

Federal Judicial Center
Executive Edge episode 5
Civility Workplace
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Lori Murphy: Hello. I'm Lori Murphy, assistant division director for Executive Education at the Federal Judicial Center. Welcome to Executive Edge, a podcast from the Federal Judicial Center focused on executive leadership in the federal judiciary. Each episode is designed to bring practical leadership guidance in research and insight to judiciary executives.

Today's episode is about the importance of civility in the workplace. Civility might seem like a quaint notion at a time when there are many pressing issues that demand leader's attention; yet, there's increasing evidence that the cost of incivility are profound for both individuals and organizations. The research suggests that organizations that promote and reward civility actually outperform those that don't. At the individual level, civility increases leader's ability to influence others and be effective.

Our host for today's episode is my colleague Michael Siegel, senior education specialist at the Federal Judicial Center. Michael, take it away.

Michael Siegel: Thanks, Lori. Today we're going to talk with Dr. Christine Porath, associate professor at the McDonough School of Business at Georgetown University. Professor Porath

is also a consultant working with leading organizations like Google, the United Nations, the World Bank, and several federal executive agencies. She's a frequent contributor to the *Harvard Business Review*, *The New York Times*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. Her work has been featured in over 1,500 television, radio, and print outlets including *Today*, *20/20*, NBC, and CBS. Professor Porath is the author of the 2016 book we'll discuss today, *Mastering Civility: A Manifesto for the Workplace*. Thanks for joining us, Christine.

Christine Porath: Thanks for having me.

Michael Siegel: It's good to have you here. In your book you say, at its core, civility is about connecting in a human way with others. Can you tell us what this looks like in the workplace?

Christine Porath: Yeah. I think it's about valuing people and showing them respect regardless of any differences they may have or whether its race and gender differences and political opinions coming from different backgrounds. But just that you treat everyone with a certain amount of dignity or respect where they feel like they matter.

Michael Siegel: It's probably not as easy as it sounds.

Christine Porath: Right. Yeah, it sounds very simple. We should have learned this in kindergarten I think most people assume, but it seems like a struggle more than we maybe should

particularly in workplaces but also in society more generally these days.

Michael Siegel: Let's look at incivility which is of course the other side of civility. In your book you describe incivility as a crisis. Why?

Christine Porath: Polls that study this and track it have found that nowadays over 70 percent of people consider it a crisis in America right now. I've studied it in a workplace over the last two decades and sadly have seen an uptake of it where over 50 percent now say they experience or witness it even weekly at work. So that's been on the rise for quite some time at least in workplaces.

Michael Siegel: So it's increasing in recent years.

Christine Porath: Yes.

Michael Siegel: What does your own research as well as the studies of other scholars reveal about the global impact of incivility in the workplace?

Christine Porath: Well, it's huge in terms of the financial toll it takes. I mean, sadly, so many people get pulled off track though it's not just about the person that experiences it and their performance suffers. They lose time worrying about the incident. Twelve percent will leave their job because of it, which is a huge cost as far as turnover goes. It adds up quickly. But we also find that it pulls the

witnesses or people that hear about the incident off track nearly as much as their performance declines over 25 percent. They are 50 percent less creative. Three times less likely to help others. And so as you might imagine, this cost can add up quite quickly. That's not including things like the stress or health care cost or legal cost of having to deal with some of these or managers' time and energy having to talk to different parties about it, to consult others to try to come up with a means of managing that. So it really, really adds up quickly.

Cisco took just a few of our numbers a decade ago and said that it was costing them conservatively \$12 million a year. At a small regional hospital that I worked with recently, worked with their financial team and said it was costing them conservatively \$30 million a year. In different economies, I saw something recently out of the UK that said it was costing a subsector of their economy \$2 billion a year going in the workplace. It's just really kind of staggering how quickly the costs add up.

Michael Siegel: Yeah. It goes beyond soft skills. It's hard data.

Christine Porath: Yes.

Michael Siegel: In your book you give a personal example of a colleague who spoke quite negatively and derisively about

the title of your book, if I remember it correctly. How did that affect you personally?

Christine Porath: Well, I think it's a minor example. I brought it up because it was easy for me to think about what did that mean. At the time I was up for tenure at my school and I was already feeling some sense of like I'm being judged or it matters how I'm performing. All of that and it really did pull me off track as far as attention goes and certainly performance as well. I just remember looking at my computer and thinking about it, what should I have said and how should I have handled that and what does this mean in terms of my future here. If it doesn't work out here, then, you know. Of course you kind of spin out of control in your mind. It's easy to lose time and energy.

