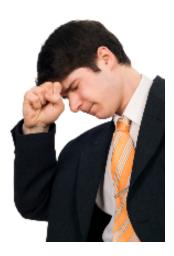# A Disturbing Workplace Trend

Regardless of the type of work we do, it's clear that we do our best work in an atmosphere of friendliness and cooperation. But recent research by professors Christine Pearson of the Thunderbird School of Global Management and Christine Porath of the USC Marshal School of Business reveals that an atmosphere of incivility is enveloping the workplace. In their book, *The Cost of Bad Behavior* (Penguin Publishing), Pearson and Porath share these shocking statistics:

- 96% of employees surveyed have experienced incivility at their workplace
- 48% of employees claim they are treated uncivilly by co-workers at least once a week
- 10% of employees say they witness mean spirited incivility every day
- 94% of workers who are treated uncivilly spend time thinking about how to get even with their offenders

Incivility is defined as "the exchange of seemingly inconsequential inconsiderate deeds and words that violate conventional norms of conduct." Examples include:

- Gossiping about co-workers behind their backs
- Mocking or mimicking another co-worker's mannerisms or physical characteristics
- Permitting a co-worker to struggle with an operation and making light of the situation
- Interrupting a co-worker's conversation
- Recruiting "allies" to take sides in interpersonal disputes
- Engaging in "horseplay" that can escalate and become increasingly ugly
- Encouraging co-workers to shun or be dismissive of an individual

Quite possibly, workplace incivility might be a reflection of the general coarsening of behaviors in society at large. For example, it is now commonplace for political discussions to involve name-calling or the questioning of one's patriotism. But Pearson and Porath emphasize that civility isn't about "being nice." It's about mutual respect.

Just as targets of incivility may experience added stress, lowered morale and possibly negative health implications, the bystanders who witness workplace incivility can also be negatively affected. When victims work less, care less or even leave their jobs, the bystanders are directly affected by having to pick up the slack of extra work created by this decreased morale and performance.

As we approach the start of a new year, many of us begin to think about resolutions that involve making positive changes in our lives. Perhaps we can expand this concept and resolve to make positive changes in our *work lives*. These may involve helping a co-worker who is struggling, abstaining from workplace conversations that demean or ridicule others, and making an effort to be friendly to others even when we feel stressed or preoccupied.