

Reviews

Rude Awakenings: Overcoming the Civility Crisis in the Workplace

Giovinella Gonthier with Kevin Morrissey. 2002. Dearborn Trade Publishing. Chicago, Ill. 227 pages. \$25.

Giovinella Gonthier's credentials (president of Civility Associates in Chicago and a former ambassador to several countries and to the United Nations in New York City) certainly qualify her for writing knowledgeably about issues that affect workplace morale and productivity. She does so with warmth, grace and humor.

Gonthier organizes her book around seven major topics, and each has numerous subtopics. The detailed table of contents makes it easy for a reader to skim the book and locate particular items of interest quickly. Most will certainly appreciate this approach. The seven major topics are "The Evolution of Incivility in Our Times," "The Business Imperatives of Civility," "How to Teach a Civility Course in the Workplace," "Uncivil Behaviors and Solutions," "Grooming and Appearance," "Conflict Management" and "Systematic Change: Implementing a Civility Policy in the Workplace."

Given that incivility (rudeness and thoughtlessness) is rampant, those in positions of authority such as top-level decision makers would be wise to take this book in hand and read it with the intent of putting some of her suggestions into practice. As she points out, in example after example when she identifies problems and describes solutions, incivility drains the energy of employees, reduces productivity and puts consumer and clientele goodwill at risk.

Particularly pertinent are the sections on technocommunications (telephones, voice mail, speakerphones, cell phones, beepers, fax machines, and e-mail). Less pertinent for readers who work at universities are the descriptions on clothing and appearance. We should do a better job of looking and dressing like the professionals we are, but it's not realistic to think that many men will take up wearing suits every day, and few women will be coaxed back into skirted suits and high heels other than for special occasions. But other points are certainly well taken: neatness, cleanliness, appropriate clothing. This section was written by an image consultant, and clearly most of us are more intent on polishing our writing and editing and other professional skills than we are on setting fashion goals. But Gonthier offers an instructive, useful, and thought-provoking analysis of workplace behavior. This guide to finding practical solutions and achieving more pleasant professional interactions will result in less stressful office environments. All readers are likely to find themselves part of the problem in at least a few instances. By spending a couple of hours with this book, they can become part of the solution.

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