

A little respect goes a long way

With a little effort, attention and patience you can create an atmosphere where respect grows. Below are a few tips on how you can help your workplace to function at its best.



Recognize co-workers' achievements and help. Offer praise to co-workers for a job well done or a simple, "thanks" if they pitched in to make your work a little easier. Show your appreciation and watch how a few simple words can improve relations and make someone's day.

Don't make negative comments or jokes about another's work, skill, background, etc.

Accept and respect different lifestyles, religions, etc. Work to understand rather than exclude and keep an open mind. You may gain new insights and uncover common ground.

Be a good listener. Show you care and respect co-workers' ideas by giving them your full attention during conversations. Let colleagues speak without interrupting and actively listen by: using eye contact, summarizing what they say, asking clarifying questions and offering open, courteous feedback.

Include others. Make an effort to get feedback and ideas from colleagues. Doing so lets co-workers know you value their input and boosts team spirit.

Remember there are many right answers. Instead of forcing others to accept your ideas, stay open to other possibilities. The most successful teams are those that can pool the strengths of each person to achieve a final result everyone is happy with.

Don't pry. Respect others' right to privacy. Pressing coworkers for updates on personal circumstances won't win you allies. Less forward questions such as, "*How are you doing these days?*" or "*Is everything alright?*" show you care without stepping into personal territory. It also gives the person an opportunity to tell you as much as they feel comfortable sharing.

Don't be a space invader. Everyone has his or her own personal boundaries; a good rule of thumb is to stay about an arm's length from co-workers when talking. Standing too close makes people nervous while keeping too much of a distance suggests you're afraid. Also knock before entering an office and try not to interrupt co-workers on the phone or in meetings.

Admit when you're in the wrong. Taking responsibility for your actions shows others consideration and will earn you more admiration than scrambling to deflect blame. Sometimes a simple, "*I'm sorry, I made a mistake,*" is just the thing to smooth over a rough situation.

When disrespect turns into bullying

Just like schoolyard bullies who browbeat to get what they want, workplace bullies cross the line—emotionally and sometimes physically—by "shoving" their way to their goals. They may do this by excluding, intimidating, threatening, belittling or verbally/physically abusing the people around them.

The cost of bullying is high: it can shatter confidence, inflict emotional stress, and trigger depression in its victims. If it seeps into the workplace it can get in the way of employee concentration, productivity and morale.

Spot the signs of bullying behaviour before its negative effects take hold of your workplace.

A few of these signs include:

- Verbal attacks (e.g., raised voices, screaming, shouting, pointing fingers, rude gestures)

- Becoming angry or aggressive when others don't meet their expectations
- Openly or indirectly threatening others
- Instigating gossip or rumours about co-workers
- Openly excluding people or giving them the "silent treatment"
- Intentionally embarrassing, demeaning, irritating or intimidating people through words or gestures
- Physical attacks—the most obvious and extreme form of bullying—such as throwing items, kicking, punching, or shoving to get what they want

How to handle a workplace bully

Handling a workplace bully is a daunting task for most people, especially if you are the target of aggression. You may feel intimidated and wish the problem would just "go away". But this rarely happens: as long as the behaviour is tolerated it's probably not going to disappear any time soon. Below are a few suggestions that may help.

Raise the issue. Calmly and directly tell the offender his/her actions or words are hurtful and unacceptable. Your colleague may be surprised by your concerns because he/she unintentionally upset you.

Be clear. Explain that if the situation continues you will take the issue to the next level.

Don't ignore it. Studies show that over 96 per cent of employees are aware of a co-worker being bullied. Don't silently consent to bad behaviour: instead approach the target of the abuse and offer your support.

Know your workplace harassment policies and procedures. Today, many organizations have workplace policies in place to address situations involving inappropriate conduct. Become familiar with your company's policies and procedures and don't be concerned about approaching your Human Resources department if you are not sure if a policy exists for the situation you are facing.

Keep track of when incidents happen. This will help you keep events clearly organized should you decide to take further steps.

Contact HR or your Personnel department to discuss the situation and standard practices to deal with your situation.

If a bully becomes aggressive:

- Stay as composed as possible and try to keep your voice relaxed and calm
- Keep eye contact but don't stare
- Signal someone (co-worker, manager, customer) for help discreetly
- Don't try to engage the person physically unless you are in danger

While physically aggressive incidents are uncommon, it's always wise—especially if you work with the public—to map out a plan before an emergency situation arises. You can also avoid the damaging effects of workplace bullying by being proactive. Keep your eyes open for disrespectful deeds and deal with them honestly and courteously as soon as they come up, even if you're not the target. Allowing rude or bullying behaviour to continue may seem simpler but, in the long run, it can pollute your workplace's atmosphere and create a "toxic" environment.

By holding a mirror up to your own actions and remembering that there is always time to be polite and considerate—say thanks, compliment achievements, and deal with people in an open, well-mannered way—you can spread respect throughout your workplace.