Whether it’s an upset customer hurling profanities or a co-worker who routinely snubs us, incivility directly impacts how we do our jobs.

A study of business school alumni by Georgetown University researchers found that when people were subjected to incivility, 66% cut back their work effort, 80% lost work time, and 12% left their jobs. Incivility in the workplace can lead to higher turnover, increased absenteeism, and potential lawsuits, as the line between uncivil behavior and harassment is paper thin.

Whether the root of the problem is conflicting personalities, workplace stress, toxic team members, or opposing worldviews, incivility is on the rise. A 2016 survey by the Society for Human Resource Management found that 62% of people said they had been treated rudely at least once in the past week, up from 55% in 2011 and 25% in 1998. The study also found 70% of US adults agree incivility has risen to a crisis level.

In short, incivility is any type of rudeness, such as actions or statements that may make us feel uncomfortable, unhappy, or disrespected.

At times, incivility is blatant, like when someone uses profanity or makes a derogatory comment. It can also include less obvious microaggressions, indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group. A microaggression could be a comment that generalizes a person based on their age, gender, race, or sexual orientation. The person who made the comment may not even be aware they hold such a stereotype.

Incivility, continued on back
Incivility is like a virus. When someone experiences rude behavior, it reduces their self-control and can lead them to be rude to others, spreading the behavior. It can also have a ripple effect into people’s personal lives, including how they treat their family members.

Workplaces should make clear what behaviors are discouraged (such as sarcasm, interrupting others, gossiping, temper tantrums) and unacceptable (obscenities, name-calling, ridiculing and humiliating others).

Individual employees also play a role in creating a culture of civility:

**Embody expected behaviors.** Look at your own actions. Are you polite to your co-workers? Do you lose your temper, slam doors, or use profanity? Do you know the names of the people you work with? This is especially important for supervisors, as leaders set the tone for an organization’s culture. In some research, one-fourth of individuals reported that their boss is rude.

**Challenge uncivil behavior.** Encourage those around you to live up to the values you want for your workplace culture. Sometimes individuals don’t realize they are offending others. When you experience or witness incivility, advocate for yourself and those around you. If you don’t feel comfortable directly inserting yourself, ask someone who is better equipped to handle the situation.

**Encourage acceptance.** It’s our responsibility to keep an open mind and allow ourselves to be exposed to other viewpoints. When in conflict with someone, make a genuine effort to identify the positive in that person and their perspective.

Promoting civility doesn’t mean there will be an end to controversy, but in a civil work environment, disagreements are respectful. Teams are open to dissent and contradictory viewpoints. Workplace civility offers a safe, supportive environment of trust, respect, and collaboration.