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Four Steps To Building A Culture Of Respect

By doug.dickerson on February 11 2013 10:01 AM EST

"Respect for ourselves guides our morals; respect for others guides our manners." -- Laurence Sterne

Surveys conducted by the global public relations firm, Weber Shandwick, in 2011, reported what many already know or experience: Incivility in the workplace is on the rise, and many place the blame at the feet of workplace leadership.

The online survey was conducted among 1,000 American adults to assess attitudes toward civility online, in the workplace, in the classroom and in politics. Some notable highlights include:

Over one-half of Americans, or 55 percent, believe that civility in America will get worse in the next few years.

Over four in 10 Americans, or 43 percent, have experienced incivility at work. A nearly equal number --38 percent -- believe that the workplace is becoming increasingly uncivil and disrespectful.

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Workplace leadership is blamed for this decline by
approximately 65 percent of those who perceive
greater incivility in the workplace.

After workplace leadership, Americans who perceive greater incivility in the workplace cite employees themselves for workplace incivility. Other reasons include the economy and competitiveness in the workplace.

That there are issues that must be addressed by workplace leaders and by employees is an understatement. In addition to the issues of disrespect in the workplace, bullying remains a problem as well. In a recent TLNT column, Judy Lindenberger cites statistics from recent studies she conducted that found more than 50 percent of respondents reported they witnessed or were a victim of bullying at their current workplace, and over 60 percent reported that they witnessed or were a victim of bullying at another company they worked for.

As a consequence of this alarming and growing trend in the workplace, a majority agreed there is a critical need for civility training in the workplace. And with workplace leadership being assigned most of the blame, it is imperative that those in leadership lead the way. Here are four small leadership can take right away to reclaim a culture of respect and productivity.

Teach it. When your staff has selective definitions over what is, or is not, disrespectful behavior in the

workplace, it leads to subjective interpretations of bad behavior. Expectations of positive behavior need to be taught, it needs to be mandatory, and it should be annual. Clearly defined expectations and boundaries helps create a culture of respect and holds everyone accountable. It will also help you weed out those who for whatever reason cannot align themselves with company standards.

Adapt it. Any course on civility, respect, or bullying should be framed within the context of your specific organization. While certain principles are universally accepted, such as treating others with respect, communication, and moral behavior, you will be well served to frame your expectations around your company's unique culture and personality. Be mindful and deliberate about your expectations, but not at the expense of destroying the good camaraderie that does exist. A good idea here would be have employees help draft the code of standards and expectations. When they have skin in the game they will be more inclined to live up to it.

Model it. Since the majority believes that workplace leadership is at fault as it relates to a culture of disrespect in the workplace, then those in leadership are going to have to personally step up and take responsibility. While changing a culture of disrespect is a system wide objective it starts at the top. What the leader expects the leader has to model. The leader must also be held to account.

Praise it. Unfortunately, many who experience incivility or bullying at work do so in silence. They

feel they have no one to turn to, or fear retaliation. Building a culture of respect begins when you teach it, adapt it, and model it. But going forward you must praise the work of your team. Instead of suffering in silence you can create a culture of praising in public. It's been said that what you tolerate, you promote. But I also believe what you praise you perpetuate. Lift up the positives of respect, honor, civility, and diversity. These are the strengths of your company and the virtues that make it great.

Building a culture of respect begins with respect, and it begins with you. Are you ready to step up?

Doug Dickerson is an internationally recognized leadership speaker and columnist. He is the author of two leadership books and is available to speak for your business. Visit his web site at www.dougsmanagementmoment.blogspot.com. Follow Doug at www.twitter.com/managementmoment

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