



Incivility Takes Over

Elizabeth Yanke, MBA, Member Services Director, League of Wisconsin Municipalities

The last two years seem to have exacerbated rude behavior all around us. We've witnessed fights on airlines or in the grocery stores over toilet paper via social media. We've all been jolted by someone's road rage and uncalled for use of their car horn. Watching these incidents on video or in person has real emotional consequences. Internally, observing rude incidents increases stress hormones in the body which leads to clouded judgment, lack of trust, and lack of creativity.

Very few people are intentionally rude, but too much negative input without consciousness of it can create a cycle of bad manners and negative culture. In one study, 26% of people showed elevated levels of cortisol just by observing someone who is stressed.¹ We know that negative workplaces are less efficient, less creative, and less effective.

The Flip Side

On the flip side, we know that positivity can create a cycle of positivity. One person's enthusiasm for a project can lead to hope in their colleagues. One person's act of kindness, like picking up trash or opening a door or offering to carry

boxes, creates positive hormones in not only the two people who interact, but in anyone who observes that act of kindness as well.²

In the face of so much negative input it is important for leaders in their community to consciously choose to react or not react to negative triggers. Step one is to cultivate a positive mindset – which is easier said than done. Stress is inevitable, but shifting the focus to view it as an opportunity to take on a challenge and learn is one tool in cultivating a more positive mindset. Research suggests that stress can cause the human brain to use more of its capabilities, improve memory and intelligence, and even increase productivity.³ This only underscores the importance of the narrative that a stressor is an opportunity for growth.

Another very important tool for dealing with stress is empathy. A subtle nod of understanding when the person across from you talks about their dog needing to see the vet goes a long way in your ability to separate from their stress. It also helps them feel slightly more comfortable and exhibit fewer stress signals moving forward.

1. Make Yourself Immune to Secondhand Stress (hbr.org)

2. rakhealthfacts.pdf (dartmouth.edu)

3. Make Stress Work for You (hbr.org)

Join us at the League's 124th Annual Conference for "Incivility Takes Over" a workshop with Elizabeth Yanke, Member Services Director, League of Wisconsin Municipalities

We will discuss how incivility effects our society and will cover research on the impacts of rude behavior on logical thought, creativity, and trust. We'll also talk about what municipal leaders can do to foster more civility in their communities.

Incivility Takes Over
Thursday, October 20, 9:00 a.m.

The League's 124th Annual Conference · October 19-21, 2022 · La-Crosse Center, La Crosse

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Empathy for yourself is also very important in dealing with stress. Acknowledging that you don't have it all together, that some things are lingering and just waiting for your attention will give you and your colleagues a sense of acceptance that not everything needs to be perfect.

Of course, there is also the old standby advice that still rings true today for dealing with stress - "Eat your vegetables." Try to get in 30 minutes of exercise a day. A spiritual practice or meditation also has great side effects for dealing with stress. A more active approach would be starting a gratitude journal, or joining a gratitude email chain, or writing a short email to a colleague telling them they did a good job. Building in more positivity into your day creates the buffer you need personally to deal with negativity.

On the community level, it is important to take the same approach to combat what can become a cycle of negativity to encourage more hope and positivity. Local government can create more civility in their communities by encouraging

connection and community. Citizens want a sense of agency in the future of their community. This can be facilitated through embracing arts, culture, and community engagement in the planning of the municipality. Bringing all voices into the conversation about the future of the municipality can help create the positivity we all need in this crazy world.

About the Author:

Elizabeth Yanke is responsible for connecting with all new member elected officials and staff to introduce the League and assess training and information needs, while seeking feedback from members and League Mutual insureds to improve offerings. She hosts and moderates League web programming, participates in evaluation of all member programming, and makes recommendations for revision. Elizabeth joined the League as a Project Manager in 2019 and prior to that spent more than 12 years in private industry strategic human resources. Contact Elizabeth at eyanke@lwm-info.org



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