



## How to Stop Bullying, Incivility, and Other Disruptive Behaviors in the Workplace

### Description

Lately I've spent a lot of time writing and talking about employee well-being. All sorts of factors have led to rampant stress, burnout, and even trauma inside organizations, and COVID-19 has only accelerated them. Add bullying, incivility, and other disruptive behaviors to the mix and you can see why so many employees are struggling.

We desperately need workplace cultures where people pull together, communicate respectfully, and support each other. We need employees to bring their best selves to work (and at a time when it's so hard to find good employees, we need them to want to stay!).

Unfortunately, most leaders don't have the skill set to deal with disruptive behaviors. It can be especially tough when remote and hybrid arrangements make it hard to see what's going on.

The great news is there's a Studer Community Institute workshop coming up Wednesday, October 27, 2021, that can help. In [How to Address Disruptive Behaviors and Cultivate a Healthier Workforce](#), international speaker and consultant Renee Thompson, DNP, RN, CSP, will share tools and strategies every leader needs to know.

This session will be held at First United Methodist Church in Pensacola from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. There is also a virtual option. Click [here](#) to learn more and to register.

We're fortunate to have Dr. Thompson on hand for this event. She's the CEO and founder of the Healthy Workforce Institute and a national expert on addressing disruptive workforce behavior. I have admired and followed her for years.

Workshop attendees will learn how to identify behaviors that undermine a culture of respect, set behavioral expectations with employees, and hold them accountable. For example:

1. How to recognize the difference between bullying, incivility, and someone just having a bad day
2. Proven tactics successful leaders use to address and eliminate disruptive behaviors
3. Practical strategies to cultivate a nurturing, supportive, and professional work environment

I am hoping and expecting to see a huge turnout for this event. In the meantime, here are a few insights inspired by Dr. Thompson:

**Know what disruptive behavior looks like.** This can be any behavior that keeps others from functioning normally. Dr. Thompson cites yelling, criticizing, gossiping, and arguing. Bullying can be extreme at times: She talks about a manager who reached out about employees' changing the code on the staff bathroom door so that people sent from other departments couldn't get in. We need to recognize disruptive behaviors so we can address them quickly and firmly.

**People think hazing is different from bullying, but it really isn't.** We might think hazing new employees—giving them the worst assignments, for example—is okay because our intentions are good. We want to see if the new person can make it through, at which point we say, "Welcome to the club." But Dr. Thompson says while the intentions around hazing may be different from those around bullying, the behaviors are the same. And they're not helpful. When we're hard on new employees during the learning phase, it makes them less *confident* and therefore less *competent*.

**Leaders need to "mother bear" new employees.** Rather than hazing new employees, we need to give them the easiest assignments to build up their confidence. We need to nurture and support them. We need to protect them at all costs the way a mother bear treats her cubs. Dr. Thompson actually uses "mother bear" as a verb. (Men and women alike can "mother bear." It's not a gender. It's a strategy for creating a culture of caring.)

**Give them the red carpet treatment from the start.** Dr. Thompson talks about her first day in a new department after returning to clinical practice following a long absence. She was extremely nervous. But then her preceptor said, "Welcome to our home. Consider yourself a guest here today. We're going to make sure we do everything we can to make this the best day you've ever had in this organization." And sure enough, they did. Everyone went out of their way to make her first day in the department as easy as possible.

**Create sacred spaces (especially when customers are in earshot).** Dr. Thompson says she learned about this concept when she and her daughter were at a nail salon. The owner came over and told them, "No talking, no cell phones. This is a sacred space." So now for hospital audiences, she advocates creating sacred spaces anywhere patients can hear—making sure there's no rudeness or yelling or arguing in those spaces. Actually, I like this idea for any organization. We all need sacred spaces, when customers can hear us for sure, but really any time.

**Be an upstander, not a bystander.** When you see bullying behavior, speak up. Confront the bully. Support the person being bullied. Dr. Thompson says the most powerful intervention to stop the cycle of bullying and incivility is for the witness to speak up, not the target—especially if they're someone in a supportive role (who may be treated as less valuable than others).

**It's uncomfortable to confront people about disruptive behaviors. Have the conversation anyway.** Most of us try to avoid confrontation. Yet bullying and incivility continue because leaders use silence as a strategy. One, we don't know how to address these behaviors. Two, it's uncomfortable, so we choose not to. This is a skill we can develop, and it takes practice.

**Remember: An antidote to cruelty is kindness.** Every day, do one thing to make life easier for

another employee. Also, find one thing to compliment someone about. Humans tend to have a negativity bias, which is why we need to be proactive about spreading kindness. In fact, Dr. Thompson created a whole “Be Kind” campaign with buttons for people to wear. She says it’s harder for people to be cruel to coworkers when they’re both wearing a “Be Kind” button!

**Do the right thing even if others don’t acknowledge it.** Think of yourself as a role model for professionalism, kindness, respect, compassion, and caring. You are teaching others how to behave. You may be surprised to find that even the worst bullies will follow your lead. But whether this happens or not doesn’t matter. You never regret doing the right thing.

Dr. Thompson says creating cultures of caring starts with holding up the mirror. She says to think of the person you love more than anyone else. Wouldn’t you do anything to help them succeed? Ask yourself, *How can I show up every day and treat all colleagues like I would treat the person I love the most?* Culture change always starts with how you show up, every day.

**Date Created**

October 26, 2021

**Author**

quint-studer