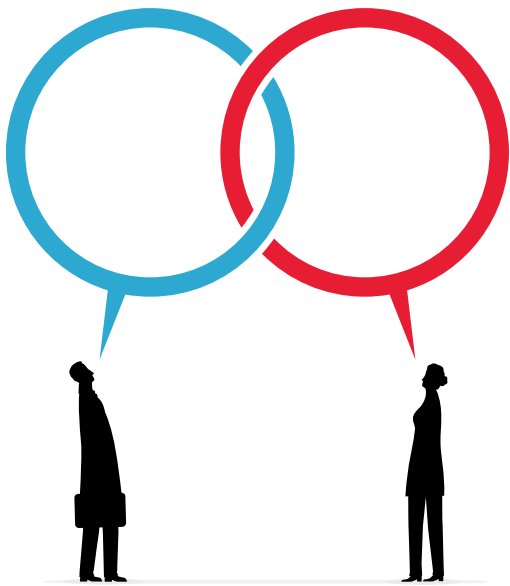# CIVILITY IN AMERICA 2018:
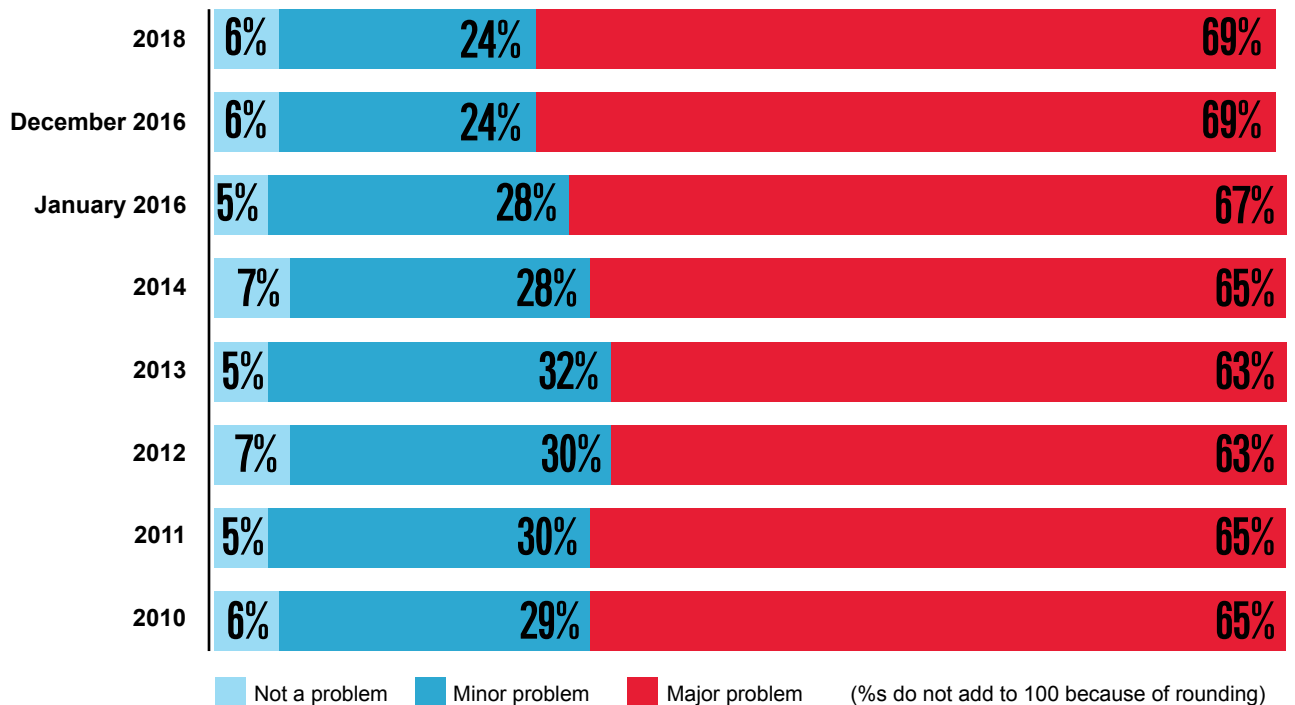# CIVILITY AT WORK AND IN OUR PUBLIC SQUARES

