

# *Civility* in an Uncivil World

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Over the past few years, some aspects of customary, socially correct behavior has seemed to regress or at times even disappear. From leaders in the highest offices to our most beloved celebrities, we can read about name-calling, blaming, threats, and even outright violence. Is it really surprising when these behaviors trickle into our communities and work spaces? In order to guide our communities in a more positive direction, it helps to identify uncivil behavior and lead by example. With a lot of deliberate, consistent effort, our positive behavior can become contagious.

We've all dealt with the outburst from a client or Unit Owner who doesn't get their way and writes a dramatic email or says something nasty. It's easy to dismiss them as unhinged, ignore all their future complaints and get defensive in these unpleasant situations. It's important to be self-aware of these human tendencies, because it can lead to habits that will not serve you well. If you hide from the tough conversations, you might miss out on the opportunity to connect with others, learn from the interactions and grow. Even though it may trigger tough emotions to deal with the challenging client, confronting them can nip problems in the bud. You may even gain an ally! Start by making a conscious effort to put yourself in the strongest mental state so that you are best-equipped to deal with the inevitable challenges that arise.

## 1. Self-Reflection:

Be cognizant of how much media you're taking in every day and the influence it might have on you. The trend of constant media and social network notifications may work well for those who benefit from extra views or clicks, but excessive exposure might have an adverse impact on our thoughts, attention and behavior. Sometimes we expend so much emotional energy reading the news that by the time we arrive at work, we're depleted. Disconnect from the breaking news long enough to focus on what's most important, both personally and professionally. *How is the information you absorb moving you towards your goals and who you aspire to become?*

## 2. Empathy:

Depersonalize the situation whenever possible. In more cases than not, the client isn't yelling because of you but because of the situation. Think about what they might be going through in their personal life with the challenges in the world and take a deep breath before responding. You may be the only person who listens to them today. If you can, counter their distress with a calming tone and a thoughtful response. *Will your undistracted attention for the next ten minutes save you hours over the next month?*



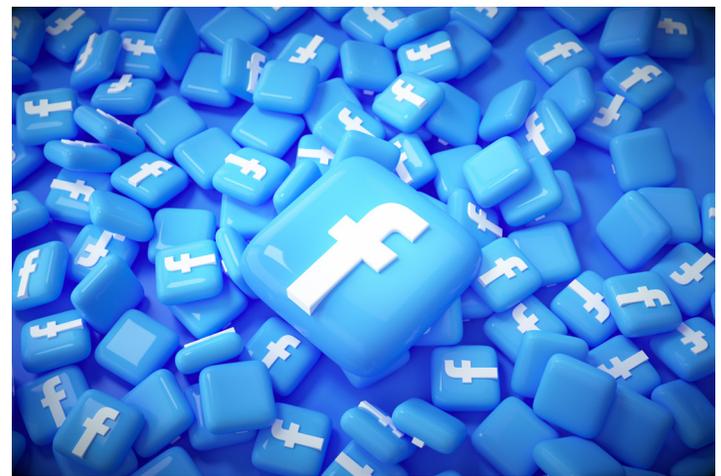
## 3. Situational Awareness:

Some of us have also noticed situations where someone makes a bold political statement to strangers or in the workplace, under the assumption that everyone agrees. I've seen it make others in the room very uncomfortable or outright angry. While it's tempting to share your opinion about the latest piece of legislation in Congress, don't forget to take note of your environment, your relationship to the listener and the possible repercussions. For example, if you're getting interviewed for a job, you may not want to risk blaming a person or administration for the current events of the day. Even if the community is in a location where the demographics seem to point to a particular opinion, you don't want to put your foot in your mouth later. Once you learn about the political or ideological leanings of a person, just remember to keep it professional at work.

Keeping these habits in mind can help us deflect and appropriately respond to uncivil thoughts and behaviors. Some other challenges that you may run into at work can be ameliorated by practical strategies.

### 1. Write it down:

Some people's stress shows up as aggressiveness, while others' stress manifests as anxiety. Anxiety can cause us to start thinking selfishly or otherwise worry about possibilities that may never happen. When others come to you with concerns or hypothetical situations, fight the inclination to dismiss them as unrealistic. Instead, try brainstorming your concerns (or your residents' concerns) and plan some possible solutions. The anxiety becomes less of an abstract idea to obsess over and more of a concrete problem you can solve. *What are the pros and cons of each option? What is the worst thing that can happen and how can you mitigate it?*



## 2. Set Expectations:

In a world where we can get instant groceries, dates and packages with the click of a button, some people expect the same instant gratification of their community manager. Asking to “speak to the manager” has become an internet joke. For managers, it can often translate to copying the entire Board of Directors to an email. Unfortunately, some creative solutions require time to develop, especially if they are to last. If a problem will take some time to resolve, let the resident know the challenges you are considering. Provide an estimated time for completion or resolution and keep them in the loop of any progress.

## 3. Acknowledge opposing views:

Things aren’t always black and white in community management. Nor can we predict the future. So it’s important to acknowledge counter-arguments even when they don’t fit the narrative we want to create. If you make a mistake, predict something wrong, or there are possible negative consequences of your recommendation, talk openly about it. How might you pivot your plans moving into the future?

It can be instinctual to tune out anything that requires extra time or energy when it feels like you don’t have any to spare. With everything going on in the world, our emotional state and the example we set may be the least of our worries. However, as a leader of your community, you are in a position to be a calming and positive influence. Small, deliberate interactions can accumulate and create real change. You may find that you not only save time in the long run, but you also get a little peace of mind!



Chantu serves as Creative Collaborator and Resident Contrarian for the consulting firm Association Bridge, LLC. She enjoys making connections from her daily life to her work and vice versa.

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