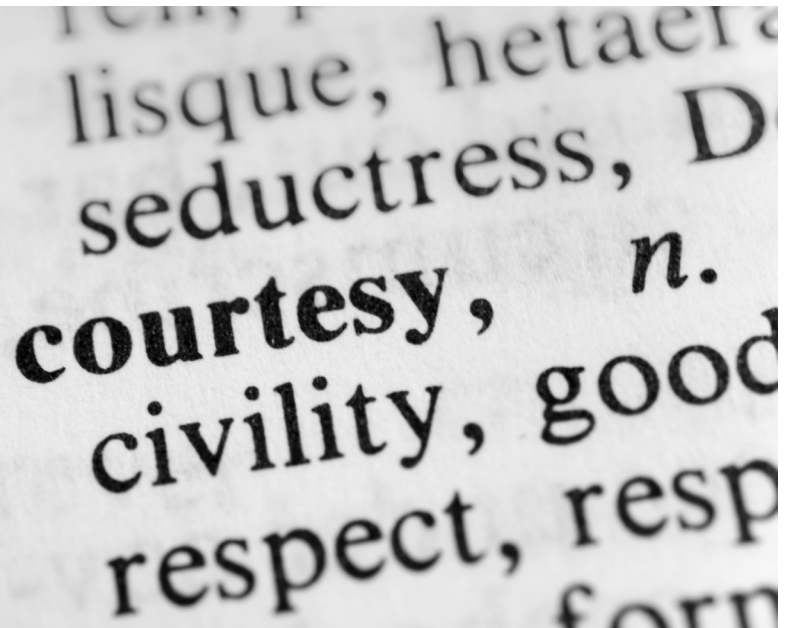


## Civility – Where Has It Gone?

A. C. Macris & Larry Reiter



### Introduction

In our last two articles we discussed ethics: the lack of ethical behavior being so prevalent in our society today and how a leader can address ethical issues and focus on their organization. In this article we step into another disturbing trend: the lack of civility in our society. As with ethics we will focus on the behavior of organizational leaders and ways to keep this unfortunate trend from negatively impacting the organization. We focus our thoughts on businesses and industries and feel our ideas apply to a broad range of entities including non-profit organizations and even government at all levels for each. There are leaders at the top of the organization and also within to first line supervisors. All these leaders are critical to the success of the organization.

In past articles we have discussed Contextual Leadership stressing leadership situations must be viewed, not as cookie cutter events, but knowing and understanding the context of the situation; examine and tailor responses to the context of the event, the industry, the responsibility of the people involved, the nature of the community and many other factors making each situation unique.

### Data We Have Found

To understand the lack of civility in our society today we need only turn on the news or read newspapers or magazines or peek at social media. We did find a study done by Weber Shandwick, a global communications consulting firm. This study was done before the 2016 presidential election.

Among the things the study found were the following...

Eighty-three percent of likely voters report that they are paying close attention to national politics, and nearly all likely voters (93 percent) say a candidate's tone or level of civility will be an important factor in deciding how they cast their votes in the 2016 presidential election, with more than half (52 percent) saying it will be a "very" important factor. Half of all likely voters (51 percent) say they had not voted for a candidate in the past because of uncivil behavior.

**"Nearly all Americans (95 percent) say civility is a problem, with three-quarters (74 percent) saying civility has declined in the past few years and two-thirds (67 percent) saying it is a major problem today.** (Emphasis is ours.) In the online poll conducted among 1,005 adults 18 years and older from January 7 to 14, 70 percent also say that incivility in this country has risen to "crisis" levels, up from 65 percent in 2014."

Asked to identify the groups contributing most to the lack of civility in society, both likely voters and the overall public cite politicians, the Internet/social media and the news media as the top three sources – each being named by more than half the respondents.

By sizable majorities, likely voters see negative consequences for uncivil behavior: 79 percent say incivility in government is preventing action on important issues; 77 percent say the U.S. is losing stature as a civil nation; 76 percent say incivility makes it difficult to discuss controversial issues; 64 percent say they have stopped paying attention to political conversations and debates; and 61 percent say incivility is deterring people from entering

public service. Only a minority of voters, 38 percent, accept the notion that incivility is just part of the political process.

