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Embracing Our Shared Humanity: Civility for Our Times

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On July 18, Leroy Smith, director of the South Carolina Department of Public Safety and the first African American to hold this position, was working crowd control to provide security for two demonstrations. On the north side of the State House, the Black Educators for Justice were demonstrating; on the south side were the Loyal White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, who were protesting the removal of the Confederate flag.¹ Upon seeing an elderly white supremacist in physical distress from the heat, Leroy Smith came to his aid. “With his left arm around the man’s back and his right hand on the man’s right arm, he walked the swastika-adorned demonstrator up the steps, as many as 40. He walked slowly, steadily, all the while giving encouragement: We’re going to make it. Just keep on going.”² He walked the man inside the air-conditioned building and up several flights of stairs to rest on a couch. A staffer for the governor took a photo, which he posted on twitter. When interviewed about the wide-spread attention the photograph has received, Leroy Smith said he “hoped the image would help society move past the recent spasms of hate and violence Asked why he thinks the photo has had such resonance, he gave a simple answer: Love. ‘I think that’s the greatest thing in the world — love.’”³

This photograph and story went viral because they hit a nerve in our collective consciousness. In a culture that is bombarded with violence, road rage, and other forms of incivility, the image of a black trooper in uniform supporting a white supremacist dressed in a T-shirt with a swastika offered us a rare glimpse of kindheartedness and humanity in highly unlikely circumstances.

That this simple act of compassion struck such a chord reveals our hunger for increased civility, our awareness of the pervasiveness and insidiousness of incivility in our culture, and our realization that incivility extracts a great cost from us. As a result, we need to develop strategies to foster civility within ourselves and in our communities.

What it means to be civil:

Merriam-Webster’s dictionary defines civility as “polite, reasonable, and respectful behavior.”⁴ In defining civility, respondents to the Civility in America Survey most frequently used the words “respect” and “treating others as you want to be treated.”⁵ Tim Jaasko-Fisher, an expert on

¹ <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/26/us/black-south-carolina-trooper-explains-why-he-embraced-a-white-supremacist.html>

² <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/26/us/black-south-carolina-trooper-explains-why-he-embraced-a-white-supremacist.html>

³ <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/26/us/black-south-carolina-trooper-explains-why-he-embraced-a-white-supremacist.html>

⁴ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/civility>.

⁵ http://www.webershandwick.com/uploads/news/files/Civility_in_America_2013_Exec_Summary.pdf 12.

civility in the legal community, defines civility as “the sincere intention to see the humanity in others and to act accordingly.”⁶ Professor Stephen L. Carter, law professor at Yale and legal and social-policy scholar, explains that “civility has two parts: generosity, even when it is costly, and trust, even when there is risk. Civility assumes that we will disagree; it requires us not to mask our differences but to resolve them respectfully. Civility requires that we listen to others with knowledge of the possibility that they are right and we are wrong. Civility requires that we express ourselves in ways that demonstrate our respect for others.”⁷

At its core, civility entails respect for others, an awareness of how we impact others, and a desire to work towards a common good. Incivility may result when any of these elements – respect, awareness of others, and commitment to community – is absent. Unfortunately, incivility is escalating in all sectors of our culture, and it extracts high costs economically, personally, and societally.

The pervasiveness of incivility

Incivility has increased, with some saying that it has reached epidemic levels. Incivility pervades the media, the workplace, schools, and politics. In the five years since the first annual Civility in America Survey was conducted in 2012, one finding has remained constant: “America has a civility deficit, and most Americans think civility will worsen in the years ahead. Roughly two-thirds of citizens still believe that we have a major civility problem, and seven in 10 believe that civility has eroded over the past few years. Only one in eight Americans believes civility will get better over the course of the next few years.”⁸

Over 80% of respondents to the 2013 Civility in America Survey think uncivil behavior is leading to an increase in violence and that civility will not improve until our government leaders act more civilly. The majority believe that the Internet and social media platforms engender incivility and that it is getting worse.⁹ Incivility is prevalent in schools. A majority of parents reported that their children experienced incivility at school, and some actually transferred their children to different schools because of it.¹⁰ According to the 2014 Civility in America Survey, 90% of Millennials, those people who were born between 1981 and 1996, have personally experienced incivility.¹¹ Millennials expect to experience incivility an average of 9.3 times per week, and strikingly, almost half of them expect to experience incivility within the next 24 hours.¹²

⁶ Tim Jaasko-Fisher.

⁷ STEPHEN L. CARTER, *CIVILITY: MANNERS, MORALS, AND THE ETIQUETTE OF DEMOCRACY* BASIC BOOKS, 1998. Print

⁸ <http://www.webershandwick.com/uploads/news/files/civility-in-america-2014.pdf>.

⁹ http://www.webershandwick.com/uploads/news/files/Civility_in_America_2013_Exec_Summary.pdf 3.