I'm not proud of that, but I do know from talking to others that happened to them as well. I'm trying to get the word out there that as much as possible it's easier said than done, but try to focus on you. You can't change what a person does necessarily, particularly if they have more power or status than you. And in this case they did. What's important is you find a way to hold your own and to thrive as best as possible in your own workplace and also your personal life. Striving in your personal life also helps buffer the negative effects at the workplace and more generally as far as stress and everything

else. But sometimes I tell people, because a lot of times they'll feel stuck, that you need to focus on yourself and building yourself back up. Others can help you do that. That will help make you more resilient and bring a stronger self into the workplace such that hopefully you won't get pulled off track quite as much.

Michael Siegel: Thanks for sharing that with us. I think we've all felt that way from time to time. And you're right, the support of others helps build this and fortify us. You're right that most people overestimate how civil they actually are. In fact, you note that in several surveys. I found this rather humorous, respondents rated their chances of getting into heaven as higher than those of Mother Teresa. Why do you think there's such a disconnect between how we actually behave and how we believe we behave?

Christine Porath: Well, apparently based on psychological research we're just biased. We tend to remember and think about our strengths, and when we've been at our best, and the nice things that we've done or the positive moments. Marcia Goldschmidt talks about we replay the reel of success in our minds but we don't often reflect on the times where we would be less than proud of ourselves or we slipped up or that kind of thing. Tasha Eurich has given a TED talk on this and has written about it. When she's researched it and polled people,

95 percent of people think that they're self-aware where she's found only about 10 to 15 percent actually are. I think I found similar results in a sense as a huge reason for coming off as uncivil, I think, stems not from meaning to be that negative person or the jerk at work but rather just a lack of self-awareness. We don't recognize how we're being perceived by others. Often there are small things that we're doing that are rubbing people the wrong way.

Michael Siegel: Probably often it's not safe to give feedback to others in this regard.

Christine Porath: Exactly because especially we find that two-thirds of the time incivility, and this is across industries, comes from people with more power or status. Our default is we're uncomfortable. That would be awkward. We can't speak up. So sadly those people don't necessarily get the feedback and I think that contributes to the lack of self-awareness.

A friend of mine who was actually a VP of Human Resources years ago said she feels sorry for people because, as they rise up in the organization, they actually get less and less useful feedback. At the time it did not surprise me, but now I see that. That's where there's different ways of gathering that feedback by yourself if the organization doesn't provide some of

that. So I think it's important for us to consider honing in on our blind spots because we all have them.

Michael Siegel: Absolutely. In your book you give a very helpful tool for us to gauge our own levels of civility or incivility. You have a self-assessment that measures for instance how often we say please and thank you, how often do we forget to include others, how often do we retreat into our e-gadgets. What can listeners gain by taking this self-assessment?

Christine Porath: Well, I think it meant to get a sense of where we should target our improvements and where we can become more consistent. It's meant to be a useful resource for just drawing some reflection on how we're showing up. Now granted this is again self, I think the quiz online is meant to give you some quick feedback and also some specific suggestions around behaviors that you could do to improve those different aspects. It's meant to customize things so it's helpful in moving you forward.

But I also encourage that teams use that kind of quiz. I have some resources on my website around team tune-up. We can talk about just how are we doing, what are our strengths and weaknesses. Even asking teammates for what are three things I'm doing well that contribute to my or the team or organization's effectiveness, what are a couple of things that I should work

on. That's been very useful activity for some of the groups and MBA population that I teach and things like that.

Michael Siegel: It sounds like a great idea for teams, absolutely. Your book offers tips for increasing our civility such as smiling more frequently, as I'm told to do when I conduct this interview. You reference the amazing statistic that kids smile up to 400 times a day but only 30 percent of adults smile more than 20 times a day and 14 percent don't smile at all. I think I know some of those people. How does smiling help to increase civility?

Christine Porath: Actually, it lifts us up. Though physiologically our own body changes, when we smile we set off a trigger. We may not notice it consciously but it actually puts us in a better spot and I think can contribute to interacting well with others because we feel a little bit of a boost, if you will. More importantly I think is that it really does increase others' sense of warmth of you and how they respond to you. They might be far more open. They might be willing to share information. They feel far more connected to you. Especially in the workplace, these are important things.

One of the nice things about smiling also is it seems to be a very positive signal across cultures. Given that we have very diverse workplaces, it's a nice way to gesture and acknowledge to people that you are warm. You do want to connect.

