

# RESPECT

## WHAT is respect?

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On the surface, respect can seem to be a fairly nebulous concept; much like the beauty in the eye of the beholder. However, we can clearly outline respect as the result of each person's search for dignity, to be valued in society. Respect is about one person honoring and recognizing the dignity of another. To that extent, the definition is clear. It is, however, less clear how to demonstrate respect.

## RESPECT is fundamental

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People learn respect early in their lives. Through the loving examples of relatives, neighbors and friends, people learn the reality of others' dignity and the importance of showing respect.

People also learn the give and take of respect; to get it, you must give it. We learn not to demean others' abilities, life situations or choices. We also learn that joking others in this way is no joke. Our socialization tells us that these behaviors are serious and bring serious consequences.

What we learn from these rules is that every life has a precious contribution to make, and that we must consider every person worthy of retaining their dignity through our communicating respect.

## RESPECT in the workplace

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What about respect at work? Is it important to remember respect in the workplace? The answer is a resounding yes! Although we conceded in a previous paragraph that the concept is nebulous, we can describe the behaviors of respect clearly. In the workplace, respect is a pervasive consideration of the dignity of others. Respect in the workplace can be demonstrated by:

- Respect for privacy
- Respect for varying viewpoints
- Respect for personal and physical space
- Respect for others' feelings, and
- Respect for others' cultures and values.

Organizations must be clear about the value of respect. Unfortunately, many organizations expect values such as respect to evolve or to spring fully formed from

some announced change. Organizational values change from the deliberate and sustained management effort to demonstrate and reinforce the expected values at every possible opportunity.

## **RESPECT** as a retention driver

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An employee's intent to stay, emotional commitment and exertion of discretionary effort (how much he or she is willing to put into the job) are directly related to the perception of respect on the job. Whenever respect is considered strong, employees are more typically committed and the employer experiences lower turnover than similar organizations with all other factors equal. Moreover, current employees refer other potential employees because of the positive working conditions around demonstration of respect. This is a cumulative effect of the organization working to maintain a functional and attractive culture of respect.

## **MANAGER'S** Role

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The manager is a catalyst for making respect happen in the organization. Managers who are positive can inspire employees to rise to work challenges.

On the other hand, managers who do not demonstrate respect cause many problems that sometimes outweigh the manager's other qualities. For example, the manager who is critical of employees work in a demeaning way creates a toxic atmosphere for employees. In some instances, the critical remarks are reflected back to the manager by the employees. In this case, the general emotional level in the workgroup can escalate. Negative side effects such as employee relations, increased turnover or disciplinary action are likely to occur. Even when turnover is not apparent, lower quality work can result because employees lose their willingness to put in extra effort when they feel they are not respected. Although managers may not perceive this is happening or realize their contribution to the problems, the organization should intervene to correct this situation.

Corrective actions include:

- Identify the behaviors that diminish respect and connect those behaviors to the organization's values.
- Consider interventions that upskill the manager and employees to interact and communicate more effectively with each other.
- Monitor the workgroup to identify opportunities to enhance specific skill areas like conflict management.

Nevertheless, even if these steps are taken, some employees may still leave. In these cases irreparable damage may have been done. Consequently, the departing employee may not be leaving the company as much as the manager. Yet, employees who leave may still be enticed back at a future date if the undesirable conditions have changed.

## RESPECTFUL manager attributes

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Respectful managers:

- Honestly help employees to grow and succeed;
- Match the people to the right job;
- Focus on people's strengths and not their weaknesses.

The respectful manager typifies and demonstrates the organization's value of respect.