¹⁰ 62% said their children experienced incivility in school and 11% actually transferred schools as a result of the incivility. http://www.webershandwick.com/uploads/news/files/Civility_in_America_2013_Exec_Summary.pdf 3.

¹¹ <http://www.webershandwick.com/uploads/news/files/civility-in-america-2014.pdf> 6.

¹² *Id.*

Furthermore, the pervasiveness of incivility in politics is a contributing factor of why a majority of Americans are disengaging from the political process and media.¹³ Regardless of political party affiliation, each year respondents to the Civility in America Survey believe that “the government behaves uncivilly and politicians are seen as the number one cause of civility erosion in America.”¹⁴ The majority of the 2012 respondents thought that the media was one of the top five of the “most uncivil aspects of American life,” and 82% believe that the media “is more interested in controversy than facts.”¹⁵

These survey results demonstrate that a large segment of Americans believe civility is declining. However, at the same time, of those responding to the 2013 survey, 87% indicated a willingness to take a national civility pledge,¹⁶ suggesting an opportunity to turn the tide.

Among those who are working to turn the tide are Drs. Lynne Andersson and Christine M. Pearson. They define workplace incivility as “low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect. Uncivil behaviors are characteristically rude and discourteous, displaying a lack of regard for others.”¹⁷ In the seminal book, *The Cost of Bad Behavior: How Incivility Is Damaging Your Business and What to Do About It*, Pearson and Porath explain that incivility certainly includes outright aggressive behaviors such as physical violence, throwing temper tantrums, door slamming, and yelling. But incivility also includes less aggressive behaviors such as interrupting conversations, not returning phone calls or emails, taking credit for others’ efforts, passing blame, not saying “please” or “thank you”, not listening, sending bad news through email, showing up late or leaving meetings early, excluding others from a network or team, using a demeaning or condescending tone, talking loudly in common areas, spreading rumors or gossip, texting or emailing during a meeting or conversation, and showing little interest in another’s opinion.¹⁸ Clearly, incivility takes many forms and appears in multiple contexts.

But often, those who act uncivilly do so without an intention to be uncivil, hurtful, or insensitive. Usually they just lack the awareness that their behavior could detrimentally impact others. Although subtle and often without malicious intent, these acts can aggregate over time with devastating consequences.

The costs of incivility

Such pervasive levels of incivility not only are hurting our culture generally, but acts of incivility are also harmful personally. Incivility hurts organizations financially, and it hurts individual psychological and physical well-being.¹⁹

¹³ http://www.webershandwick.com/uploads/news/files/2012_Civility_ExecutiveSummary.pdf 10.

¹⁴ <http://www.webershandwick.com/uploads/news/files/civility-in-america-2014.pdf> 15.

¹⁵ http://www.webershandwick.com/uploads/news/files/2012_Civility_ExecutiveSummary.pdf 9.

¹⁶ http://www.webershandwick.com/uploads/news/files/Civility_in_America_2013_Exec_Summary.pdf 2.

¹⁷ Lynne M. Andersson & Christine M. Pearson, Tit for tat? The spiraling effect of incivility in the workplace, *Academy of Management Review*. 24 (1999): 452, 457 Print.

¹⁸ CHRISTINE M. PEARSON AND CHRISTINE L. PORATH, *THE COST OF BAD BEHAVIOR* New York Penguin Group 2009. Print; see also <https://hbr.org/2013/01/the-price-of-incivility/>.

¹⁹ <https://hbr.org/2013/01/the-price-of-incivility/>.

Acts of incivility in the workplace have detrimental financial consequences, including lower productivity and efficiency, higher absenteeism, higher turnover rates among employees, disruptions in concentration and increased counterproductive work behavior,²⁰ and negative impacts on consumer attitudes and behavior.

Research demonstrates that incivility in the workplace reduces worker motivation and productivity. Pearson and Porath surveyed 800 managers and employees in 17 different industries. Among the targets surveyed, the vast majority said their commitment to the organization declined, and they lost time worrying about the incident and avoiding the offender. Significant numbers said that they intentionally decreased their work effort, time at work, and work quality.²¹ In fact, it has been estimated that because of workplace incivility, organizations annually lose about \$6 billion.²²

Additionally, incivility results in higher turnover rates. In one survey, 26% of respondents have quit a job because of incivility.²³ This is also costly for the companies. For example, O'Melveny & Myers, a law firm, estimated that over the course of a few years, the firm lost six attorneys and two paralegals because of one partner's incivility. The firm estimated that replacing these workers cost over \$2.8 million.²⁴

Not only are there financial costs to businesses, but even worse, incivility increases errors on the job and can even cost lives. In a recent survey of more than 4,500 doctors, nurses and other hospital personnel, a majority of respondents tied abusive and insulting conduct to medical errors, and just over one-quarter linked these behaviors to patient deaths.²⁵

In addition, acts of incivility negatively impact consumers. For example, 69% of the respondents in the 2011 Civility in America Survey stated they "either stopped buying from a company or have re-evaluated their opinions of a company because someone from that company was uncivil in their interaction."²⁶ Respondents also said that they advise people they know to avoid companies whose representatives are uncivil or rude.²⁷

²⁰ Paula C. Morrow, James C. McElroy & Kevin P. Scheibe, Work unit incivility, job satisfaction, and total quality management among transportation employees, 47 *Transportation Research Part E: Logistics and Transportation Review* 1210 (2011) *JSTOR* Web. 10 February, 2016

²¹ CHRISTINE M. PEARSON AND CHRISTINE L. PORATH, *THE COST OF BAD BEHAVIOR* 55 (2009).

