

Resolving Incivility In Business

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Photography: Nandhu Kumar



Photography: Sam Burriss

"Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean."

These words of Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet* came to mind during a conversation between an academic colleague, who is also a theatre professional, and myself whilst speaking about the ever-increasing incivility in today's global society, which is getting worse with each new generation. While those Shakespearean words may be a stretch from today's world, they allude to a principle that relates to modern global society's mindset and behavior. While, with all the varied mindsets of Arts lovers across the world, some may call this parallel misplaced, to me, and to those I speak with on many occasions regarding this topic, it is a parallel that holds within it a summation of the principle surrounding what is occurring in our world today regarding incivility amongst all people across countries, industries, and languages, to varying degrees. Below, microbiologist Dr. Pooja Gupta Aggarwal (Ph.D.) writes on just one personal experience which elaborates on that principle and its effects in today's business world that has not only become pervasive, but, more disconcerting, socially accepted.



Photography: Christian Fregnan

“Are all the people you connected to on your professional sites as accommodating as you expect them to be? Or they are just there? Here is a story that sheds, unfortunately, negative, light on this issue.

Thousands of applications invited to apply for Permanent Residency (PR)”. Very luring initially. People get excited to begin a new chapter of their life in a new country. You ask them if they have had an offer of employment and most of them don’t. On striking a conversation with fellow jobseekers the one major thing that came up was they strongly believed in their networking. This was mainly through social or professional sites. They had a strong belief that people in their contact list of professional sites would definitely aid their job hunt.

Is it really so? Are all the people you are connected to on your professional sites as accommodating as you expect them to be? Or they are just numbers?

Being a Ph.D. and having my credentials evaluated by World Education Services as ‘Earned Doctorate’ had put me under the impression that I would be more than welcome to the places I really wanted to work at. In hindsight, it wasn’t the scenario. On doing lots of searching, what I gathered is I would require certain certifications to squeeze into the job market. Which is fair enough as every country needs to evaluate if our education can meet up their standards. World Education Services is one of the renowned service providers to

evaluate credentials including for immigration purposes. Then why do individual subject associations require evaluations from other assessing bodies? One already shells out their hard earned money to prove the equivalency of their education only to realize that it wouldn’t hold importance once you enter the foreign country. All countries do not use similar course work or titles or designations as far as a particular subject or job is concerned. All individuals cannot be put under one bracket to evaluate their qualifications and job experience. Though my Ph.D course work comprised mainly of medical microbiology, my degree is in Microbiology. Only because my degree doesn’t mention Medical Microbiology, does my course work and research stand null and void and of no consequence?

We connect to people on LinkedIn with similar education or work experience in and around our areas. In my recent experiences I realized that when I send invitations to people with similar backgrounds they do accept your invitations. However when you message them, most of them do not bother to reply. Why? There are exceptions too. Many did write back and I highly appreciate that.

I agree that it is difficult for people to reply to each and every message they receive. But one can choose who to reply to. I am sure that all deserve a reply but at least the ones seeking advice and guidance merit reply. The next question to arise is how one can judge who to reply to. LinkedIn has the provision to view the full profile of the individual who has sent you the invite. So when you are accepting the request, you kind of have an idea of the individual’s background. In this way, you can choose as to who deserves a minute of your time.

I applied to various institutions only to realize that I would require a particular certification to meet the ‘Required Qualifications’ of that job. When I go to the website of that particular certification, their requirement is evaluation of another assessing body. Why isn’t my initial equivalency of any use? Why would it not be considered by the certifying body? Why should I spend on the same thing all over again? You call and ask the assistant of that association and they have no answer. Certain Certifying bodies have ‘Prior Learning Assessment’ to check your eligibility and the fees of which are exorbitant. For individuals who have put their money into getting the PR, credential evaluation and then immigration, where will they get money to put into these eligibility criteria for such certifications and thereafter

for the actual certification? And especially when they are not even sure of getting a positive report.