INTRODUCTION

Weber Shandwick and Powell Tate, in partnership with KRC Research, have conducted *Civility in America: A Nationwide Survey* annually since 2010. In this year's installment, we find Americans continuing to report a severe civility deficit in our nation, with a vast majority – 93% – identifying a civility problem in society, and most classifying it as a major problem (69%).

PROBLEM WITH CIVILITY IN AMERICA TODAY

(among total Americans)

Year	Not a problem	Minor problem	Major problem
2018	6%	24%	69%
December 2016	6%	24%	69%
January 2016	5%	28%	67%
2014	7%	28%	65%
2013	5%	32%	63%
2012	7%	30%	63%
2011	5%	30%	65%
2010	6%	29%	65%

■ Not a problem   ■ Minor problem   ■ Major problem   (%s do not add to 100 because of rounding)
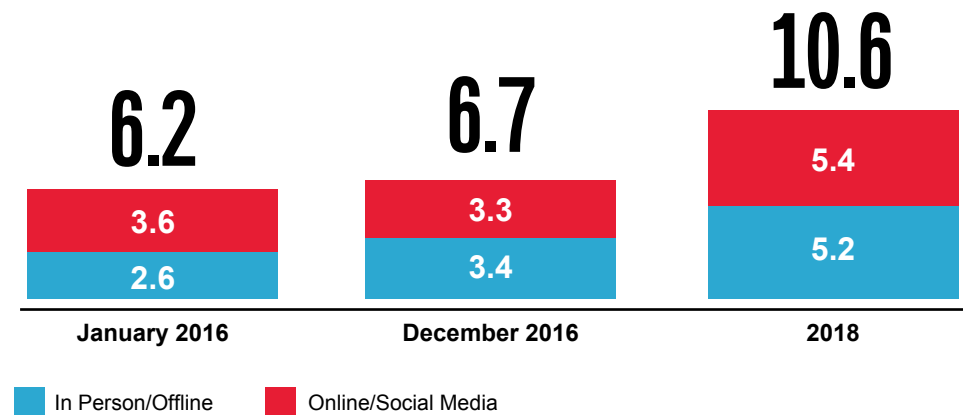
Incivility is more than a perception. More than eight in 10 Americans (84%) have at one time or another experienced incivility and in a wide variety of places and settings, most typically while shopping (39%), while driving (39%) or while on social media (38%). Among those who report ever experiencing incivility, encounters are frequent, averaging 10.6 times per week. Online interactions slightly edge out in-person interactions (5.4 vs. 5.2). More disturbingly, the frequency of uncivil encounters has risen dramatically since 2016.

AVERAGE NUMBER OF INCIVILITY ENCOUNTERS PER WEEK
(among Americans who have personally experienced incivility somewhere)

6.2

January 2016
3.6
2.6

6.7

December 2016
3.3
3.4

10.6

2018
5.4
5.2

■ In Person/Offline   ■ Online/Social Media

Americans have not lost sight that civility provides substantial advantages to society, including building national pride (84%) and easing tension and conflict (79%). Despite the high incidence of incivility, hope remains for restoring civility to our nation. The majority of Americans (71%) are at least somewhat hopeful for a more civil future, and 81% believe that highly controversial subjects can indeed be discussed in a civil way.

In this eighth edition of *Civility in America*, conducted online among 1,481 U.S. adults in January 2018, we continue to track Americans' perceptions of and experiences with civility in their lives. We also dig deeper into a phenomenon we detected last year: the role of the workplace as a civility safety zone.