²² Christine L. Porath, Alexandra Gerbasi & Sebastian L. Schorch, The Effects of Civility on Advice, Leadership, and Performance, 100 *Journal of Applied Psychology* 1527 2015, Print; available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/apl0000016>.

²³ http://www.webershandwick.com/uploads/news/files/Civility_in_America_2013_Exec_Summary.pdf 3.

²⁴ CHRISTINE M. PEARSON AND CHRISTINE L. PORATH, *THE COST OF BAD BEHAVIOR* 92-95 New York Penguin Group 2009. Print

²⁵ <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/21/opinion/sunday/is-your-boss-mean.html>.

²⁶ https://www.webershandwick.com/uploads/news/files/Civility_in_America_2011.pdf 7.

²⁷ *Id.*

The financial costs are just one tangible and easily measurable negative impact of incivility. More concerning are the psychological distress and harm to individual health and well-being.²⁸ Although a one-time isolated incident of incivility can have detrimental effects, “it may [also] be the accumulated effect of frequent ‘daily hassles’ that are harmful to individual health and well-being.”²⁹ For example, in a study of university students, researchers found that frequent exposure to incivility increased negative emotions, which increased disengagement with the institution and lowered academic performance. Furthermore, it increased feelings of ostracism, which can “culminate in depression, helplessness, low self-efficacy, and anxiety.”³⁰ In addition to leading to lowered performance and psychological distress, Dr. Robert M. Sapolsky, Professor at Stanford School of Medicine, contends that “when people experience intermittent stressors like incivility for too long or too often, their immune systems pay the price. We also may experience major health problems, including cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes and ulcers.”³¹

Studies about the cognitive and psychological impact of incivility show that acts of incivility reduce cognitive effectiveness, creativity, helpfulness, and memory, and increase dysfunctional ideation.³²

In 2005, Drs. Porath and Amir Erez conducted a three-part study to evaluate how being the actual target, being the indirect target, or just imagining being the target of rudeness impacts cognitive ability, creative functioning, and helpfulness. In the first experiment, college students were asked to participate in a study about the link between personality and performance for which they would receive extra credit. They were put into two groups, one group exposed to rudeness and the other included as a control group. Both groups were instructed to complete a personality questionnaire, complete 10 anagrams, and take five minutes to create a list of uses for a brick. In the second experiment, students were sent to the wrong office to participate in the study. One group of students was very rudely redirected to the correct room, and the students in the control group were simply told that the room had changed. Upon arriving at the correct room, students in both groups performed the same tasks as in the first experiment.³³

The participants who were exposed to rudeness in these first two experiments performed significantly worse on the tasks. They performed 61% worse than the control group on the anagram tasks and produced less than half as many uses for the brick. In both experiments, not only did those in the group exposed to rudeness come up with fewer uses for the brick, but the uses were also less diverse and creative. In addition, they came up with more dysfunctional uses

²⁸ Zhiqing Zhou, Effects of Workplace Incivility on Nurses’ Emotions, Well-being, and Behaviors: A Longitudinal Study 1 (2014) Print, available at <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=6534&context=etd>.

²⁹ Amir Erez, Christine L. Porath & Trevor Foulk, *Even If It’s Only On Your Mind: The Cognitive Toll of Incivility*, www.gsb.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/documents/ob_02_14_erez.pdf 4.

³⁰ Brianna Barker Caza and Lilia M. Cortina, From Insult to Injury: Explaining the Impact of Incivility, *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* 29 (2007) 335, 345 Print.

³¹ http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/21/opinion/sunday/is-your-boss-mean.html?_r=2

³² Christine L. Porath & Amir Erez, Overlooked but not untouched: How rudeness reduces onlookers’ performance on routine and creative tasks, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 109 (2009) 29 Print.