“The American people have a clear sense that rising incivility is harming our political process and the ability of our government to function well,” said Pam Jenkins, president of Powell Tate. “They see the nation paying a price for incivility and worry the cost could rise in the years ahead.”

In their 2018 Global Leadership Forecast report, Development Dimensions International (DDI) surveys HR professionals’ assessment of leadership and leadership development programs in their organizations; they report the following:

- 31% have weak or nonexistent relationship between annual strategic plans and their own plans to grow leadership talent.
- 50% do not have well-integrated and strategically aligned leadership development programs or processes.
- 78% see their leadership career planning/pathing systems as only moderately effective or worse.
- 65% do not believe their leaders have high quality, effective development programs.
- 48% do not use information from assessments and simulations to make leadership hiring and promotion decisions.
- 35% do not have a program to develop high potentials and 45% of those that do don’t measure the effective ness of the programs.
- 73% do not exercise negative consequences when leaders fail to develop their leaders on their team.
- 52% do not know the up-to-date status of leadership talent capability across the organization.

Further DDI adds: “Never in the 20 years we’ve been collecting data from the Global Leadership Forecast have we seen the array of forces that are disrupting the essence of great leadership. Competitive pressure to innovate and shake up established markets is too powerful for companies and the people who lead them to ignore.” If you would like a copy of the complete DDI report please contact us.

The DDI information may seem to be a different topic from civility but we feel that the dearth of civility, as well as, our prior topic, lack of ethics, are significant contributing factors in the continuing decline in the assessment of leadership. And our focus is on improving leadership.

### How Can A Leader Address Incivility?

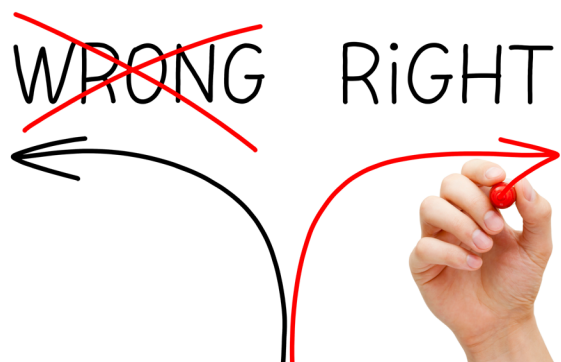
As with our prior discussion on ethics some basic tenets hold when discussing civility. There will always be questions of right v. wrong. Meeting a wrong with another wrong does not make a right. It is just a perpetuation of the wrong. You, our readers, are probably like us when we watch the news or read a newspaper; a lot of the news is disconcerting and we either try to just ignore or tend to bring global and national issues into our own world. Some may directly impact us but really many are at best indirect impacts.

In discussing ethics we proposed key way to deal with these issues in our organizations and even our families. Bring it in – don’t solve the world’s problems. Define your sphere of influence or physical/ organizational realm. Deal with that first and get it right. When it comes to the news, local is more relevant and meaningful. When it comes to civility, we know, with a rather high degree of certainty that many feel our society has lost so much. Rather than address society’s issue on a broad level, we intend to approach civility from a leadership perspective. Our last article looked at ethics with our cover image a series of post-it-notes with the words Right and Wrong written on them and a series of question marks. The right and wrong is where we are going with civility too.

Who says what is right and what is wrong. The concept of right versus wrong steams from the barometer of our value system, or the Golden Rule, or what our parents taught us (or didn’t), plus many other things. Social norms are another huge contributor. In the early 2000s I (Dean) worked a few years on a project in London, England. This project took me there periodically during those years. One thing I readily noticed was the rather high level of civility, and politeness. He found himself realizing he had to up his social behavior because many around me were so civil; and while I thought I was a reasonably polite person, the bar was higher.

When it comes to civility, how is the bar set? It’s set at home when children are young. It is reinforced as much as one’s surroundings will accommodate, and it’s then conveyed to those who are learning through mentoring. Unfortunately opposing forces are always present. Aberrant behavior abounds, but as long when throttled and publically exposed as aberrant, these roots have a tough time taking. It’s when the aberrant becomes the norm, that the bar is lowered. Some of us remember that not only our parents taught us proper behavior but so did our friend’s parents. It takes a village to raise a child was the accepted way.

