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## Teaching and Learning

# *All I'm askin' is for a little respect*<sup>1</sup>: How can we promote civility in our classrooms?

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### Abstract

Across geographical regions and academic disciplines, faculty members are lamenting the rise in behavior problems in the classroom. We present here a review of the literature on classroom incivility and a categorization of uncivil behaviors. Next, attributing classroom incivility, in part, to cultural characteristics of our current undergraduates, we compare Millennials to earlier generations and discuss the impact of specific cultural characteristics on their classroom behavior. Then, using transactional and transformational leadership theories to frame our recommendations, we combine insights from research on Millennial culture to offer pedagogical methods for helping to prevent incivility, as well as how to respond to it and how to fortify ourselves against it.

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### Whatever happened to civility in the classroom?

Faculty members complain that student behavior has been going downhill in recent years (Lashley and de Meneses, 2001; Kirk, 2005; Clark and Springer, 2007). Our vision of an academic institution in which classrooms abound with polite students engaged in civil, respectful discourse with their professor and classmates has blurred over the past few years. In its place are stark images of students who, at best, text-message their friends from their classroom seats or, worse, destroy the classroom learning environment by challenging their professor's control of the classroom or complaining about their grades directly to the college president. Professors and academic administrators alike bemoan the loss of respect in the classroom. We hasten to point out that not all students behave uncouthly. Still, instances of classroom incivility "are sufficiently pervasive to be of general concern to the academic community" (Bayer, 2004: 77). The concern about waning civility has stimulated a growing trend of campus civility initiatives, ranging from expert guest speakers, such as Miss Manners (Paulson, 2007), to campus-wide campaigns and projects, to contracts between students and professor about proper classroom behavior (Dechter, 2007). (We focus in this paper on students' incivility toward professors, but acknowledge the serious flipside of this problem, that is, faculty members' mistreatment of students; see Bayer (2004) and Buttner (2004)).

Civility in society at large is an ethical matter that includes courtesy, politeness, manners, good citizenship, and concern for

the well-being of our communities (Forni, 2002). Civility in the classroom requires no less. But when does a minor classroom annoyance, such as a student's entering and leaving the classroom while class is in session, become an obstruction to instruction? Certainly the case reported by an observer of a 40-student lecture class, who "counted 50 instances of students leaving or entering the [class]room during one 75-minute session" (Dechter, 2007: F1), falls into the latter category. Table 1 lists examples of varieties of classroom incivility.

The once common view that a college professor is an authority in his or her field of study ("the sage

**Table 1** Examples of incivility<sup>a</sup>

*Minor disruptions that annoy the instructor and accumulate to erode the learning climate*

- Wearing inappropriate attire
- Reading the newspaper
- Studying for another class
- Packing up before the end of class
- Passing notes to one another
- Arriving late
- Leaving early
- Using electronic devices
- Having side conversations

*More egregious acts that directly interfere with instruction*

- Dominating the classroom discussion
- Not tolerating classmates' views
- Talking or laughing when a classmate contributes
- Speaking in class, but totally off the topic of discussion
- Making sarcastic, disparaging remarks
- Challenging the instructor's knowledge
- Demanding special treatment that violates the instructor's policies and would thus create inequities for other students
- Complaining about grades (repeatedly) during class time
- Giving the instructor unjustifiably negative teaching evaluations
- Threatening to complain to the instructor's superiors
- Having one's parent(s), other family member(s), or employer complain about the instructor to university officials
- Threatening litigation or actually filing suit against the professor and/or school about grades
- Threatening to attack or actually physically attacking a classmate or instructor<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Some of these examples come from Feldmann (2001), others from participants in a recent MOBTC session (Baker *et al.*, 2007).

<sup>b</sup>Faculty and students have a right to feel and be physically safe in the classroom environment. Any member of a class feeling apprehensive should notify a designated public safety officer, the dean, or the provost, depending on the policies of the school. Faculty need to recognize that incivility occurs on a broad continuum that ranges from minor classroom disruptions to tragedies of the scale that have recently occurred at Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois University. Faculty can help safeguard our classrooms and campuses by being aware of and reporting questionable student behaviors.

on the stage") whose knowledge and position merit respect has become a bit of nostalgia. Many students today view their professors as employees of an institution to which they, the customers, make payment for services, sometimes translated as "I'm paying your salary, and I expect an 'A.'" Students expect good service and even entertainment from their professors, whom they consider their "employees" (Dechter, 2007). Students' obnoxious behavior has become a source of deep disappointment and frustration for many faculty members. But more than merely unpleasant, classroom incivility can hinder teaching and learning (Feldmann, 2001; Hirschy and Braxton, 2004). Although some instances of incivility are deliberate acts of aggression, others are unintentional, perpetrated insensitively by students who attend to their own needs without considering the potential impact on their instructor or classmates.

Instructors at all levels must contend with incivility. Arguably the earliest systematic investigation of incivility in academe (Boice, 1996) found that incidents of incivility occur even in the classrooms of skilled veteran faculty. That junior faculty members are equally dismayed by students' rudeness suggests that it is not the case that their more seasoned counterparts are running out of patience as their careers progress – or that students are trying to take advantage of new instructors. There is some evidence that students of women and minority professors engage in more uncivil acts in the classroom than do students of white male professors (Alexander-Snow, 2004). Nonetheless, it seems as though no faculty member is exempt from incivility (Kirk, 2005). Indeed, in a session at a recent conference on teaching (Baker *et al.*, 2007) only one participant had not really experienced incivility in his classroom. More recently, online discussions among members of an organizational behavior teaching listserv generated widespread comments about how professors can deal with students' lateness to classes (How do you handle late students? 2007b,c; Suggestions about extreme lateness, 2007), side conversations (Side conversations in classes, 2008), and ringing cellphones during class meetings (HOW ABOUT CELL PHONES RINGING? 2007a).

