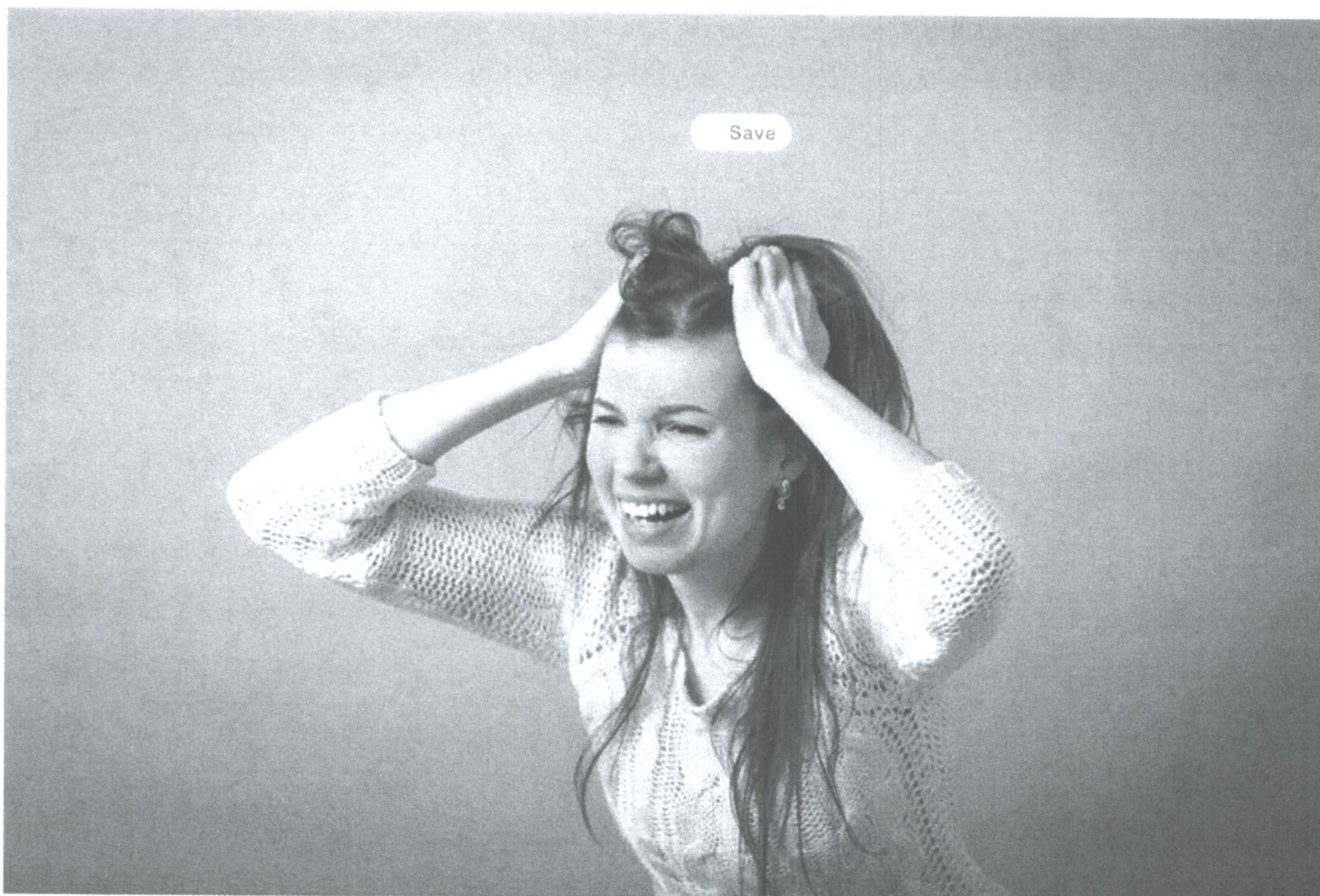


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# Here's How To Stop Communication Incivility In Your Workplace



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Instead of getting upset, try these tips. ICLIPART

**By Dianna Booher**

In addition to unrest in the streets, incivility crops up in the workplace all too often. Many offer reasons for the commonplace rudeness: pent-up anger over job losses, survivor guilt, COVID fear, financial loss, a volatile 401K or IRA, and the list goes on.

Whatever the cost, the cure can be painless.

Maybe you've experienced some of the recent rudeness:

- Curt responses from agents at Help Centers
- Blunt responses from customers calling Help Centers ("I've been on hold 50 minutes listening to your-call-is-important-to-us messages, and now you're telling me there's no solution! #\$\$%&%")
- Late-arrivers to meetings—virtual or live ("Stuck in traffic" can't be an excuse for ZOOM.)



- People eating and drinking while in a virtual meeting or on the phone
- People who get in your space, “up close and personal” to talk without a mask
- People trying to “top” your stories or expertise
- People who simply don’t respond to a colleague’s email
- Expletives on your social media posts
- Confrontational, bullying remarks to other commenters on your social media posts
- Spam calls
- Hitting your email inbox with offensive jokes and stories

Here are a few solutions to rampant rudeness:

## **Tackling Incivility Head On With Your Communication Style**

### **Focus On The Goal, Not Your Feelings**

When treated rudely, your first reaction is likely an emotional response. If you communicate in that state of mind, things will only escalate to the typical impasse. So stay calm and keep focused on the goal: A solution to your problem or an answer to your question. A helpful meeting discussion. An insightful social media post. Or a quick trip to the store.

### **Offer Empathy**

Several years ago, I witnessed a celebrity speaker quickly quiet a crowd of angry, rude conference attendees. The promoter of the event had somehow oversold 1,000 seats, mistakenly selling duplicate tickets for more than 1,000 seats.

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So when those people arrived, trekked up to the auditorium balcony, and discovered someone else sitting in their assigned seats, they were miffed. As people continued to gather and grumble, the emcee of the event announced several times that the event had been mistakenly oversold and that they would be opening up additional areas to accommodate the overflow and unexpected crowd.

The grumbling and confrontations continued.

Then a new voice came over the broadcast system—this time it was the celebrity speaker who had rolled to the podium in her wheelchair. Paralyzed at the age of 19 after a



swimming accident, Joni was there to talk about resilience and faith.

Unannounced, Joni began, “May I have your attention a moment? I know some of you are upset to find out about the mistake and have had to take a seat elsewhere. You’re not sitting where you expected to be. . . . I too find that I’m not sitting where I expected to be today.”

The murmuring became noticeably quieter and more respectful. Perspective pays.

## Model the Communication You Want

Ask questions to get the facts of a situation. Provide appropriate details so the other person can understand clearly what has happened. Continue to focus on the resolution: On-time meetings. Open discussion of an issue with input from the entire discussion group. Meeting a project deadline. Reasonable expenses.

After responding with empathy to the other person, stay focused on fact-finding and a solution to the issue.

## State Next Steps Clearly

Don’t threaten—most especially with threats that you cannot or don’t intend to carry out. Instead, clearly state what your next steps will be if you don’t come to an agreement.

An example, “Let’s continue to hear from others about the X issue. If we can’t come to an agreement about whether to accept this bid, then I will email Cari to ask her to make the decision herself.” That’s not a threat; it’s a statement of conditions and next actions.

## Document an Incident

If the uncivility seems to be increasing rather than decreasing, document what happened—the who, what, when, why, and how of the situation. Never trust your memory. Contemporaneous notes carry weight, even in the courtroom.

Although these strategies won’t rid the world entirely of rudeness, they will contribute to calmer reactions and quicker, more appropriate resolutions.

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