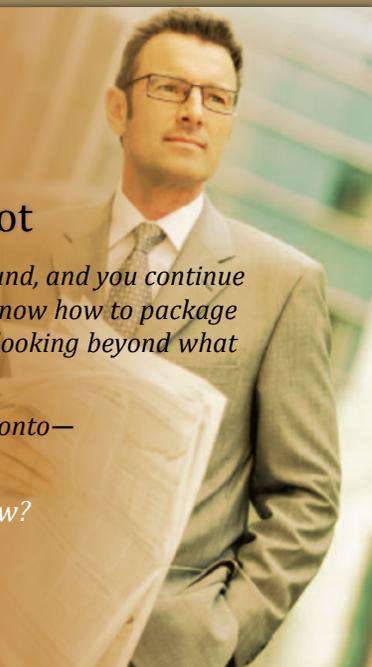
Image is Everything Except When it's Not

You've got the education and background, and you continue to develop your skills. But unless you know how to package these assets, few will be interested in looking beyond what they can see to find out what's inside!

Employers are looking for—and hold onto—quality and excellence.

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