Every workplace has a different requirement of certifications. How are we supposed to meet all of them? I have written to people who might have been in a similar situation when they might have migrated. But no one wants to help. No one bothers to write back to you. What is the reason for this incivility? Where is the so-called networking of any help? Are we not supposed to work in symbiosis? I also tried knocking on the doors of concerned authorities. Few of them found it invasive. The answer I seek is what should be the approach of newcomers to a system they are completely unaware of. Are the help desks at the offices really helpful? Are your contacts in your social/professional sites really worth the time and energy you invest in them?

Companies have automated replies to applications with a disclaimer that only selected candidates would be contacted. An automated reply of rejection would also be of great help.

Are we so distanced by technology that we have forgotten the basics of humanity? We have the gifts of the ability to think and comprehend. I want people to just take a break for a few minutes and ponder that if we have the ability to help individuals, why aren't we doing it? Is it just the lack of interest towards the other person's situation? What could be the grounds of this hostility? My connections may not be in a position to help me at their level but replying back to me with a Sorry isn't too much to ask for.

So why do you connect with people on professional sites? To increase the numbers on your profile? Or to make connections of lasting value?"



Photography: rawpixel

Let us look further into this issue illustrated by Dr. Pooja by examining the foundations of systems, or, more specifically, the negatives of disharmony and the positives of unity within various systems across existence.



Photography: Markus Spiske

Regarding disharmony in systems, any kind of disconnect leads to a result that is not ideal to that system's design or intention. Any deviation from the desire/goal/mission of its origin, to whatever degree, leads to a deviation in the end, in the results, to whatever degree. Any kind of disconnect, to whatever degree, gives way to weakness, vulnerability, disharmony, destabilization, again, to whatever degree. This principle of disconnect within systems is seen across landscapes, e.g.:

- Influenza virus cells weakening and thereby causing a decrease in the virus's potential due to invading vaccination cells breaking down the virus cells' walls
- Decreasing attendance of a horror-movie social group's monthly attendance after five years of perfect attendance due to members' interests shifting towards drama movies
- Decreasing health in a human due to a redirect of commands and strategies by a sect of otherwise healthy cells attacking their own counterpart cells due to an autoimmune disease
- Increasing loss of revenue, profit, and potential of an office equipment manufacturer due to consistent high wastage from deviations in the production molds that create the furniture which stems from loose but slight calibration oversights on the machinery
- Dissipation of a Category 5 hurricane due to the continued erosion of its wind power caused by it traveling over colder waters, and over surfaces with greater friction than water (e.g. islands),

causing the breakdown of the potential of the hurricane



Photography: Clem Onojeghuo

On the contrary, unity in systems is a positive variable within any system, tho, not necessarily a positive variable in terms of humans' "positive" and "negative" judgment. Unity leads to a result that is ideal to that system's design or intention. Any unification of resources, of variables within a system, to whatever degree, leads to an enhanced system, which yields grander results, to whatever degree. Any kind of stronger connection, unity, to whatever degree, gives way to more power, more potential, again, to whatever degree. This principle of unity within systems is seen across landscapes, e.g.:

- Increased intimidation of a school kid due to his classroom bully hanging out with another bully from the same school who was just befriended
- Increased employee loyalty and decreased turnover in a call center's sales department due to weekly 30-minute culture-building sessions
- Increased velocity and mobility of a large fast-moving river's fluid dynamics due to a convergence with the rushing waters of a flood from a nearby sea
- Increased feelings of camaraderie, invincibility, energy, and collective waves of adrenaline rushes felt within a person as she joins moves to the center of a crowd of 10,000 people at 9 p.m. and joins them in singing the climactic long note in the final chorus of a popular energetic song
- Increased fear-instilling and damage potential of a teenage street gang as they grow from two to five members due to fellow members seeing and joining them in a walk to wreak havoc on the neighborhood and instill damage