So now there is a conflict once again. Right v. Wrong, Good v. Evil. But who says what’s right or wrong, or good or evil? We are suggesting leaders have a significant influence on decisions and behavior of those who work for them. Over the past many years, the line between these opposing forces has become blurred. We can accept there is wiggle room, but as long the fundamentals are intact, good prevails, maybe not as everyone might expect, but with a higher bar the outcomes become acceptable. We see leadership as a major culprit in the conflicting values, which when coupled with a less than solid foundational system, results in a lowered bar.



## What Else Is In the Leaders Toolbox?

In our discussion of Contextual Leadership we look at Leadership Attributes and Leadership Competencies. They are rather long lists but to focus on how to address incivility we want to look at a few of the key Attributes and Competencies and show how these can help a leader deal with questions of civility and ethics. The Leadership Attributes we want to examine are:

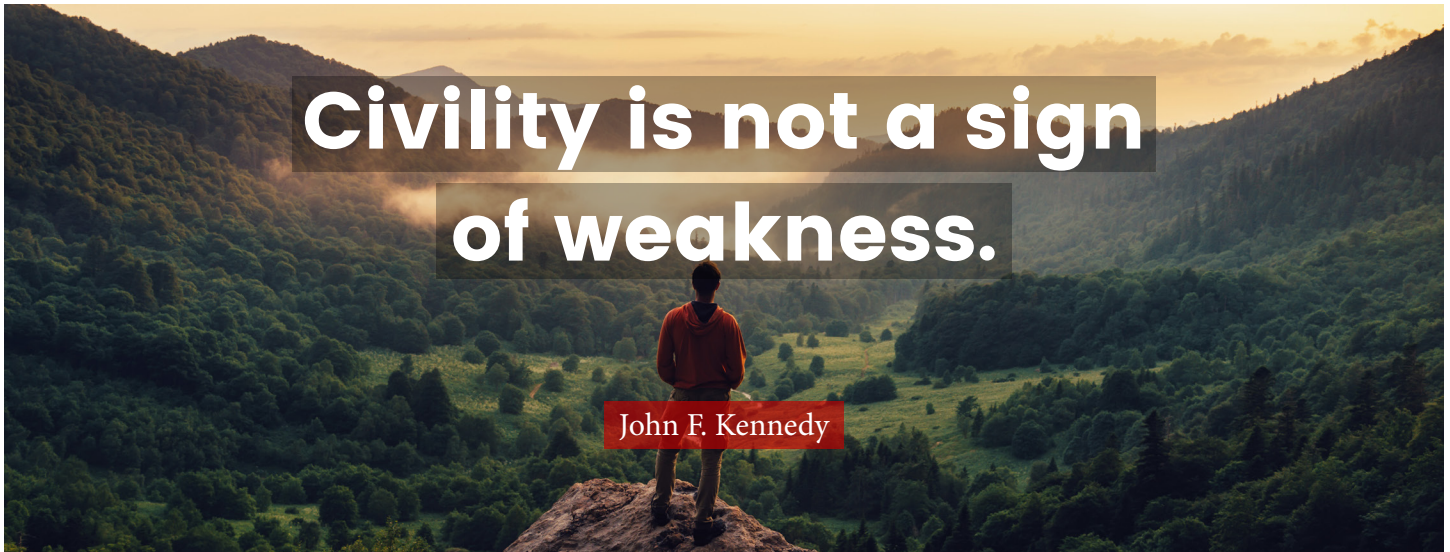
- Self-Discipline
- Integrity
- Respect
- Role model
- Consistency
- Ethical behavior

**Self-Discipline.** We consider self-discipline as one of the key leadership attributes. A leader without self-discipline results in a person who becomes a loose cannon, and subject to their own whims and desires. Couple this with a self-perception of power and

authority, the lack of self-discipline can be a critical shortcoming. Lacking self-discipline can also accentuate or perpetuate incivility. Many of the characteristics resulting from the lack of self-discipline directly relate to lack of civility and questionable ethics. If a leader cannot control themselves, how are they going to effectively lead? They are just going to create more incivility.