Hopefully, that means you're happy to see them. So all of these things are good. You're contributing in some way to others feeling a lift and feeling valued or at least acknowledged.

Michael Siegel: Any other simple tips for helping us to become more civil?

Christine Porath: Yeah. One of the biggest complaints I hear about is people that are multitasking. They're on their phone or they're on their laptop or just very distracted. So I think that most people are asking for people to pay more attention and to listen attentively to someone. I know for myself, but I hear so many others say it too, it's very distracting now. Maybe you feel like you're listening but your nonverbals are telling a different story and people shut down. They won't speak up and won't come to you anymore because of that. So I think if we could all work on listening attentively, that would go a long way to others and we would probably be better off as well too.

Michael Siegel: Absolutely. Thanks. We're going to take a quick break. When we come back we're going to continue talking with Professor Christine Porath about the impact of civility on leadership and organizational effectiveness. I'm Michael Siegel, and you're listening to Executive Edge.

Jennifer Richter: Are you a deputy court unit executive with a passion for learning and a desire to cultivate leadership

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To learn more or to apply for this exciting opportunity, visit the Executive Education page at fjc.dcn or contact FJC Education Specialist Missy Cross at 202-502-4057 or mcross@fjc.gov. Now back to Executive Edge.

Michael Siegel: Welcome back. I'm Michael Siegel, and you're listening to Executive Edge. I'm talking with Professor Christine Porath, author of *Mastering Civility: A Manifesto for the Workplace*. Christine, before the break we were talking a lot about face-to-face interactions. But in your book you also write that civility is important in email and other online communication. Would you explain what you mean by e-civility and specifically how we can use email in ways that promote civility?

Christine Porath: Well, I think I just refer e-civility as any electronic communication and how we should be mindful of how we interact with it and how we might be interpreted when we use

it. It's tougher when we're trying to convey respect or dignity to someone or be polite when using these various technologies because oftentimes the receiver does not have your tones or your nonverbals. It makes for a lot of misunderstandings basically or the potential for that particularly again given that we may be coming from very different backgrounds and very different cultures where we may speak very directly. That might be our default or others may be used to a lot of pleasantries and so forth in email. So we may judge people and the message quite differently.

Michael Siegel: That's very interesting. Like you say, you can't see the body language.

Christine Porath: Right. Yes. In the civility quiz, the number one thing people fault them for so far is using email when they should use face-to-face or a richer form of communication. I think we often hide behind email whether it's for giving bad news or there's something stressful or we want to fire something off and not deal with someone's response, things like that. Particularly under those circumstances where we think someone might not respond well or we're delivering bad news or it's something that stresses us or them out, then we should try to use a richer form of communication. Even if that's Skype or Zoom or something where people have your

nonverbals and/or your tone. Or pick up the phone at least so that they have your tone and to respond.

Michael Siegel: Absolutely. Maybe email is efficient, but not effective perhaps.

Christine Porath: Yeah, I think that's right especially in some certain circumstances.

Michael Siegel: You mentioned that organizations that encourage and even reward civility in the workplace experience increased levels of performance and productivity. Can you give us some examples of this?

Christine Porath: Sure. Zappos has a program where people can give each other a \$50 gift certificate for doing something really positive. The idea being that they write up the specifics and then they're eligible for a larger award, a free parking spot for the month and the spun tape that labeled you a hero, and people display it proudly. That has reinforced behaviors that the organization really wants. Peers are actually the most underutilized source of feedback and reinforcement because we expect that our leaders would do that but most often they're not present necessarily. So I think for most organizations peers are actually great at doling out, high fives, or thank you's, or sharing credits. You really want to build a culture where that happens often. In finding fun ways, it doesn't have to have resources behind it but there can be a

quick thank-you system in your email type of server and so forth where you can shoot an email about something that someone did well. Nowadays there's a lot of apps that reward people or say great job or whatever but they get it to people quickly after that they've been civil or done something really well that the organization wants more of.

Michael Siegel: Great. What else can organizations do to promote civility?

Christine Porath: Well, I think one of the things that I've seen work really well is having a code of civility or standards of respect. Whether you get employees involved in coming up with those, as I've seen done and done with law firms for example, or you hand them. You know, we're going to really strive to live these ten principles of civility. That's really helpful. Again you can reinforce one in each month, circulate materials around them each month. Kind of build them into the culture. Some of them have them on the back of their name badges and plastered all over cafeterias and hallways and so forth. So they really make a big deal about civility campaign.