Photography: Tre Immagini

Expanding on this concept of unity, we come to a term called symbiosis. Symbiosis occurs when various entities associate and collaborate with each other, thereby unifying their bond together, which, in turn, leads to a more powerful benefit to each one. This symbiosis stems from a unity between the two. Sometimes this is conscious, sometimes not, and sometimes it is neither (as when it is just by design between two non-sentient entities). Symbiosis, or unity, occurs between the above noted real-world examples, as well as countless others across existence. Some more examples include fluid dynamics, liquid evaporation cycles, unemployment and capitalism, recycling systems, cellular systems, circulatory systems, digestive systems), life and death cycles, and chaos and orderly systems ("chaos" and "orderly" as viewed from the eyes of humans, which is actually not sound since all systems are orderly, even tho some may seem chaotic from human perspective).

As anyone can see, whether s/he is a systems thinker or not, there is a set of foundations, fundamentals, universals, or underlying variables that govern systems. This is irrespective of those systems being deemed as positive or negative from a human perspective. Whatsmore, those foundations, fundamentals, universals, or underlying variables are considered positive if they add to the original design, or original intent, or original purpose of their respective systems.



Photography: Matt Hardy

To illustrate using some examples above, the design, or intent, or purpose, of a five-member teenage gang (which is a subgroup, or subsystem) within a larger social system is to do harm, damage, or instill negative effects on opposing systems (e.g. property, humans, or animals [all of which are subgroups or subsystems within the same social system as the gang]). The design, or intent, or purpose, of a Category 5 hurricane (which is a subgroup, or subsystem within a larger weather system ([or Nature system or Earth system]) is to do harm, damage, or instill negative effects on opposing systems (e.g. property, humans, or animals [all of which are subgroups or subsystems within a different system than the hurricane]). Or, if a person is more aligned with Nature via education or spirituality, the design, or intent, or purpose, of a Category 5 hurricane (which is a subgroup, or subsystem within a larger weather system [or Nature system or Earth system]) is to resolve the imbalance of physical forces. Or, if a person is more aligned with Nature via education or spirituality yet has a different perspective, the design, or intent, or purpose, of a Category 5 hurricane (which is a subgroup, or subsystem within a larger weather system [or Nature system or Earth system]) is simply to exist, or come about, due to the perfect weather variables that cause the hurricane. Regarding these examples, as is the case also with all systems, any variable that enhances a system automatically (e.g. additional members joining the teenage gang in their mission to wreak havoc, or warm air masses adding to the power of the hurricane) is a positive variable since it increases that system's potential and, thus, helps the system serve its purpose to a grander degree. This is regardless of if it is a variable or system deemed negative by human perspectives.

To Dr. Pooja's point concerning the incivility of the business world these days, as well as the point of systems with positive (healthy, beneficial) and negative (unhealthy, damaging) variables, our Islamic returning expert and aspiring Hafiza Afnan notes moments in life which allude to the secret underlying universals, or foundations that reveal the severity of this issue of incivility in business.



Photography: Luis Galvez

While helping others is a human instinct, as a child, I began to see the evidence of this human instinct beginning to wane. I recall many children would typically not pay attention to me, save for when they needed something. At those times they would approach me with no problem. Then, when I helped them with what they sought, they would ignore me completely again and not even look at me when we met again. Their disgusting pattern would continue — ignore, then talk to get help, then ignore again. Of course, whenever they needed the help they would speak with me nicely, but only temporarily of course.

This vile behavior, continues to reign over the upcoming generations, and, sadly, as Dr. Pooja rightfully states, has infiltrated the world of business. Whatsmore, this accepted practice shows no signs of waning due to the progressive nature of the world's incivility as we see it these days. With that, the human instinct that was rooted in all of us since long ago to help our fellow Muslims and non-Muslims alike continues to weaken while people's self-serving interests increases in strength.