" **Given that nearly all Americans consider incivility to be a problem in our country – a number that has not budged since the inception of the study – the fact that a similar proportion finds civility in their workplaces offers a ray of hope for this seemingly intractable social issue. Companies should build on the important safe haven they provide employees and activate strategies that nurture even greater collegiality and respect around the organizational purpose, which, in turn, can deepen stakeholder relationships.**

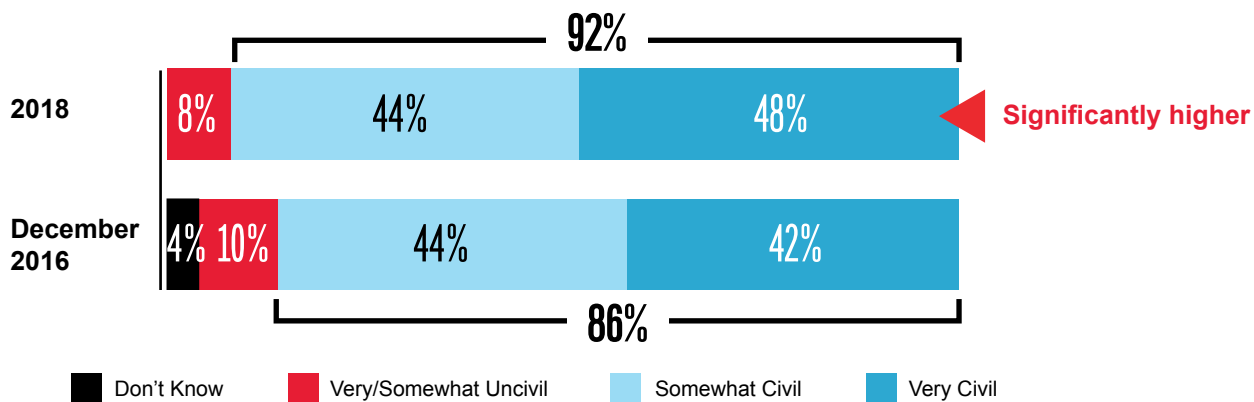**Andy Polansky, Chief Executive Officer, Weber Shandwick**

THE CIVIL WORK ZONE

Just over half of Americans (53%) report they are employed in a job where they have coworkers. We investigated this group's attitudes toward and experiences with civility at their workplace.

For the second consecutive wave of our study, we find that the workplace is largely a civility safe zone. More than nine in 10 Americans who work with others (92%) describe their place of employment as very or somewhat civil, a statistic that rose since our last measurement at the end of 2016 (86%).

## GENERAL TONE AND LEVEL OF CIVILITY IN PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT

(among employed Americans with coworkers)

	Don't Know	Very/Somewhat Uncivil	Somewhat Civil	Very Civil
2018		8%	44%	48%	— Significantly higher
December 2016	4%	10%	44%	42%

92% (2018)
86% (December 2016)

Not only does the overwhelming majority of Americans with coworkers describe their workplace as civil, but 27% report this level of civility has improved compared to a few years ago. These positive indicators align with the general decline in the number of Americans overall who report ever having experienced incivility at work.