**Integrity.** Integrity is being ethical and being civil in dealings with everyone. A true leader cannot have integrity if they are not ethical and civil. It's kind of obvious but why do we have so many "leaders" – in businesses and government who do not have integrity. Has the bar been lowered so much that we ignore this critical attribute?

**Respect.** Respect is another of those key leadership attributes. We mentioned the Golden Rule above. If a leader expects respect, that leader must afford respect. Respect is a double-headed arrow ALWAYS. It must go both ways.



**Role Model.** Perhaps the most influential attribute. Again, we have to address expectations. Years ago the overworked term 'Walk the Talk' was in vogue. Leaders can have incredible positive or negative influence depending on what kind of role model they are as well as affecting the overall culture of their organization and those they mentor. A poor role model as a very significant influence on those again who may not have the foundational value system. Good or bad, a leader is a role model. People in an organization are going to observe behaviors and try to emulate them, thinking that the behaviors represent what it takes to succeed or considered acceptable in the organization. Those without strong personal foundations will emulate regardless of whether the behavior is civil or ethical.

**Consistency.** We have discussed this attribute quite a bit over the years. Inconsistent leaders are disconcerting, destabilizing and ultimately ineffective.

**Ethical Behavior.** We have noted the close relationship to ethics and civility. An ethical leader's behavior is civil to everyone, even those he/she does not agree with. Everyone is treated with respect. (See our last issue: <http://www.themacrisgroup.com/newsletters/Vol17Iss3-Jun2018.pdf>.)

The Leadership Competencies we want to address are:

- Business Knowledge
- Emotional Intelligence
- Team Development

**Business Knowledge.** Business knowledge as related to civility for a leader is knowing what he or she is doing. Without business knowledge a leader doesn't know what they don't know, so once again, their reality becomes what they think they know, which may have little relevance to the issue at hand. This dilutes confidence in those working for a leader, diminishes any leadership competence, and creates a downward spiral usually resulting the departure

of key individuals. There are too many opportunities for high performance individuals in this world to waste their time with low performing leaders.

**Emotional Intelligence.** This is an essential competency, no excuses, no exceptions. Emotional intelligence ties many of the above together. Just imagine a leader who is competent from a business knowledge perspective, respects their people, is a role model to their employees and future leaders, behaves consistently so their people know why decisions are made, and the basis for the decisions; is self-disciplined and is emotionally intelligent – what a powerful combination of attributes and competencies. Can you think of such a person?

**Team Development.** Any leader is successful only because of the team supporting and around them. Most leaders recognize the importance of their team, but not all know how to effectively use and develop team members. If the approach is demanding rather than collegial or talking down rather than talking with, the team will not be a team. It will be a collection of individuals who do the boss's bidding. In these cases incivility is frequent. And the wrong behaviors become the norm and become accepted. High performers must be developed and mentored. A leader who does not recognize this is not a leader period.

### Summary

We attempted to address a lack of civility in the world around us – and particularly from a leader's position. Since our goal is to help people become effective leaders, we journeyed into attributes and competencies of leaders. Looking back at the two studies referenced in the beginning of this article we see how deficient people view leaders coupled with the lack of civil behavior. The recent DDI study continues to highlight the lack of leadership as well as the lack of leadership bench strength. This decline remains a disappointing trend as evidenced via the DDI studies as well as others, over the past several years. We encourage our readers to examine your own behavior and the behavior of others in your

organizations – whether for profit, not for profit, volunteer or other. Our society must develop future generations of new leaders who are competent, as well as ethical and civil in dealing with everyone.

### Incorporating Civility and Ethics into Leadership Workshops

We believe effective leadership must be civil and ethical leadership. Civility and ethics encompasses so many of the components of our existing leadership program, and integrating dedicated sessions on Civility and Ethics tying many pieces together is the right thing to do. Therefore, we are incorporating new Civility and Ethics sessions which integrate values, emotional intelligence, conflict management, communication and listening to list a few. More details to follow.



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