³³ Christine L. Porath & Amir Erez, Does Rudeness Really Matter? The Effects of Rudeness on Task Performance and Helpfulness, *Academy of Management Journal* 50 (2007) 1181 Print, available at http://bakerretail.wharton.upenn.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Amir_Erez_Paper_1.pdf.

for the brick such as “smash the experimenter’s face,” “break someone’s nose,” “murder someone,” or “beat someone up”.³⁴

In their third experiment, student participants in the group exposed to rudeness were asked to write a short story elaborating on a scenario describing a rude incident and to imagine it happened to them. The control group was asked to write about neutral events. Then all student participants completed the same cognitive and creative tasks as in the first two experiments. Those in the group that wrote about rudeness “did not perform as well as controls on the anagrams assignment, produced fewer uses for a brick, and were rated as less creative and less flexible on their brick uses than the uses produced by the controls.”³⁵

Incivility not only impacts the targets detrimentally but also harms witnesses of the incivility, producing a spill-over effect. In 2009, Porath and Erez employed a similar control and experimental group methodology to measure the impact of witnessing rudeness on cognitive and creative functioning and helpfulness.³⁶ The participants who witnessed the rudeness performed lower than the control group on an anagram test and on the brick test, producing fewer and less creative uses. As was expected, the participants who witnessed the rude response had higher levels of dysfunction ideation. In addition, they demonstrated roughly 50% lower citizenship behavior, measured as willingness to volunteer.³⁷ Porath and Erez concluded that witnessing rudeness can prime “anti-social thought in the observers,”³⁸ producing antisocial behavior, reducing helpfulness, and reducing prosocial tendencies.

The above summary is a small sampling of the multitude of research that demonstrates the many ways that acts of incivility harm our economy, our work environments, our psychological and physical health, our cognitive and creative functioning, and our cooperativeness.

The benefits of civility

As the foregoing provides strong evidence that incivility harms our society and our individual health and wellbeing, then it follows that the absence of incivility benefits us at all these levels. However, to foster civility means more than merely refraining from being uncivil, it means being civil in a proactive, not neutral, way.

In the workplace civility benefits the organization and the individual. Despite some belief, arguably misplaced, that acting uncivilly helps one advance up the career ladder, being civil is a benefit in today’s “fast-paced, technologically complex, and culturally diverse” work

³⁴ <https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/volume-24/edition-7/how-rudeness-takes-its-toll>.

³⁵ Christine L. Porath & Amir Erez, Does Rudeness Really Matter? The Effects of Rudeness on Task Performance and Helpfulness, *Academy of Management Journal* 50 (2007) 1181 Print, available at http://bakerretail.wharton.upenn.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Amir_Erez_Paper_1.pdf.

³⁶ Christine L. Porath & Amir Erez, *Overlooked but not untouched: How rudeness reduces onlookers’ performance on routine and creative tasks*, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 29 (2009) 109 Print.

³⁷ *Id.* at 33, 35.

³⁸ *Id.* at 36.

environment.³⁹ Civility engenders more positive feelings about one's self as well as more positive feelings about others. In this way, civility helps to develop and strengthen relationships.⁴⁰ When interactions are civil, people feel heard, acknowledged, appreciated, and respected, and valued.⁴¹

In a recent study, researchers found that people who are civil are viewed as warm and competent, and therefore, they are more likely to be asked for advice and are also more likely to be considered a leader. Civil people are more likely to engender positive responses from others, who will be more supportive, committed, and motivated to work harder. In addition, others are more likely to recommend a person who is civil.⁴²

Civility also facilitates cooperation in the workplace. David Brooks, New York Times Op-Ed Columnist, writes that cooperation and kindness are essential components for advancement. He states that “we often have an incentive to repay kindness with kindness, so others will do us favors when we're in need. We have an incentive to establish a reputation for niceness, so people will want to work with us. We have an incentive to work in teams, even against our short-term self-interest because cohesive groups thrive. Cooperation is as central to evolution as mutation and selection...[N]atural selection takes place not only when individuals compete with other individuals, but also when groups compete with other groups. Both competitions are examples of the survival of the fittest, but when groups compete, it's the cohesive, cooperative, internally altruistic groups that win.”⁴³

Being civil can not only help reduce the pervasiveness of incivility and avoid the negative consequences that result from incivility, but more importantly, implementing strategies to foster civility benefits society, organizations, and individuals.

Strategies to foster civility

To foster civility, many people try to point the finger and correct the uncivil actor. However, true civility begins from within each of us; before we seek to improve someone else, we need to focus on our own behavior. P.M. Forni, co-founder of the Johns Hopkins Civility Project, reminds us that “civility means being constantly aware of others and weaving restraint, respect, and consideration into the very fabric of this awareness. Civility is a form of goodness; it is gracious goodness [I]t also entails an active interest in the well-being of our communities and even a concern for the health of the planet.”⁴⁴ Parker Palmer, founder and Senior Partner of the Center for Courage & Renewal, states that “[t]he civility we need will not come from watching our

³⁹ Christine L. Porath, Alexandra Gerbasi & Sebastian L. Schorch, The Effects of Civility on Advice, Leadership, and Performance, *Journal of Applied Psychology* 100 (2015) 1527 Print, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/apl0000016>.

⁴⁰ *Id.* at 2.

⁴¹ *Id.*

⁴² *Id.* at 9-10.

⁴³ David Brooks, Nice Guys Finish First, *N.Y. Times*. May 16, 2011 27 Print.