Clark and Springer (2007), documenting the frequency of various uncivil classroom behaviors, compare the concern for civility in our classrooms to the broader concern for civility in society and at work. Forni (2002) asserts that national concern in the United States was "extraordinary" by the end of

the 20th century (p. 182), when the media focused attention on a “rampant incivility” that lowered social standards and eroded the quality of life (pp. 182–183). Likewise, Phillips and Smith (2003) discuss “everyday incivility...as a social problem of the first rank” in Britain and Australia as well as the US (p. 85). There have been appeals to curb incivility on the Web (Stone, 2007), and a code of conduct for bloggers has been proposed (Miller, 2007). Researchers have documented uncivil workplace behaviors ranging from careless rudeness and inconsiderateness (Chismar, 2001) to mean-spirited mistreatment and oppression (Vega and Comer, 2005; Sutton, 2007; Tepper, 2007). Milder incivilities may provoke acts of escalating intensity, producing a destructive cycle that

diminishes individuals’ productivity, performance, motivation, creativity, and helping behaviors. The sting of incivility has emotional and behavioral impact on its targets, as well as those who witness...it (Pearson and Porath, 2005: 8).

Even single episodes of rude behavior can impair victims’ “task performance, creativity, flexibility, and helpfulness” (Porath and Erez, 2007: 1193). Incivility occurs in a variety of organizations (Pearson and Porath, 2005) in occupations ranging from healthcare (Hutton, 2006) to law (Van Drake, 2003; Schuck, 2005), in addition to education as documented above. Remedial programs in student behavior, comparable to those offered in reading and writing, have been suggested for college students (Benton, 2007). The increase of documented and anecdotal incidences of uncivil classroom behaviors in our business schools during this same period cannot be coincidental.

### **Precursors to student incivility**

How have society and our classrooms devolved to this point? The rise in undesirable classroom behaviors may result, in part, from a paradigm change in higher education. Many institutions of higher education no longer view their ivory towers as repositories of knowledge to which professors serve as gatekeepers. Instead, they now practice a business model in which they are purveyors of educational products that compete with many alternative forms of educational delivery systems to attract consumer dollars (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999; Marlantes, 2000). College administrators and marketing specialists evaluate students for their economic value, considering not only students’ payment of tuition and fees but also their potential

financial contributions as alumni (Hutton, 2005). As sellers they want to keep their customers happy, which has resulted in a shift in the balance of power from faculty to students (Clayton, 2000; Marlantes, 2000). Whereas institutions endorse the idea of customer service with an eye to the bottom line, consumers like the idea of “customerization” because it carries an assumption of greater accountability by our institutions (“Customerization” is undermining U.S., 2006).

Yet treating students as customers can be harmful. Ferris (2002) denounces the student-as-customer model, arguing that although customers may always be right, students cannot learn without corrective feedback. But, as Hutton (2005) laments, educational institutions no longer give students what they need – a foundation in intellectual and moral standards – but, instead, give them what they want. Rather than developing thoughtful citizens who can reflect critically on and grapple with the range of issues faced by society, educational institutions are producing consumer graduates who think first of themselves (Hutton, 2005). The phenomenon of customerization has also contributed to an emphasis on self-esteem rather than character building, a dilution of standards and an inflation of grades, and (last, but not least) classroom incivility (Hutton, 2005).

But beyond higher education’s adoption of a business model, there have been important changes in the attitudes of the very members of society who are the buyers and users of these educational products. To understand our students, we need to consider their parents’ history and their own generational history. Indeed, Pilcher (1994), resurrecting Mannheim’s (1952) comprehensive sociological theory of generations, explains that the members of each generational cohort are defined by sociohistorical conditions during their coming of age. Each generation’s common past and unique critical incidents give its members a shared culture (Pilcher, 1994; see also Schuman and Scott, 1989). Adding a developmental psychology component to the sociological conceptualization of generations, Cavalli (2004) asserts “the situations in which young people first experience the world serve to model and shape the basic structures of consciousness” (p. 158). Arsenault (2004) discusses the importance of generational cultural differences and McGuire *et al.* (2007), Patota *et al.* (2007), and Jenkins (2008) highlight the need to manage intergenerational diversity. Observing that a given act is not intrinsically uncivil, but that perceptions

of incivility are socially constructed, Bray and Del Favero (2004) suggest that an appreciation of generational differences between faculty and students may help to explain classroom incivility.

A widely accepted model of generations was developed by Strauss and Howe (2000, 2007a, b). Strauss and Howe conducted generational research for decades, analyzing public data collected by government and private agencies. Consistent with other generational scholars, they explained that a generation's "members share a location in history and, as a consequence, exhibit distinct beliefs and behavior patterns" (Howe and Strauss, 2007a: 44). Their generational framework has been adopted by both the US Department of Labor and the US Department of Health and Human Resources (2007a). With financial support from Chartwells Higher Education Dining Services and Datatel Incorporated, Strauss and Howe (2007a) partnered with Crux Research to conduct an extensive survey about current generational attitudes of parents and students. They reported summary findings in *Millennials go to College* (2nd edition).

Educational scholars have recommended applying Strauss and Howe's framework to understand college students (Merritt and Neville, 2002; Coombs and DeBard, 2004; DeBard, 2004). Moreover, there is empirical endorsement for their model. A study of medical students by Borges *et al.* (2006) found generational differences in personality that are similar to differences in generational characteristics found by Strauss and Howe. Likewise, in a sample that included undergraduate business students, Lyons *et al.* (2007) identified generational differences in values that support Strauss and Howe's model of Millennial characteristics. We draw on this model in the following section.