Photography: Paulo Silva

This foundation for incivility seems to stem from ubiquitous rituals and values that are toxic and have infiltrated our global society's mindset, as well as its child-rearing practices. Such rituals being no longer raising children to understand, care for, and practice tolerance, civility, and charity unto our fellow brothers and sisters. Another being not instilling proper rules for children. This is evidenced in how children are allowed to walk all over their parents, and keep their heads buried in electronic devices without engaging in considerate conversation with others whilst in the car, bus, on camping trips, or even at the dinner table with the family. But, as we all are members of one ecosystem, one society, whose actions collectively harm or benefit each other in the short and/or long-term, it is in all our best interests to offer help, in business environments, and out. It only divides and harms us all to cultivate and perpetuate a mindset based on ignoring others, such as in the business aspects Dr. Pooja illustrates, because we may have no interest in those people requesting a simple email, call, text message, or chat message.

As for those few on this planet who try, in futility, to stop this waning of the good nature of humans, most of them eventually join the ranks of the selfish simply out of exhaustion; thereby proving the phrases, "you are what you eat", "you become who you most closely associate with", and "you are the company you keep". Such is the case many times when you constantly deal with people who look only for satisfying their self-interests out of shameful self-love.



Photography: Riccardo Annandale

So, what's the solution? How does one get rid of conceited self-love and selfishness? Especially since selfishness materializes in many, sometimes hidden, aspects of personality, e.g. vanity, conceited self-love, arrogance, self-interest, or greed. The solution is extremely simple, and it starts from each person. By giving what is due, whether it is giving charity or just giving what is right (such as what Dr. Pooja alludes to), a person is forced to think of others and treat them as s/he thinks about and treats him/herself. God mentions this in the Quran.

Surah Ali Imran 92:

“لَنْ تَنَالُوا الْبِرَّ حَتَّى تُنْفِقُوا مِمَّا تُحِبُّونَ”

“Never will you attain the good (reward) until you spend (in the way of Allah from that which you love). And whatever you spend — indeed, Allah is knowing of it.”

This command in the Quran tells us we must help those in need who ask us, be they the poor or the non-poor, including those in our business circles — colleagues, candidates, subordinates, etc. In this way, we also all get what we want — both the receivers and the givers. Ergo, the solution entails we exercise the negativities in our personalities, e.g. selfishness and self-love. Then, if we conduct this in earnest, in turn, the negativities will be replaced with positivities. This kind of mentality gives way to the actions of civility, decency, of replying to people when they simply ask us to reply in an email, text message, chat message, or phone call.

Whatsmore, and finally, when we give (as a collective entity, society) we see that we receive (as a collective entity, society). This is because everything has a return, i.e. giving civility, or kindness, or consideracy. Helping

people via simply being civil and perpetuating civility in our global society, amongst Muslims and non-Muslims alike, has a positive return that creates a continuum of civility down the later generations. This action also begets feelings of tenderness and satisfaction. Ergo, ensuring we are civil to others, including in these business situations Dr. Pooja speaks of, we find our civil actions return to us in other ways.

families to eat, for them to be warm at night, and to live just a few moments of happiness throughout our hard-worked lives.



Photography: Valentin Salja

"On pain of torture, from those bloody hands,

Throw your mistempered weapons to the ground!"

While, just as with the words at the opening of this work, those Shakespearean words may be a stretch from today's world, they allude to a principle that finds truth in the everyday dealings of current and prospective employees and employers. This principle follows the truth that spoken words, unspoken words, and direct and indirect practices by people unto others which yield negativity often lead to negative domino effects. The allusion of "pain of torture" is to the pain experienced by our own people across the world who are hurt and damaged by repeated acts of the pain of the torture of incivility against each other, "from those bloody hands", i.e. from the guilty and continued use of incivility against our own undeserving people across the Earth. The allusion of "throw your mistempered weapons to the ground" is to the call for everyone to drop this vile and damaging practice of incivility unto each of us undeserving people who are simply trying to make a means to an end (making money) which allows our