FORETHOUGHT MANAGING PEOPLE

How Toxic Colleagues Corrode Performance

by Christine Porath and Christine Pearson
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We’ve been studying incivility for a decade, and we’ve found that common (and generally tolerated) antisocial behavior at work is far more toxic than managers imagine. Berating bosses; employees who take credit for others’ work, assign blame, or spread rumors; and coworkers who exclude teammates from networks—all of these can cut a swath of destruction that’s often visible only to the immediate victims. Targets of bad behavior become angry, frustrated, and even vengeful. Job satisfaction falls, and performance plummets. Some employees leave. But those who stay may take a bigger toll on the organization. As a senior vice president of a Fortune 50 firm told us, “They can and do sit in the boat without pulling the oars...and that may be worse than leaving.”

To understand the impact of incivility on performance, we polled several thousand managers and employees from a diverse range of U.S. companies about their responses to rudeness at work and learned that among those on the receiving end,

- 38% decreased their work quality,
- 66% said their performance declined,
- 80% lost work time worrying about the incident,
- 63% lost time avoiding the offender, and
- 78% said their commitment to the organization declined.

As companies slash workforces and depend on the staff left behind to do more, they can’t afford to let a few noxious employees corrode everyone else’s performance. Uncivil behavior should be penalized and repeat offenders cut loose.

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