Millennials, the generational name for the traditional undergraduates we now teach, were born between 1982 and 2000 (Strauss and Howe, 2007a). These Millennials, more racially and ethnically diverse than any previous American generation, have both Boomer and Generation X ("Gen X") parents. Boomers, Americans born in the post-World War II baby boom between 1943 and 1960, grew up during the social revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s. Characteristic of the Boomer-turned-Yuppie generation are those families with two workaholic wage-earners, often resulting in accumulation of disposable income that could be lavished on their children (Strauss and Howe, 2000). Affluence and consumerism have become

synonymous with the Boomer generation, and their Millennial children exhibit these characteristics as well (Goldgehn, 2004).

Gen Xers, born after the Boomer generation, between 1961 and 1981, grew up amid the turbulent economic inflation and recession of the 1980s. Gen Xers worried about their market choices and wondered if their financial investment in college would be rewarded during the tumultuous labor market of the Reagan years (Strauss and Howe, 2007b). Workaholic Gen Xers became identified with their outstanding entrepreneurial skills (Strauss and Howe, 2007a) as well as their pragmatic calculation of value vs investment and their demand for accountability from their children's educational institutions (2007b). Their Millennial children similarly expect value for their tuition dollars (Marlantes, 2000).

Despite their different economic and sociocultural histories, Boomer and Gen X parents share similar attitudes about raising their Millennial children. They want their children to be connected to their families as well as to their national communities (Strauss and Howe, 2000). They also value child safety (Strauss and Howe, 2007a). Indeed, the unrelenting desire of Boomer and Gen X parents to protect their children has resulted in a level of parental involvement in their children's lives that neither generation experienced themselves. Like Strauss and Howe, Forni (2002) has noted that society today places more value on treating children well and is willing to devote abundant resources to the intellectual and emotional health of young children. Whether Boomer "helicopter parents" or Gen X "stealth fighter parents" (Strauss and Howe, 2007a), Millennials' parents have hovered over every facet of their children's lives from infancy through college and remain "within one text message of changing their children's choices" (Strauss and Howe, 2007b: B16). Have Millennials' parents gone too far in their quest to preserve their children's self-esteem and enrich them with after-school activities? As Twenge (2006) and Zaslow (2007) have observed, youngsters whose parents praise their mediocre or even substandard performance and shuttle them from one extracurricular event to another become adolescents and young adults who expect others to glorify their ordinary feats and provide endless entertainment for them. Accustomed to reaping rewards for even below-average performance, these students often expect high course grades.



### The nature of Millennials

In our review of both popular-press and scholarly literature, we found descriptions of many Millennial characteristics. Six of these characteristics are particularly relevant to classroom behavior: (1) Family and Community Ties, (2) Peer-centrism, (3) Conventionality, (4) Achievement, (5) Digitalism, and (6) Consumer Orientation. Descriptions of the six characteristics follow:

#### Family and community ties

As described above, Millennials' parents are intimately involved in their lives. Millennials welcome their parents' involvement ("National survey finds," 2007) and have close ties with their families (Strauss and Howe, 2007a). A notable byproduct of parental hyperinvolvement, however, is Millennials' lack of experience as decision-makers. Because they have depended so heavily on their parents, they are unaccustomed to and uncomfortable with making their own choices (see Hira, 2007). Boomer and Gen X parents want their children to experience a sense of inclusion and connection to family and community, which they themselves lacked in their formative years. Millennials hold dear their connections to others outside their family unit and value their community commitments (Goldgehn, 2004). Acting locally and globally, they help hometown neighbors and those in need of international aid (Strauss and Howe, 2000).

#### Peer-centrism

In addition to their strong family and community ties, Millennials typically socialize with large groups. They have a support network, rather than just one or two friends (Strauss and Howe, 2007a). Millennials, who care about their peers' opinions more than any previous generation, actively influence one another's decisions (Strauss and Howe, 2007a). The respect and approval of their peers matter more to them than the nod of authority figures (Goldgehn, 2004; Park, 2006).

#### Conventionality

Millennials respect social norms, rules, and structure (Strauss and Howe, 2007a). They endorse the teaching of values in school along with classroom discipline and civil behavior (2007a). Perhaps Millennials, who lack decision-making experience (due to their parents' close involvement), crave structure and rules, which they can follow without needing to exercise anxiety-inducing discretion

(see Schwartz, 2004, for a depiction of the demands and disappointments of decision-making). Millennials do not hesitate to ask us to bend our classroom rules in their favor, but these requests may not so much reflect their disdain for rules as their deep-seated belief in their own entitlement, which is rooted in the messages they have heard since childhood about their unique nature (Twenge, 2006; Hira, 2007; Zaslow, 2007).

#### Achievement

Both Boomer and Gen X generations have practiced workaholicism to achieve their goals in life, and they want their children to excel, as well. They sometimes try to reinforce their own social status through their "trophy child" (Williams, 2008: 4A). Millennials feel parental pressure to earn good grades and gain admission to "good" schools (Strauss and Howe, 2000). They know that they are competing with their equally pressured peers, who are also working hard for grades and careers (Strauss and Howe, 2007a). Parents give mixed messages: they hold the achievement bar high even as they praise lackluster performance with proclamations that "everyone's a winner; no one is left out" (Twenge, 2006; Zaslow, 2007). Whereas only the top Boomers and Gen Xers merited blue ribbons, all Millennials are now awarded ribbons.

Millennials' parents have the financial means to help their children achieve (McGlynn, 2005). If their child struggles at school, parents do not hesitate to hire tutors and coaches (McGlynn, 2005). They may go so far as to enlist a team of psychologists, physicians, and lawyers to help advocate for the highest quality of service for their children (Strauss and Howe, 2007a). Accustomed to such extensive support throughout the pre-college years, the Millennial college student expects to receive the same degree of attention and assistance at college, resulting in what we professors often view as a sense of entitlement to our and our institution's services (McGlynn, 2005). Chartwells 2006 College Student Survey found that 57% of respondents rated as "very important" or "extremely important" in their college selection process the amount of time spent by full time faculty with students (Strauss and Howe, 2007a).

