



CULTURE OF KINDNESS

Professional development activities that cultivate civility at your ECC.

By Adam Timm and Andre V. Jones

Your center's culture is a difficult thing to pinpoint. By definition, organizational culture is the collection of ways of thinking, interacting and behaving that have come to be taken for granted. It wouldn't be your center's culture if it wasn't simply "the way things are." The biggest challenge with diagnosing and changing center culture is that it takes a long time for it to form, and it isn't formed by any one thing. We can, however, begin to identify why the culture is as it is and, if the culture is negative, work to change the behaviors that caused it to be this way. The truth is, we are all part of creating culture, shaping both our experience and our coworkers' experience of work.

The best workplace culture is formed when all employees show up, work hard and practice kindness. Working each day with kindness and empathy while extending respect to your fellow coworkers is called civility. It sounds wonderful, doesn't it? The idea that we can look forward to our time at the emergency communications center (ECC) working alongside other professionals who are equally committed. So why is the work environment at so many ECCs less than civil, and why do we so easily accept unacceptable behavior?

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way we’ve always done it”), when there is a lack of civility and respect in the workplace the consequences are detrimental to both the organization and the employees that work there. As one’s commitment to the organization declines, employees will resign because of persistently negative workplace culture. When they don’t resign, team members may intentionally decrease their work effort or call in sick to minimize their exposure to the negativity. Those who stay may otherwise absorb the behaviors they have been subjected to and put newcomers through the same kind of abuse.

There are several reasons why unacceptable behavior may be accepted in the workplace.

Lack of awareness: Sometimes, employees may not be aware that their behavior is considered unacceptable. This could be due to cultural differences or lack of training related to appropriate workplace conduct.

Fear of consequences: Some employees may tolerate unacceptable behavior because they fear retaliation or negative consequences, such as losing their job or being passed over for a promotion.

Power dynamics: If the person exhibiting the behavior is in a position of authority or has significant influence, others may feel powerless to speak up.

Cultural norms: In some workplace cultures, certain behaviors that are considered unacceptable in other settings may be accepted or even encouraged. This can make it difficult for employees to identify and address inappropriate behavior.

Lack of accountability: If unacceptable behavior is not addressed by management or HR, it can create a culture where such behavior is seen as acceptable or even normalized.

To prevent unacceptable behavior in the workplace ECCs should establish clear standards for behavior, provide training on appropriate workplace conduct, and ensure that employees feel safe to report any incidents of inappropriate behavior without fear of retaliation. Additionally, center leadership should model and reinforce appropriate behavior and hold all employees accountable for their actions.

BE PROFESSIONAL

Opinions may differ on what constitutes “professionalism” at the communications center, but if we were to spend a bit of time as a team discussing in-bounds and out-of-bounds behaviors that constitute professionalism in action, we would likely arrive at a common agreement. In fact, most 9-1-1 professionals, when given the choice between working at a center that feels like a dysfunctional family, or working at a center that feels like a high-performing team united by professionalism and mutual respect, will opt for the latter. We want professionalism — we crave it — yet bullying persists.

Bullying is one of the most severe types of disrespectful conduct, yet it’s also one of the most common. Bullying at the workplace is known to lead to mental health issues such as depression, burnout, anxiety and hostility, as well as an increase in physical complaints and worries about health and well-being. Bullying has repercussions not just for the individuals who are directly engaged in it but also for those who witness it or are in its immediate vicinity. Employee engagement and morale may also be negatively impacted by more subtle kinds of incivility, such as volume of speech, word choice and tone of voice. Additionally, nonverbal actions, such as gestures and facial expressions, may have a similar effect.

BE COURTEOUS

Greater job satisfaction, a sense of justice and an overall pleasant atmosphere are all linked to having a workplace that is courteous and respectful to its employees. A courteous and respectful workplace is also associated with improvements in morale and collaboration, as well as stronger relationships between supervisors and personnel. Workers also have a greater propensity to be involved in their own personal growth while actively participating in the process of problem-solving.

A workplace that is courteous and civil to its employees has lower rates of absenteeism and turnover. Organizations known for their courtesy and respect cultivate a pleasant environment defined by good spirits and job satisfaction, as well as improved favorable relationships with the community and responders alike.

When employees are treated with respect and dignity, they are more likely to be engaged, committed and motivated to do their best work.

Being professional and courteous in the workplace can have a positive impact on organizational culture in several ways.

Builds trust: Professional and courteous behavior creates an atmosphere of trust among colleagues. When people feel they can rely on others to act with integrity, they are more likely to communicate openly and honestly.

Enhances communication: Professional and courteous communication promotes active listening and clear, respectful exchanges of information. This can lead to more effective collaboration, problem-solving and decision-making.