⁴⁴ P.M. FORNI, *CHOOSING CIVILITY* NEW YORK ST. MARTINS PRESS, 2002. Print; see also <http://legacycultures.com/10-actions-you-can-focus-on-to-influence-culture-of-respect-civility-in-your-workplace/>.

tongues. It will come from valuing our differences.”⁴⁵ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote, “If we could read the secret history of our enemies we should find in each man’s life sorrow and suffering enough to disarm all hostility.”⁴⁶

If being civil means to act with graciousness, compassion, value of difference, and disarm hostility, does being civil require passivity and weakness? On the contrary, to be civil is an act of courage. It does not require us to ignore our disagreements; rather, it requires us to find constructive ways to express ourselves and communicate with respect. Writing for an on-line journal directed at members of the legal profession, Mary H. Mocine, a Buddhist priest who practiced law for 18 years, asserts that being kind is an act of courage. She advocates using “radical kindness”: “Radical kindness includes being fierce when that is appropriate. It includes setting boundaries. It includes being flexible, thinking outside the box of our assumptions.”⁴⁷

One way we can foster civility is to practice the three pillars of civility: consciousness, creativity, and community.

Consciousness

Consciousness embodies the principles of emotional intelligence. Psychologist Daniel Goleman explains that emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive, understand, and manage one’s own emotions, as well as to understand and respond to others’ emotions.⁴⁸ Studies show that people with higher emotional intelligence are less uncivil and more resilient when faced with incivility.⁴⁹ Specifically, consciousness fosters civility by increasing our awareness in three key areas. First, consciousness calls upon us to be aware of our own psychological triggers, emotional responses, and overall well-being.⁵⁰ People who are psychologically healthy generally have a more positive outlook on life and tend to be more proactive and less reactive.⁵¹ Second, consciousness calls upon us to be aware of how our words and actions impact others. As mentioned above, the majority of uncivil actors are not aware that their behavior has negatively impacted others; greater awareness of the impact of their actions might prevent many unconscious incivilities. In developing this level of consciousness, we can increase our empathy and compassion for ourselves and others. Third, consciousness calls upon us to be aware that many of our beliefs and attitudes are unconscious and may be based on invalid biases. Increasing our awareness of these beliefs enables us to examine our assumptions and reduce the impact and influence of unconscious priming, which is how prior exposure to stimuli influences our interpretation of later stimulus.

⁴⁵ PARKER PALMER, *HEALING THE HEART OF DEMOCRACY* (2011).

⁴⁶ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Driftwood* (1857), quoted in John Bartlett, *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations* 467 (Justin Kaplan ed., 17th ed. 2002).

⁴⁷ <http://www.transformingpractices.com/gc/gc.html> (last visited Aug. 6, 2012).

⁴⁸ DANIEL GOLEMAN, *EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE* NEW YORK BANTAM BOOKS, 1995 Print.

⁴⁹ Paula C. Morrow, James C. McElroy, & Kevin P. Schreibe, Work unit incivility, job satisfaction, and total quality management among transportation employees, *Transportation Research Part E: Logistics and Transportation Review* 47 (2011) 1210-1220 Print.

⁵⁰ *Civility starts with you*, available at <http://www.americannursetoday.com/civility-starts-with-you/>; see also <http://www.nursinglibrary.org/vhl/handle/10755/307851>.

⁵¹ Cynthia L. Alexandra & G. Andrew H. Benjamin, Civility is Good for Your Health, *Wash Bar News* (April 2011) Print, available at https://www.academia.edu/501812/Civility_Is_Good_for_Your_Health.

In sum, staying conscious involves the discipline of being present in the moment; responding to the actual, real-time stimuli and not old triggers; and reflecting on our behaviors, thoughts, and beliefs. Techniques to develop our consciousness muscle can take a myriad of forms. Several techniques are; paying attention to our breathing, taking a deep breath before responding; engaging in regular physical exercises like running, walking, dancing, or doing yoga; being in nature; making art or music or other forms of creativity; maintaining a spiritual practice; or having a regular practice of mindfulness meditation.

Mindfulness helps counteract our brains' automatic reflexes; in so doing, it helps us respond rather than to react to stimuli and triggers. Our minds are hard-wired to look for and focus on negative experiences. Historically we were either prey or predator, and because our survival depended upon us avoiding danger and threats, the brain registers negative information and stimulus more rapidly in order to remember and avoid it in the future. This survival instinct results in a cycle of negativity that leads to pessimism and to overreactions.⁵² To further compound the harmful effects of our tendency or bias toward the negative, we do not actually remember each detail of an experience; instead, the brain recalls a few frames of the experience and then manufactures the remaining detail. Thus, each time we remember something we add details and reinforce the feelings associated with that experience. These simulations create strong responses to stimuli because a slight trigger will pull us out of the present and into the past. As a result, most everyday experiences (both pleasant and unpleasant) pale in comparison to those imagined or remembered. The simulation is riddled with unchecked assumptions, interpretations, and beliefs. Most often, because the negative trumps the positive, the negative unpleasant feeling tones prevail, color the experience, and cause us to avoid experiences that we perceive as being more painful than the reality actually is.⁵³