An interesting aspect of Millennials' desire for achievement, linked to their peer-centrism and conventionality, is their reluctance to take initiative or show originality. Instead, Millennials prefer to follow the rules and stick close to their peers (Strauss and Howe, 2007a). If they take an

intellectual or creative risk and fail, they fear losing an A in their course. Millennials ask for clear performance specifications and standards before they invest any time in an assignment or even an application to an honors program (Strauss and Howe, 2007a). They subsequently hold their professors to the letter of the standards when arguing how the standards were applied to their own assignments.

One other aspect of Millennials' achievement orientation is their desire for a mentor and role model. Just as they value precision and clarity in other areas of their lives, they seek a specific mentor (Goldgehn, 2004). Millennials have little use for general information about how to succeed personally or professionally. Instead, they prize particular advice from an expert who can offer reliable guidance about a circumscribed area of interest (Goldgehn, 2004).

### Digitalism

Millennials are "well-wired multitaskers" ("How the new generation," 2007). As the first generation to grow up with videos, cellphones, e-mail, and the Windows operating system, they are sophisticated users of digital communication technologies (Gorman *et al.*, 2004). They are accustomed to – and expect – incessant interactivity, instant feedback, and flexibility ("How the new generation," 2007) and are impatient with technology that does not work well or that does not add value to their surfing experience (Goldgehn, 2004). They believe that e-multitasking, such as playing games on cellphones or laptops during class, does not harm their classroom performance (Gilroy, 2003). Peer-centric Millennials use digital technology such as Instant Messaging and internet sites such as Facebook and MySpace to stay connected with their parents and network of friends.

### Consumer orientation

As consumers of educational products, Millennials, ever guided by parental input, have carefully chosen their colleges, and they want what they have paid for: a degree that signals their preparation for their chosen career. An unsigned editorial in an urban university student newspaper proclaimed, "It's an odd concept, student as customers, but we pay the university for a service – teaching. What is a diploma but a receipt?" ("Fee-sibility", 2008). They and their parents also expect As Martinson (2004), Shepard (2005) and many college professors oblige them, particularly those in

adjunct or pretenured positions, who lack job security (Boretz, 2004).

Another factor that drives students to demand the services that they see themselves paying for is the amount of debt they are acquiring as they pursue their degrees. Chartwells 2006 College Student Survey finds that Millennials are concerned about the amount of student debt they acquire and their earning power when they graduate (Strauss and Howe, 2007a). In 2004, approximately two-thirds of students attending 4-year public colleges incurred student debt (Center for Economic and Policy Research, 2005). Although total inflation-adjusted dollars in student aid increased during the decade between 1996–1997 and 2006–2007, they did not keep pace with rising tuition and fees during the same period (College Board, 2007). Because federal loans and private and government funding have lagged behind college expenses, students turn increasingly to the non-federal, private loan market to fund their education (College Board, 2007). To help meet tuition costs and reduce borrowing, many undergraduate students work. Whereas in 1981, a student who worked full time at a minimum wage job during summer break could earn about two-thirds of his or her annual college costs, a current undergraduate would need to work full time at a minimum wage job for a full year to pay for one year of education at a 4-year public school (Center for Economic and Policy Research, 2005). It is not surprising, then, that 48% of full-time undergraduates under age 25 were employed in 2005 (College Board, 2007). Nine percent of them worked 35 hours per week or more and 18% worked between 21 and 34 hours. In comparison, only one-third of full time undergraduates under age 25 were employed in 1970 (College Board, 2007).

### Classroom consequences of Millennials' characteristics

As the previous section suggests, there may be more to this generation of students than what we notice in our classrooms. How can we reconcile the demanding, self-centered students we encounter daily with the above descriptions of achievement-oriented, rule-seeking, socially connected young adults? First, we must recognize that objectionable behavior is a side effect of the changing view of education, propagated by academe and by parent and student consumers, as a good for sale. Second, we must acknowledge the mixed messages sent by closely orbiting Boomer and Gen X parents: they want their children to be successful, yet at the same



time they praise them for substandard performance. The pressure on Millennial students to succeed, coupled with their sense of entitlement as purchasers of a costly degree, puts them in a precarious situation and contributes to incivility in our classrooms.

Professors today have the same objective as our counterparts in earlier generations: we want to help students learn. But we are challenged by changes in student attitudes that erode respect for both us and our academic institutions. The trend toward burgeoning uncivil and disruptive student behaviors does not seem likely to reverse itself without intervention. What happens when student expectations aren't met? The stories are familiar, if not personally painful. A freshman reports that he naps in class when a professor is "annoying" or unexciting. He insists, "This is my time, this is my money. The teacher is paid to be here. He should try to be a good employee" (Dechter, 2007: F6). The same student asserts that because of the cost of college, it should not be students' responsibility "to have to teach ourselves the content. The teachers should try to make it interesting" (Dechter, 2007: F6). Another Millennial student finds lectures "really boring" and as a result, "tend[s] to kind of zone out the whole time." She explains that she needs "more bells and whistles to keep [her] attention" ("How the new generation," 2007). Management scholars are focusing on the ways in which generational attributes affect how students learn and how we should teach them (see, e.g., Meisel and Fearon, 2007; Proserpio and Gioia, 2007). Indeed, Millennials' positive characteristics give us hope for dealing with their uncivil classroom behaviors. Millennial students value rules and social norms, have a community-consciousness, and seek specific guidance from mentors. They know how to work in teams and they are technologically savvy. In the remainder of this paper, we integrate the research on classroom incivility with the literature on transactional vs transformational leadership to produce recommendations for dealing with Millennial students' disrespectful displays in the classroom. In particular, we will address three questions:

- (1) What can we do to *prevent* incivility?
- (2) How should we *respond* to incidents of incivility as they occur?
- (3) If (some) offensive behavior is inevitable, how might we *fortify* our emotional reserves to diminish its damaging effect on our psyches and replenish our patience?