Fosters respect: When employees consistently treat each other with professionalism and courtesy, it creates an environment of mutual respect. This can help reduce workplace conflict, improve morale and boost productivity.

Improves stakeholder relations: Professional and courteous behavior toward the public and responders can enhance the agency’s reputation and lead to increased loyalty.

Sets standards: When professional and courteous behavior is modeled and reinforced by leaders in the organization, it sets a standard for how everyone should behave. This can create a culture of accountability where people are held to high standards of conduct.

Civility in the workplace creates a positive work environment that promotes productivity, creativity and employee satisfaction.

When employees are treated with respect and dignity, they are more likely to be engaged, committed and motivated to do their best work. Civility also helps to reduce stress and conflict in the workplace, leading to improved communication, collaboration and teamwork. Additionally, it can enhance the reputation of the organization and attract top talent.

If civility can help any center make huge strides in the direction of positive change, how do we practice it? The following professional development activities can help improve civility.

Leadership training: Leaders play a crucial role in fostering a civil workplace culture. Train leaders on how to lead by example, create a positive work environment, and address uncivil behavior.

Diversity and inclusion training: Training employees on the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace can help them understand and appreciate the differences among colleagues and promote respect and acceptance.

Communication training: Effective communication is key to a civil workplace. Employees should be trained on how to communicate effectively, actively listen and resolve conflicts respectfully.

Emotional intelligence training: Emotional intelligence involves understanding and managing one’s own emotions and the emotions of others. EI training can help employees develop empathy and respond appropriately to the emotional nature of 9-1-1 work, leading to more civil interactions.

Regular feedback and performance evaluations: Regular feedback and performance evaluations can help employees understand expectations and goals, address areas for improvement and promote a culture of accountability and respect.

If the way things have always been done at your center include incivility as a part of the daily mix, it will take some time to change the culture that leads to these behaviors. But it’s an effort worth pursuing. With time and regular attention, more of the team will get on board as they see the changes take root.

Overall, professional development activities that promote respect, empathy, effective communication and positive relationships among colleagues can be very effective in

improving workplace civility. This is a foundation for building strong relationships that may help cultivate a sense of community and encourage collaboration and respect. Fostering a culture of civility at your center can have a positive impact on employee well-being, job performance and organizational success. Ultimately, if emergency communications centers can improve civility, they can improve employee resilience and retention, both essential to the success of any agency. ●

Adam Timm began his 20-year career in public safety as a 9-1-1 dispatcher for Los Angeles Police Department, where he spent over a decade under the headset. He left the LAPD after founding his training and consulting company, *The Healthy Dispatcher* (www.thehealthydispatcher.com), to help dispatchers across the country. He is the author of three books, including the popular, *Dispatcher Stress: 50 Lessons on Beating the Burnout* and his most recent, *People Driven Leadership: How the Best 9-1-1 Centers Inspire Positive Change.*

Dr. Andre V. Jones is an Assistant Executive Director and Head of Profession-EMD for Hamad Medical Corporation Ambulance Service, the national ambulance service in the State of Qatar. He also serves as the Executive Lead for the FIFA (World Cup 2022) Medical Command Center, which is within National Healthcare Incident Command Center. He has 27 years of experience in emergency communications and focuses on improving leadership and retention in the 9-1-1 profession.

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Bullying in the workplace has no impact on employee engagement and morale. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. True b. False 2. Which of the following professional development activities can help improve workplace civility at an emergency communications center? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Conflict resolution training b. Technical skills training c. Sales and marketing training d. Financial management training 3. What are the potential consequences of unacceptable behavior in the workplace? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Decreased employee morale b. Improved teamwork c. Enhanced stakeholder relations d. Increased productivity 4. Establishing clear standards for behavior and providing training on appropriate workplace conduct are effective measures to prevent unacceptable behavior in the workplace. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. True b. False | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Communication training can contribute to a more civil workplace by? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Encouraging active listening b. Promoting conflict escalation c. Ignoring diverse perspectives d. Fostering power dynamics 6. Professionalism at the communications center can be defined differently by each individual. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. True b. False 7. How does being professional and courteous in the workplace impact stakeholder relations? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. It improves collaboration and problem-solving. b. It creates an environment of mutual respect. c. It enhances the organization's reputation. d. It sets standards for behavior. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Which of the following is a recommended professional development activity to improve workplace civility? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Technical skills training b. Emotional intelligence training c. Inventory management training d. Compliance training 9. Why do some employees tolerate unacceptable behavior in the workplace? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Lack of awareness b. Fear of consequences c. Power dynamics d. All of the above e. None of the above 10. Fostering a culture of civility at the center can lead to improved employee well-being, job performance and organizational success. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. True b. False |
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