Negative experiences, even when we have healed them, leave traces in our brains that are primed to react to future fear-providing stimuli.⁵⁴ Negative experiences cause us to feel negative and pessimistic and be vigilant for future negative experiences, which prime us to overreact and create more negativity.⁵⁵

Conversely, practicing mindfulness changes the circuitry of our brains and transforms our relationships with others and with ourselves.⁵⁶ Mindfulness meditation is one example of such a practice. It involves turning one's attention to the present moment and being a neutral observer of one's thoughts and feelings. This practice supports a level of detachment that enables the practitioner to reflect on situations and avoid automatic reactions.⁵⁷ Studies show that mindfulness meditation helps us be responsive rather than automatically or unconsciously reactive to stimuli and triggers, helps us develop compassion, and helps us counteract the impact of bias and priming.

⁵² RICK HANSON & RICHARD MENDIUS, *BUDDHA'S BRAIN* 41-42 (2009).

⁵³ *Id.* at 42-45, 48.

⁵⁴ *Id.* at 42.

⁵⁵ *Id.*

⁵⁶ *Id.*

⁵⁷ Adam Lueke and Bryan Gibson, *Mindfulness Meditation Reduces Implicit Age and Race Bias: The Role of Reduced Automaticity of Responding*, 6 (3) *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 284, 284 (2015).

As we use mindfulness exercises and employ other strategies to strengthen our compassion, we must remember to practice compassion for ourselves. Psychologist Rick Hanson writes that “[t]he root of compassion is compassion for oneself.”⁵⁸ Self-compassion is “powerful for reducing the impact of difficult conditions, preserving self-worth, and building resilience It also opens your heart, since when you’re closed to your own suffering, it’s hard to be receptive to suffering in others.”⁵⁹

Finally, mindfulness can reduce implicit bias and the influence of priming. “Implicit attitudes are based on the automatic association between constructs in memory.”⁶⁰ Because mindfulness meditation reduces the influence of past experience on the present experience, it diminishes dependency on past memory or associations, which in turn decreases reliance on automatic responses to stimuli. Thus, mindfulness meditation frees the mind to make decisions with less bias.⁶¹ Studies likewise show that implicit beliefs can change in response to new information. For example, evaluative conditioning, which occurs when we are exposed to positive examples of members of negatively stereotyped groups, can change implicit racial attitudes.⁶² Other studies suggest that mindfulness techniques calibrated to remedy bias can reduce disability and race discrimination.⁶³

Consciousness fosters civility by helping us live and respond to the present stimuli, with awareness and compassion and without attachment or bias.

Creativity

The second pillar of civility is creativity. Engaging in creative process enables us to see a situation from the perspectives of all involved; to relate to the human, personal, and emotional experience of others; and to anticipate others’ needs, issues, and challenges. Creative processes include making art or music, dancing, writing, gardening, experimenting, taking a different route, or doing anything that enables us to suspend or quiet the cognitive control centers of our brains. Creativity fosters civility because it supports consciousness and self-awareness, fosters being in a state of flow, expands perspective, and supports effective problem-solving.

An essential state of consciousness to support creativity is flow. Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, founder and co-director of the Quality of Life Research Center, defines flow as “a state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience is so enjoyable that people will continue to do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it.”⁶⁴ In this state, people feel “strong, alert, in effortless control, unselfconscious, and

⁵⁸ RICK HANSON & RICHARD MENDIUS, *BUDDHA’S BRAIN* NEW HARBINGER PUBLICATIONS, 2009. 46 Print.

⁵⁹ *Id.* at 50-51.

⁶⁰ *Id.*

⁶¹ *Id.*

⁶² Adam Lueke and Bryan Gibson, *Mindfulness Meditation Reduces Implicit Age and Race Bias: The Role of Reduced Automaticity of Responding*, *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 6(3) 2015) 284, 285 Print.

⁶³ *Id.* at 287-288.

⁶⁴ CSIKSZENTMIHALYI, *FLOW* 4 (1990).

at the peak of their abilities.”⁶⁵ Flow states are not associated with rational thinking or goal orientation; instead “the essence of flow is the removal of the interference of the thinking mind . . . Absorption in a task indicates the absence of the self, and a merging of your awareness into the activity you are engaged in.”⁶⁶

The state of flow, in and of itself, promotes civility because there is a connection between flow and conscientiousness, a key component of civility. In a 2012 study, researchers found that “those who were more dutiful and persevering also tended to report higher levels of flow in their daily lives. This association is probably due to the fact that conscientiousness is positively related to other variables that are also associated with flow, such as social problem solving, life satisfaction, subjective happiness, positive affect and intrinsic motivation. Conscientious individuals are also more likely to spend the time practicing to master challenging tasks, conditions which make flow more likely.”⁶⁷

Creativity also supports civility by expanding perspectives. Creative process involves looking beyond our first impression of stimuli to discover other ways of seeing and interpreting. For example, a kaleidoscope contains various shapes, colors, and forms, yet each turn of the cylinder reveals a different pattern. Just recognizing that there is more than one pattern is significant in the process of expanding perspectives. Over time, we can develop not only this awareness, but we can also create a habit of discerning yet another pattern. This process allows us to address our own biases and assumptions, become more curious about perspectives of others, and see more possibilities.