## Preventing incivility

Leadership involves an influence relationship between leader and followers in which the leader and followers intentionally join together to initiate mutually agreed upon change (Rost, 1993). Rost's definition describes what many of us may see as an ideal professor-student relationship. As we've noted above, though, for many of us our ideal is seldom realized, and instead we have a reality in which our classroom interactions are increasingly stressful. In suggesting actions to prevent incivility in our classrooms, we draw on transformational leadership theory. Burns (1978) introduced the concepts of transactional and transformational leadership, which were extended by Bass (1985, 1990). They agreed that transformational leader behaviors improved the performance of a leader's followers. As Burns eloquently argued, such behaviors "raise... the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and led..." resulting in followers who become more engaged and become leaders themselves (p. 20). Other theorists have similarly viewed leadership as the ability to empower followers and inspire them to achieve a common goal, among other characteristics (see, e.g., Sashkin *et al.*, 1996; Kouzes and Posner, 2002; Gardner *et al.*, 2005).

Our suggestions for preventing incivility in the classroom include both transactional and transformational behaviors that professors can add to their repertoire. Some of the methods we propose to inhibit incivility are straightforward transactional agreements that we negotiate with our students semester by semester. Other, more complicated methods require that we practice the very behaviors we teach about transformational leadership: that we challenge ourselves by examining our pedagogy to develop a vision of what will best serve our students and that we implement new pedagogical methods that both reach our students and inspire our colleagues, transforming the nature of how we teach to engage our students once again in the classroom. Six suggestions for preventing incivility follow.

### Transactional suggestions

Transactional suggestions to prevent classroom incivility start with the syllabus, our contract with our students.

1. *Use the syllabus.* We can use the syllabus to convey our expectations about students' classroom conduct and indicate acceptable behaviors and those behaviors we will not tolerate – and the

consequences for students who exhibit them (e.g., lowered grades, being asked to leave the classroom). Linking discourteousness to outcomes students deem unpleasant will likely contribute to greater civility in the classroom (Bray and Del Favero, 2004). Just as the most effective organizations articulate performance expectations for their employees, every course syllabus should indicate the requirements for each grade (A, A-, B+, etc.). Millennial students crave these explicit standards (Strauss and Howe, 2007a), but all students have the right to a syllabus that plainly indicates evaluation methods and criteria. Anticipating students' behaviors and trying to address as many contingencies as possible on the syllabus works wonders to limit requests for favors from Millennials, who may feel that they are entitled to special treatment, as discussed earlier in this paper (Twenge, 2006; Hira, 2007; Zaslow, 2007). We can review the syllabus on the first day of the semester and mention the repercussions of disruptive behavior. Although it can seem disappointing to have to spell out and speak about these policies, we need to remember that Millennials desire rules and structure (Strauss and Howe, 2007a). We can explain to our students that written rules help to ensure that misbehavior does not impede learning (Thompson, 2007).

2. *Cast classroom policies in a positive light.* This will appeal to Millennials' need for achievement ("How the new generation," 2007) by depicting the classroom as an environment in which to model and practice professional behaviors that are expected and required in the workplace. The classroom can well be regarded as an organization in itself, in which to set up a positive tone for classroom, that is, organizational behavior. As in any organization, the members should show respect for one another regardless of the extent to which they may disagree with the opinions of their peers. Communications among members of the classroom organization should be clear and consistent. For example, class members respond to and report primarily to their professor. Times are permitted for organization members to work with and communicate with other members of their teams. At other times, it is expected that communications will occur only between individual students and the professor. To discourage side conversations and ringing cell-phones in the classroom, we can point out how inappropriate it would be at a job interview or business meeting to be talking with other members of the group or taking a phone call while an

interviewer is talking or a manager is trying to explain a project, conveying key information, or asking for input from individuals on a critical matter. Students may not perceive disruptions as disrespectful and inappropriate (Caboni *et al.*, 2004). But a moment's reflection may prompt them to change the ringer settings on their phones, thus reducing annoying incoming calls during class (Avrahami *et al.*, 2006). Likewise, just as attendance, punctuality, and work deadlines are required to achieve organizational goals, they are prerequisites for students' learning.

3. *Establish a "Code of Civil Classroom Conduct".* Students can contribute to the development of the code, a written contract among fellow students and with their instructor that will govern their behavior. Student ownership of the code of behavior will go a long way in making class members take additional responsibility for a civil environment, rather than leaving it all on the shoulders of the instructor. "Civil behavior, then, can become the class's decision rather than a decision imposed by the teacher" (Richardson, 1999: 81). We can give each student a copy of the document and ask students to return a copy of their signed agreements to us. Peer pressure, a powerful tool generally, may work especially well with peer-attuned Millennials (see Goldgehn, 2004; Park, 2006) to enforce the code of conduct.

As we craft the code of conduct, we must remember that our Millennial students' assumptions and norms as to what constitutes appropriate behavior differ from those of their Gen X or Boomer professors and that these generational differences also involve cultural differences. The process of establishing a code of conduct, discussing norms, and agreeing to shared norms provides an in-class experience that may be used to illuminate such concepts as culture, intergroup dynamics, and conflict resolution in our management and organizational behavior classes.

4. *Develop a student handbook.* We faculty, along with administrators and student leaders, can develop a student handbook that specifies acceptable and unacceptable behaviors (Bayer and Braxton, 2004). Millennials value clear expectations and guidelines and administrators and faculty depend on rules and procedures when students are challenging grades or filing complaints against a faculty member. Getting administrators involved and on board in the creation of an institutional handbook will help assure their support when students question faculty decisions (Lashley and de Meneses, 2001).