I think another thing is just again whatever you can do to reward and reinforce this is helpful. Thanking people at the beginning of meetings, things like that. So leaders and managers really set the tone. We and other researchers have found that civility training is effective, that it builds

awareness and can really improve a variety of business outcomes. So I know that a lot more of that is being done. In fact, it also helps mitigate the potential for harassment. It's being used in multiple ways to improve the culture and provide some shelter from certain risk that may occur in organizations. Those are a few things that I've seen work really well.

Michael Siegel: Great. You mentioned leaders and managers have a particular responsibility. Have you seen some leaders really take this on?

Christine Porath: Absolutely. I mentioned a law firm where they've had a training for everyone and then they broke in the very mix group. It didn't matter your status or power in the organization. They brainstormed and then voted and came up with ten that they were willing to live by and they would hold each other accountable for in this code of civility. They have it engraved in granite in their lobby. They really worked on this and within a year-and-a-half they won Best Place to Work. I think that that's one example of how I've seen this work really well.

There's a group, the Architects of the Capitol, that has a civility campaign. They're doing tremendous with it and reinforcing each of their principles of civility. They focus on one each month. Everyone goes to training. I think for them it's become really ingrained in their culture such that people

just call each other out on stuff. They'll say like, seven; dude, 745. They know them by number. That's really what you want, is everyone engaged and really motivated to live this stuff and to help coach others when they slip up such that we all move from good to great. Be more consistent.

Michael Siegel: Absolutely. Leaders, you've mentioned before, sometimes live in a feedback-poor environment themselves. What else can they do to be sure that this value is being promulgated?

Christine Porath: Yeah. I think it's really important that they walk the talk, especially if they've set expectation and such around civility. So getting feedback about how they're perceived is actually quite helpful. One of the leaders that I think had a great way of thinking about this is Doug Conant who was the CEO of Campbell's. He talked about being tough-minded on standards but tenderhearted with people. He focused on touch points or these brief daily interactions he had with people whether in the cafeteria, in meeting rooms, or in the hallways. He said if he handled each touch points well, he'd make employees feel valued. I think that's a great attitude to have because we all and certainly leaders have about 400 of these touch points a day. Most don't take long, less than two minutes each. So the key is to be agile and mindful in these moments.

Michael Siegel: Excellent. Well, Christine, now we're going to focus on my final question on the judiciary which as you know, like many other institutions, is finding ways to increase civility in the workplace and deal with some vexing issues like sexual harassment. What else can judicial leaders learn from your research?

Christine Porath: Well, I think walking the talk is one important element. If you come up with a code of civility or norms that you live by, I think that that makes it very actionable. It also helps that we can really get the word out on those specifics and then get people to focus on that whether you're concentrating on one a month or whether you're drawing attention to that, I think it's a way that we all become clear on the expectations. We all strive to live for certain specifics, and so that lifts us all up. Those would be some main things.

I mean ideally you want a situation where people are coaching each other, if you will, or providing that feedback. So particularly in smaller groups, smaller departments, teams, judicial offices, if you work on the team feedback, I think that's great too. Typically it works well whether it's groups of five or ten. You could obviously do more, but I think if people know each other well they're more comfortable and they can speak more accurately to specifics. But I think just

drawing attention to this and showing that it matters and it's worth our time and energy. Yes, it may seem like a minor thing. Yes, we started out like simply. You'll notice by now. Isn't this obvious? I think it is worth the attention certainly for objective business outcomes that so many organizations obviously care about.

Michael Siegel: Well, that's really great. You've given us a lot to think about. Is there anything else you'd like our listeners to know?

Christine Porath: The courage to speak up about this I think is important. What you don't want to do is stay silent about certain issues because they can get worse. So I think if we teach each other if we see something, say something; and, the idea of providing feedback to each other, then we will move ourselves forward and lift others up in doing so.

Michael Siegel: Great point. A great way to bring us to a close. I'd like to thank you very much, Professor Porath, for sharing your research and insights with us today.

Christine Porath: My pleasure. Thanks for having me.

Lori Murphy: Thanks, Michael, and thanks to our listening audience as well. If you're interested in learning more about Dr. Christine Porath and her book *Mastering Civility: A Manifesto for the Workplace*, you can visit the Executive

Education page on fjc.dcn and click or tap on Executive Edge podcast.

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Executive Edge is produced by Jennifer Richter and directed by Maisha Pope. I'm Lori Murphy. Thanks for listening. Until next time.

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