Studies show that creative process activates different parts of the brain and in so doing, influences how we process information. In research comparing brain images of jazz musicians and rappers who played or rapped from pre-set music with those who improvised, results demonstrated that when engaged in a creative process of improvisation, the musicians showed decreased activity in the executive functioning and inhibition parts of the brain – i.e., the rational-thinking centers – and increased activity in the sensorimotor and language areas, as well as those areas that involve introspective thinking – i.e., more creative centers.⁶⁸ When we can suspend our cognitive control centers, such as when we daydream, we activate the areas of the brain that house unconscious forms of information processing.⁶⁹ This process allows us to expand beyond our habits of thinking about and interpreting stimuli.

Finally, because creativity facilitates consciousness and expands our perspectives, it supports more effective problem-solving. By suspending the cognitive regions of the brain and activating the unconscious forms of information-processing, we can widen our inquiry to more holistically analyze the problem and find more solutions. For example, a common toy for toddlers has a ball with different holes cut into shapes such as a star, circle, square, oval, with blocks of those

⁶⁵ <http://www.pursuit-of-happiness.org/history-of-happiness/mihaly-csikszentmihalyi/>.

⁶⁶ *Id.*

⁶⁷ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/scott-barry-kaufman/consciousness-and-flow_b_1108113.html.

⁶⁸ http://www.ted.com/talks/charles_limb_your_brain_on_improv?language=en; *see also* <http://www.brainfacts.org/In-Society/In-Society/Articles/2014/Unlocking-Creativity-in-the-Brain>.

⁶⁹ <http://www.brainfacts.org/In-Society/In-Society/Articles/2014/Unlocking-Creativity-in-the-Brain>.

shapes. The toddler puts the correctly shaped block into the corresponding hole in the ball. Our natural tendency is to solve complex problems by looking for the pre-conceived categories that will provide a ready-fit answer. But human problems don't necessarily come in neat shapes that correspond with our previous experience. When we limit analytic possibilities to preconceived categories, we limit our ability to find solutions that satisfy the greatest number of needs and desires.

Through creative process we can suspend our cognitive faculties and open our minds to a broader range of potentialities. In so doing, we are more likely to act civilly.

Community

The third pillar of civility is community. Civility calls upon us to do more than tolerate difference or otherness. It calls upon us to do more than respect difference or the other. It calls upon us to be curious about and value difference and other perspectives. Our brains are hard-wired for us to think that we are separate and independent from others and from our environment when, in fact, we are also connected and interdependent.⁷⁰ As we are continually confronted by the ways in which we are connected, the brain's desire to maintain our separateness creates "painful signals of disturbance and threat."⁷¹ When we lose our sense of connectedness, we feel more fear and vulnerability.⁷²

This neurological response to threat is to take care of our own and fear and fight others. Once we identify someone as "them," our brains automatically devalue and justify mistreatment of them.⁷³ This plays out in modern society in the form of "schoolyard cliques, office politics, and domestic violence," and fuels "prejudice, oppression, ethnic cleansing, and war."⁷⁴ To counter this tendency to separate "us" from "them," we must engage in practices that are more inclusive and that bring more into our inner circle. The Zen saying, "nothing left out," signifies that we leave nothing out of our awareness, our practice, and our heart. This principle necessarily leads to the question of whom and what are we leaving out when we separate "us" from "them."⁷⁵

To live valuing community is essential to fostering civility. As humans we live a shared interdependent existence. When he discusses his work with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that was set up after the end of apartheid in South Africa, Archbishop Desmond Tutu often speaks of Ubuntu, a South African humanist philosophy. He explains that we exist *only* in relation to other. He elaborates that our humanity is inextricably tied to each other, that we need to see ourselves in others, and that each of us needs the other to be the best he or she can be because that is the only way each of us can be the best we can be.⁷⁶ When we operate with this

⁷⁰ The left lobe of the brain forms the realization that our bodies are separate and distinct from the world, while the right lobe forms the realization of where our bodies are in relation to our environment. RICK HANSON & RICHARD MENDIUS, *BUDDHA'S BRAIN* 27 (2009).

⁷¹ RICK HANSON & RICHARD MENDIUS, *BUDDHA'S BRAIN* NEW HARBINGER PUBLICATIONS, 2009. 46 Print.

⁷² *Id.* at 29.

⁷³ *Id.* at 132.

⁷⁴ *Id.* at 131.