Although such campus-wide guidelines and policies are uncommon (Bayer, 2004), they would serve to reinforce the rules and expectations articulated in instructors' syllabi and codes of conduct.

5. *Establish credibility and "walk the walk."* We can establish our credibility at the very beginning of the semester and always behave professionally and courteously ourselves. For example, we need to arrive on time for class, set an agenda, keep appointments, and return voice-mails and e-mails promptly. Outside the classroom, we must be fully present for students during our office hours, avoiding answering the phone while meeting with a student, and not using office hours for eating lunch (Lemos, 2007). If we do not tolerate students' multitasking in our classrooms, we should not hypocritically multitask in our offices when students are present to meet with us. Lemos (2007) suggests that faculty dress appropriately for class as we do for business meetings, religious services, and other affairs. He argues that business attire "commands a much higher level of respect than casual wear. It represents authority, professionalism, confidence and expertise" (p. 46). Some faculty may even wish to specify a dress code for students enrolled in business courses, which can help prepare them for the workplace.

Students model what they see on their campus and our actions in front of students are powerful in shaping civil behavior (Richardson, 1999). Millennial students may be likely to view their business school faculty, especially those of us who have practical real-world experience and/or current company contacts, as potential mentors whose behaviors are worth emulating (see Goldgehn, 2004). It is refreshing to hear faculty members refer to each other by their titles (e.g., "Dr. Smith") when they are in public. In contrast, it is destructive to allow students to hear their professor curse about a late appointment or insult an administrative assistant to the point of embarrassment. Modeling civil behavior cannot be overemphasized in creating the proper academic atmosphere.

### **Recommendations for transformational change**

6. *Examine and revise our own teaching.* Incivility might well be correlated with faulty pedagogy, as noted by the example earlier in which the student found lectures boring and zoned out during class. Is it possible, at times, that we cause the exact behavior that we are complaining about and are

trying to eradicate? Bilimoria (1997) presciently advised:

Within a matter of a decade or so, the students in our classrooms will be individuals who have grown up comfortable with and conversant in the everyday application of new information technologies and advanced communication methodologies.... This increasing technological sophistication of our future students must be paralleled in growth in our pedagogy (p. 237).

More recently, Proserpio and Gioia (2007) have told us that the students in their late teens and early 20s whom we are now trying to educate are from a new technological generation. They explain that because of "Internet tools, computer simulations and games, and computer-mediated communication" these virtual-generation or "V-Gen" students have a totally new set of learning styles (p. 70). The old lecture format, for example, is no longer effective because our current students do not have a "verbal" learning style (Proserpio and Gioia, 2007: 69). Instead, "V-gen" students learn well via gaming and simulations (Proserpio and Gioia, 2007). Proserpio and Gioia (2007) advise faculty members to promote learning by adopting "styles of teaching... that are consistent with the learning styles" of the students in our classes (p. 68) and Gabriel (2008) asserts that the "reconfiguration of the lecture as a multimedia performance" suits the skills of today's students (p. 270). Likewise, Betts *et al.* (2007) encourage management educators to create "a culture of engagement" (p. 2284) in which students are emotionally, intellectually, and behaviorally involved in our courses and Boretz (2004) calls upon all college educators "to offer a stimulating, motivating learning environment for students" (p. 46). While acknowledging the challenge these changes present to faculty and the competition faced by faculty for students' attention, Skiba and Barton (2006) and Olian (2007) urge us to recognize – and adapt our teaching to – Millennials' learning styles. Compared with instituting a transactional set of rules for the classroom environment, implementing student-responsive teaching is more likely to leave a positive perception of the learning setting, transforming ourselves, our students, and our classrooms in the process. By embracing pedagogies that match our students' preferred learning styles and crafting assignments and class experiences that are meaningful to them, we faculty will keep students involved and thereby likely increase the level of civility in the classroom.

Indeed, in his discussion of leadership, Quinn (2004) observed that all individuals and organizations make progress until they reach a plateau, at which they embrace and successfully execute routine tasks. According to Quinn, this normal state of leadership involves staying in one's comfort zone, defining oneself by how one is seen by others, using reactive problem-solving, and putting self-interests before collective interests. In contrast, real change requires what Quinn calls "the fundamental state of leadership" (2004: 21). Applying his ideas to the classroom, Quinn has stated, "We can change our students by changing ourselves, by becoming transformational teachers" (Anding, 2005: 492). In order to rethink our pedagogies, address the needs of a new generation, and have a positive effect on our students' behaviors, we as educators must step outside the grooves in which many of us dwell in our classrooms so that we can grow as educators. We must value the welfare of our students and the common good over our own interests; shed our obsolete pedagogies and adapt as needed; be purposeful about what we want to create; and, perhaps most radically, scrutinize our behavior to ensure that it aligns with our values (Quinn, 2004). Only after undertaking honest and thorough reflection can we transform our teaching so that it fosters the kind of engaging and enriching classroom environment that enhances our students' civility and learning. Such reflection may well be our greatest challenge as educators as well as the key to the greatest rewards for us and our students.

### Responding to incidents of incivility

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. We believe that following our recommendations for preventing incivility will reduce a faculty member's need to contend with unpleasant classroom behaviors. Nonetheless, there may still be occasions when it is necessary to react to rudeness. Following are five suggestions for responding to incivility.

1. *Deal immediately with problems.* Although it may appear sensible to allow unobtrusive forms of incivility (e.g., quietly reading the newspaper in class), Feldmann (2001) asserts that permitting these low-intensity gateway acts may encourage students to commit ever more offensive transgressions as they test the boundaries. Kirk (2005) likewise advises faculty to deal immediately with any discipline problems. Millennials may gain a sense of comfort upon learning that statements on the syllabus are true rules rather than options.

Moreover, the repetition of even the smallest annoyances can swell, until the faculty member, like an overused vacuum cleaner bag, finally bursts – leaving a huge, grimy mess. If a student behaves discourteously, stop him or her, stare, and say something to the effect of "I beg your pardon?"

