Brave Conversations

The Antidote to Workplace Incivility

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Incivility definition *reminder*:

Rude, disrespectful or impolite behavior that violates norms of mutual respect.

Reference: ChatGPT, OpenAI, 2025

The Cost of SILENCE

- **Not giving honest performance feedback**

- **Staying quiet in meetings**

- **Avoiding tough conversations about behavior**

- **Not speaking up about risks or concerns**

- **Withholding upward feedback**

- **Failing to ask for help**

References: Stone et al. (1999); Detert & Edmondson (2011); Pearson & Porath (2009); Edmondson (1999); Burris (2012); Lee (2002)

SILENCE

What causes people to be silent?

Porath & Pearson (2013); Andersson & Pearson (1999).

FEAR

Porath & Pearson (2013); Andersson & Pearson (1999).

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BRAVERY *defined*

Voluntary ACTION taken
despite **FEAR**
toward an **important, moral** or **worthwhile GOAL.**

Reference: (Pury, 2010)

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BRAVE COMMUNICATION

When Brave Communication is Needed

1

Speaking Up with Ideas or Concerns

In groups or one-on-one

2

Having Difficult Conversations

Tackling conflict, misalignment, or sensitive issues

3

Giving Constructive Feedback

To peers, leaders, or direct reports

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BEYOND PSYCH SAFETY

Safety Alone Isn't Enough

- Psychological safety = essential foundation.
- Safe environments don't guarantee people will speak up.
- Employees also need the *skills and confidence* to be brave (speak up with ideas, questions, and express concerns)

References: Edmondson (1999); Detert & Edmondson (2011)

Bandura (1977, 1997)

BUILDING VOICE EFFICACY

The Confidence to Use Your Voice

- Voice efficacy = belief that speaking up will make a difference.
- Without it, silence wins — even in safe cultures.
- Factors that Influence Voice Efficacy — Personality traits, Peer support, past success, and leader responsiveness
- Voice efficacy grows when people are taught how, gain practice using their voice, and see their input valued.

References: Bandura (1997); Burris (2012); Detert & Treviño (2010); Li & Tangirala (2022); LePine & Van Dyne (1998)

From SILENCE to BRAVERY

Practical Tools

- Bravery can be taught — it's a skill, not a personality trait.
- Simple frameworks make tough conversations easier.
- Training + practice turn fear into confident action.
- Expectations and team norms influence behavior.

References: Bandura (1997); Stone et al. (1999); Burris (2012); Li & Tangirala (2022); Barsade (2002)

THE FEEDBACK FALSE DILEMMA

I need to either:

Speak Up

or

Stay Silent

Create conflict,
harm relationships, and
be perceived as negative

Maintain relationships
and harmony
and be perceived as weak

THE BRAVE ALTERNATIVE

The Better Choice:

BRAVE Conversation

Honest, caring conversations in **service to the other person** and the **mission** — resulting in greater **trust,** mutual **respect**, **transparency**, and **performance.**

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Communicate with POISE

Feedback Model to Build Voice Efficacy

P — Pure Intent & Permission

Open with the pure intent and gain permission to give feedback.

O — Observed Behavior

State the specific, factual behavior you observed (no judgments).

I — Impact

Share the effect the behavior had on you, the team, or results.

S — Seek to Understand

Ask open, curious, non-leading questions. Listen to their perspective.

E — Enact a Plan

Agree on next steps together. Clarify accountability and support.

References: Stone et al. (1999); Kluger & DeNisi (1996); Yeager et al. (2014)

Example POISE Feedback Conversation
Feedback Model to Build Brave Communication

P — Purpose & Permission

"Thanks for making time to talk. I want to share some feedback with you because I know you're capable of being a strong contributor on this team, and I want to help you get there. Would it be okay if I shared an observation?"
(Pause for permission/acknowledgment)

O — Observed Behavior

"In the last three team meetings, you arrived about 10–15 minutes late."

I — Impact

"When that happens, the team has to stop and repeat information, which slows down progress. It also sends a signal — even unintentionally — that the meeting isn't a priority."