⁷⁵ *Id.*

⁷⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ftjdDOfTzbk>.

awareness, we strive to understand others in order to build and strengthen our community. Doing so improves our health and increases positive social skills.

Indeed, working to serve and strengthen our community is a fundamental value. Civic Humanism, rooted in the 14th and 15th centuries, is a founding value of our country and is a core aspect of civility. Put in its simplest form, Civic Humanism posits that humans are free, autonomous beings, able to make choices for themselves, and that with this freedom comes a concomitant duty to serve the common good. Os Guinness, social critic, calls for Americans to recommit to the founding principles of our nation by “abiding by a covenant . . . that requires duties as well as recognizing rights, that gives weight to truth, justice, and restraint as well as to power, and that sees civility as a necessary and vital companion to freedom and justice for all.”⁷⁷

A broader development of one’s sense of community can reduce implicit racial bias. Drs. Patricia G. Devine, Patrick S. Forscher, Anthony J. Austin, and William T. L. Cox outline specific strategies to reduce the impact of such bias. One of their five suggested strategies to increase opportunities to have contact with those from other groups. Having positive interactions with people from different groups “can ameliorate implicit bias through a wide variety of mechanisms, including altering the cognitive representations of the group or by directly improving evaluations of the group.”⁷⁸

Furthermore, being of service to the common good, a key component of civility, is broadly and personally beneficial because it promotes physical and psychological well-being and builds positive social skills. Research shows that serving others decreases stress hormones and that even witnessing helping behavior can boost the immune systems of college students.⁷⁹ According to the Dalai Lama, long-term happiness comes from being of service to others’ well-being.⁸⁰ Helping others activates the caudate nucleus and anterior cingulate cortex regions of the brain, those parts that trigger pleasure and reward, so being of service to others can produce a similar pleasure as satisfying a personal desire.⁸¹ Volunteers have been shown to exhibit positive emotions and social skills such as openness, agreeableness, and extraversion.⁸² Altruism and service increase a sense of meaning, self-esteem, and satisfaction with one’s daily activities and feelings of living up to one’s potential. They also increase feelings of connectedness and reduce feelings of isolation and depression.⁸³ Moreover, collaborating with others can build social skills. Collective action and the sense of common purpose can build social

⁷⁷ OS GUINNESS, *THE CASE FOR CIVILITY* New York Harper One, 2008. Print.

⁷⁸ Patricia G. Devine, Patrick S. Forscher, Anthony J. Austin, & William T. L. Cox, Long-term reduction in implicit race bias: A prejudice habit breaking intervention, *J. Exp Soc Psychol.* 48 (6) (2012) 1267-1278 Print., available at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3603687/pdf/nihms396358.pdf>.

⁷⁹ Constance Flanagan & Matthew Bundick, Civic Engagement and Psychosocial Well-Being in College Students, *Liberal Education* 97 (2011), available at <https://www.aacu.org/publications-research/periodicals/civic-engagement-and-psychosocial-well-being-college-students>.

⁸⁰ <http://www.ucanews.com/2011/12/02/dalai-lama-offers-key-to-happiness>.

⁸¹ David Brooks, Nice Guys Finish First, *N.Y. TIMES*, May 16, 2011 27 Print.

⁸² *Id.*

⁸³ Constance Flanagan & Matthew Bundick, Civic Engagement and Psychosocial Well-Being in College Students, *Liberal Education* 97 (2011), available at <https://www.aacu.org/publications-research/periodicals/civic-engagement-and-psychosocial-well-being-college-students>.

trust, increase our faith in humanity, and help to broaden perspectives and see the best in others.⁸⁴

Conclusion

Incivility is pervasive in our culture. Acts of incivility cost billions of dollars annually, negatively impact workplace environments, impair our health and well-being, reduce cognitive and creative functioning, and lower citizenship behavior. In contrast, civility, defined as proactive behaviors that show mutual respect and care (rather than merely the absence of incivility), benefits us all. Because much of uncivility is the result of a lack of sensitivity and awareness of how the actor's behavior impacts others, increasing awareness of the impact as well as the detrimental consequences of incivility might be one of the best antidotes to it. Rather than focusing on fixing the actor who is uncivil, more effective strategies to foster civility begin within each of us.

As we develop our consciousness, creativity, and community, we can deflect incivility and model behaviors that increase civility and deepen our humanity. We can all be more like Leroy Smith, the African American state trooper mentioned earlier. He was able to be conscious of and suspend his own triggers and emotional reaction upon seeing the white supremacist at the courthouse steps. He was able to creatively see beyond the Nazi Swastika on the T-shirt; instead he saw a man who was suffering. He was able to recognize his responsibility to his community and to his fellow man. This recognition enabled him to put the needs of that man above his own possible negative emotional response. He was able to face his own biases and to meet that man with compassion and a desire to help. Leroy Smith said it was love that caused the photograph to have such resonance – love that was embodied in an act of true civility.

⁸⁴ *Id.*