2. *Ask rude students to speak with us after class.* Meeting individually with rude students, we can underscore that discourteousness will adversely affect their course grade and we can urge them to consider dropping the class if they cannot behave civilly. Although adherence to anti-incivility policies may cause some students to retaliate with unfavorable course-and-teacher evaluations (Fram and Pearse, 2000; Lashley and de Meneses, 2001), which are particularly daunting to untenured faculty members, their classmates will likely welcome a decisive professor who creates an atmosphere that fosters learning.

3. *Appeal to students' concerns for their fellow students.* When students engage in "e-rudeness" (by, e.g., texting, phoning, or looking at something unrelated to our class on their laptops), we can insist that they stop in order to be fair to – and not to disturb – their fellow students who are complying with classroom rules. Indeed, students consider ringing cellphones distracting (Campbell, 2006). Although Millennials may not mind that their activities irk their instructors, they may be more motivated to refrain from behavior that would harm their classmates (Park, 2006).

4. *Be consistent.* Although most rule-oriented Millennial students will take the information in written policies seriously from the start, others will test it. It is necessary, therefore, to adhere to our class policies and the student-written code of conduct. We can handily dismiss demands for special treatment by referring to these policies and appealing to students' sense of fairness to their peers.

5. *Know our rights.* For hardcore cases involving persistent acts of intimidation, it is important to know our rights as a faculty member at our institution. An especially unruly student can be asked to leave the classroom. If the student refuses to leave, campus security can be called.

Even though classroom incivility has increased, most of our students in any given semester will still behave decently. It is important to be accessible and responsive and demonstrate our concern for our students (Boice, 1996). We should use Theory Y, but prepare for the occasions when we may need to use Theory X (McGregor, 1960).



## Fortifying ourselves against the damages of incivility

The accumulation over time of stressful experiences can, if unchecked, lead to physical and/or psychological illness (Christensen and Boone, 2003; Maddi, 2006a, b). It is therefore essential to protect ourselves against the harmful outcomes of repeated episodes of incivility. Following are four suggestions for fortifying ourselves against stresses caused by incivility.

1. *Seek the support of colleagues.* Our colleagues can help us respond to incivility. Some may have encountered our rudest student in their classes. But we must avoid the temptation to dwell on complaints, which can bring everyone down further. Instead, we must recognize that the student's behavior is not a reflection of our teaching and exchange coping tips. It is not unreasonable to have another faculty member observe our class if we need someone to provide a second opinion on student behavior, or, in the worst case, even to serve as a witness to what is happening.

2. *Accept our responsibility to prepare students.* As faculty members, one of our responsibilities is to prepare students to act professionally in the business world. We can view this role as an opportunity to improve the world, one student at a time. Indeed, Chismar (2001) would view students' disrespect and rudeness as instances of unethical behavior. Although they are of lower moral intensity (i.e., they have a lesser negative impact on others) than stealing or lying, Chismar would place them on a continuum with these more severely egregious acts and consider them lapses of professionalism.

3. *Reframe what is important to us.* Reconsider the true importance of acts of incivility that are not physically threatening. For instance, although interruptions may increase interruptees' experience of negative affect and decrease well-being (Zijlstra *et al.*, 1999), we can recognize that students are gadget-addicted multitaskers and not let it bother us when they engage in texting, websurfing, or other e-practices. (Nonetheless, it may be worthwhile to make available to our students a *New York Times* article (Lohr, 2007) that summarizes research findings highlighting that we humans are simply not cognitively equipped to do more than one thing well at the same time, and to advise them that there are individual differences in multitasking proficiency (Wasson, 2004; König *et al.*, 2005), that people may overestimate their ability

to multitask (Wasson, 2004), and that even those who report a preference for multitasking may not be particularly adept at it (König *et al.*, 2005). Likewise, responding to a student's occasional tardiness by reasoning that there is insufficient time between classes and that it does not ruin our teaching if the student arrives a couple of minutes late is healthier than viewing the tardiness as a grand gesture of disrespect and then bottling up our outrage. Reframing or reinterpreting a situation to diminish its negative emotional impact (Gross, 1998; Gross and John, 2003) works even for cases of more intense obnoxiousness, such as students' demands for privileged treatment. Faculty members who remember to take comfort in the fact that many students are respectful and eager learners, and who attempt to regulate their emotions by reframing students' imperfect classroom behavior as not-such-a-big-deal, may experience less strain than those who try to suppress their true negative feelings (Gross, 1998; Grandey, 2003) or ruminate about the unpleasantness (Nolen-Hoeksema *et al.*, in press; Porath and Erez, 2007).

4. *Take control and act constructively.* It is useless to deny the problem of incivility, retreat from it, or regard it as unfixable. In the long run, stepping up to the plate can yield more gratifying outcomes than giving up, complaining fruitlessly, practicing denial, or striking out (Maddi and Khoshaba, 2005; Maddi, 2006a). We can enrich our professional lives by following the recommendations above for preventing and responding to incivility. Making productive changes to deal with incivility may even enhance our ability to face other life demands. Indeed,

hardy attitudes provide the courage and motivation to do the hard work of turning stressful circumstances from potential disasters into growth opportunities instead. As such, hardiness is a pathway to resilience under stress (Maddi, 2006b: 160).

Maddi and Khoshaba (2003) believe that resilience can be acquired (as does Reivich, 2003). As we strive to cultivate our resilience we must not replay upsetting incidents. Instead, we can reflect on the progress we have made (Rutter, 2006) and take satisfaction in the steps we have taken to establish and enhance civility in our classrooms. Please see Table 2 for a summary of our recommendations and the Millennial characteristics with which they align.