Example POISE Feedback Conversation
Feedback Model to Build Brave Communication

S — Seek to Understand

"What's your perspective? What's been getting in the way of arriving on time? *(Listen fully, acknowledge their response)*

E — Enact a Plan

"Let's agree on a plan. Starting next week, could you block a buffer before meetings so you can join on time? I'm confident you can do this, and I know the team will benefit from your full presence."

Example POISE Feedback Conversation
Feedback Model to Build Brave Communication

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"What's your perspective? What's been getting in the way of arriving on time? *(Listen fully, acknowledge their response)*

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Reflection Questions

How does this model help with feedback conversations?

- What feels different about this model compared to how you usually give feedback?
- How might this structure make feedback easier for the **giver**?
- How might it make feedback easier for the **receiver**?
- If you used this approach consistently, how might it change the culture of your team?

Create Team-wide Norms

Leaders — Guide Your Team Through These Questions

- Why is brave communication important for us to succeed together?
- If we practiced brave communication more consistently, what positive impact would we see?
- What specific expectations will we commit to about speaking up and giving feedback?
- What does brave communication look like for our team in practice?
- How will we support and respond when someone communicates bravely (and gives us feedback)?

References: Edmondson (1999); Detert & Edmondson (2011); Burris (2012); Li & Tangirala (2022); London & Smither (2002)

Summary:
Bravery as the Antidote for Workplace Incivility

- Cuts through silence and harshness
- Builds trust and respect
- Fuels accountability and growth

✨ *Incivility destroys trust. Bravery builds it.* ✨

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Reflection:
How much candor and transparency exist in your team/organization?

- In what areas are you and your team already doing well with communication?
- In what areas can your team improve?
- What is one concrete idea you will take forward to improve brave communication in your team/organization?

✨ *Incivility destroys trust. Bravery builds it.* ✨

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Final thoughts

- Treating people with dignity and respect means being honest about challenges that fuel growth or impact.
- Silence born of fear may protect you, but it's uncivil to others.
- Brave Communication ends silence and builds a culture of caring candor.

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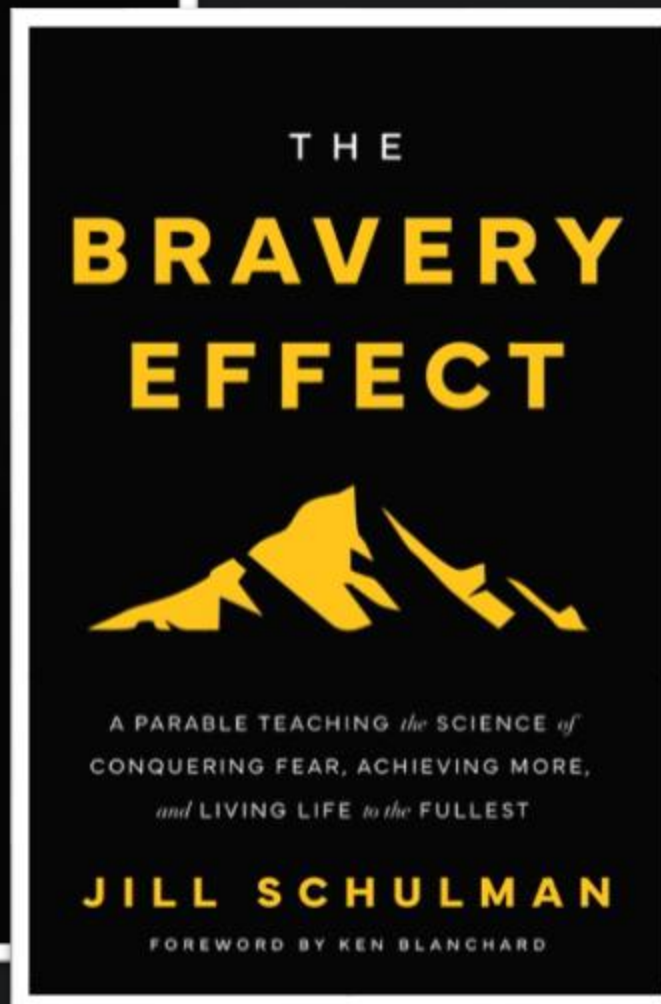
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THANK YOU!

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