**Table 2** Recommendations and strategies to prevent classroom incivility, to respond to it when it occurs, and to fortify ourselves against its psychic harms

<i>Recommendations</i>	<i>Specific strategies</i>	<i>Relevant millennial characteristics<sup>a</sup></i>
<i>Prevent incivility</i>		
1. Use the syllabus.	Syllabus: our contract with students; review it first day of class; articulate expectations and penalties	<i>Conventionality</i> : respect for norms and structure <i>Achievement</i> : desire for clear standards
2. Cast classroom policies in a positive light.	Classroom policies: a model of workplace behavior	<i>Achievement</i> : desire for career
2. Cast classroom policies in a positive light.	Guidelines for communications: student–faculty or among students in teams.	<i>Conventionality</i> : respect for norms and structure <i>Achievement</i> : desire for clear standards
2. Cast classroom policies in a positive light.	Do not allow side conversations	<i>Conventionality</i> : respect for classroom discipline <i>Peer-centrism</i> : appeal to respect for peers
3. Establish a Code of Civil Classroom Conduct.	Code of Civil Classroom Conduct: students and professor create document; students sign copy of it as contract with one another and with professor	<i>Conventionality</i> : respect for norms and structure <i>Peer-centrism</i> : appeal to respect for peers
4. Develop a student handbook.	Student handbook: with student, faculty, and administrative input, it details acceptable and unacceptable behavior	<i>Conventionality</i> : respect for norms and structure
5. Establish credibility and “walk the walk.”	Establish credibility at beginning of semester; behave professionally (arrive on time; set agenda, keep appointments, and office hours; don’t answer phone when meeting with student; dress professionally)	<i>Achievement</i> : appreciation for role model
5. Establish credibility and “walk the walk.”	Establish dress code for class	<i>Achievement</i> : desire for career
5. Establish credibility and “walk the walk.”	Act as role model; address other professors by title; model civil behavior	<i>Achievement</i> : appreciation for role model
6. Examine and revise our own teaching.	Adopt teaching methods to learning styles of students; craft assignments and class experiences that are meaningful to students	<i>Digitalism</i> : technological adeptness; desire for interactivity, feedback, and flexibility
6. Examine and revise our own teaching.	Create “culture of engagement” (students engaged emotionally, intellectually, and behaviorally); show that we value welfare of student and common good over our own interests	<i>Family and community ties</i> : importance of community
6. Examine and revise our own teaching.	Change ourselves: be purposeful about what we want to create	<i>Achievement</i> : desire for clear standards
6. Examine and revise our own teaching.	Change ourselves: align our behavior with our values	<i>Achievement</i> : appreciation for role model
<i>Responses to incivility</i>		
1. Deal immediately with problems.	Immediate action: prevents slow erosion of standards; reinforces policies in syllabus	<i>Conventionality</i> : respect for norms and structure
2. Ask rude students to speak with us after class.	Speak with rude students individually: discuss adverse effect on grades; reiterate policies in syllabus and code of student conduct	<i>Conventionality</i> : respect for norms and structure
3. Appeal to students’ concern for their fellow students.	Stop uncivil student acts and note that they disturb other students	<i>Peer-centrism</i> : appeal to respect for peers

Table 2 Continued

Recommendations	Specific strategies	Relevant millennial characteristics <sup>a</sup>
4. Be consistent.	Apply class policies and student code of conduct equally to all students.	<i>Conventionality</i> : respect for norms and structure <i>Peer-centrism</i> : concern for peers
5. Know our rights.	Know rights and policies at our own institution; for example, ask unruly student to leave class; call campus security	<i>Achievement</i> : appreciation for role model
<i>Fortify ourselves</i>		
1. Seek the support of colleagues.	Colleagues may already have taught our rude student(s); exchange coping tips; ask colleague to observe our class to verify student behavior	
2. Accept our responsibilities to prepare students.	Recognize opportunity to improve world, one student at a time	
3. Reframe what is important to us.	Unless acts physically threaten us, change our mindsets about them to diminish their negative emotional impact	
4. Take control and act constructively.	Do not deny incivility or hope that it will disappear; proactively address it with above suggestions; practicing proactivity builds resiliency	

<sup>a</sup>Recommendations and strategies for preventing classroom incivility and responding to it if it does occur are designed to appeal specifically to one or more Millennial characteristics. Recommendations and strategies for fortifying ourselves against the stresses that can be caused by classroom incivility focus, by their very nature, on faculty rather than students and therefore do not align with Millennial characteristics.

### Conclusion

We had a dismal view of today's students based on anecdotes from our colleagues and our own personal experiences and generational filters. We now recognize, however, that what we still regard as the all-too-common displays of disrespectful behavior in college classrooms can be attributable, in large part, to the unique cultural characteristics of our Millennial students. Although as management educators we have been trained to appreciate cultural and demographic diversity with respect to such attributes as gender, race/ethnicity, and (dis)ability, we have, until recently, overlooked generational differences and their effects on our classroom experiences. In this paper, we have discussed Millennials' parents' over-protective emphasis on preserving their children's self-esteem and hyperinvolvement in their children's lives, as well as Millennials' ties to family and community, membership in friendship networks, conventionality, achievement, consumer orientation, and expertise with digital technology.

Rather than struggling to fight students' misbehavior in order to establish a more positive learning environment, we advocate crafting an engaging classroom in order to minimize incivility. Drawing from our newfound understanding of Millennial

culture, as well as the literature on transactional and transformational leadership, we have provided recommendations for reducing incivility in our classrooms. We have also offered suggestions for responding to incidents of incivility and fortifying ourselves against the hurts of incivility while these changes are in progress. We are confident that combining easy-to-implement transactional techniques that appeal to Millennials' need for clear outcomes with more substantive strategies that transform our pedagogy to meet their unique learning styles will engage our students, enhance our teaching, and help reduce incivility in our classrooms.

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### Note

<sup>1</sup>*Respect* (Otis Redding, 15 September 1965).



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