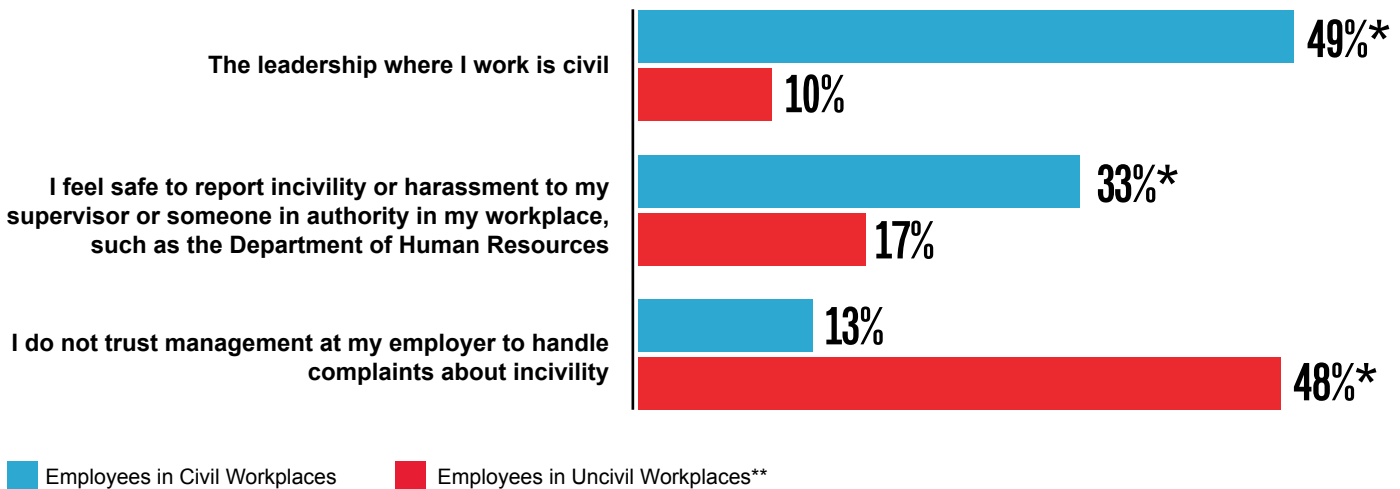## PERSONALLY EXPERIENCED INCIVILITY AT A PAST OR PRESENT JOB

(among total Americans)

2011	2012	2013	2014	January 2016	December 2016	2018
43%	34%	37%	38%	33%	34%	29%

CIVIL WORK AHEAD
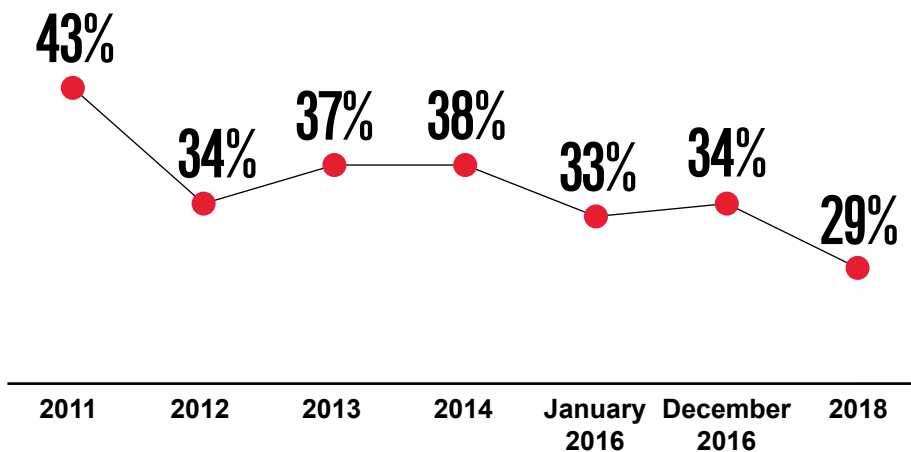
How do employers of civil workplaces create this kind of safe haven? We compared respondents in civil environments to those who work in uncivil environments and found that civility is an organizational value. In civil workplaces, leadership is more likely to be perceived as civil (49% vs. 10%, respectively) and employees feel safer reporting uncivil conduct (33% vs. 17%). In uncivil workplaces, employees are more likely to distrust management to handle complaints about incivility (48% vs. 13% of employees in civil workplaces).

ELEMENTS OF CIVIL WORKPLACES

(% of employed Americans with coworkers who agree with statements)

The leadership where I work is civil
- 49%* (Employees in Civil Workplaces)
- 10% (Employees in Uncivil Workplaces)

I feel safe to report incivility or harassment to my supervisor or someone in authority in my workplace, such as the Department of Human Resources
- 33%* (Employees in Civil Workplaces)
- 17% (Employees in Uncivil Workplaces)

I do not trust management at my employer to handle complaints about incivility
- 13% (Employees in Civil Workplaces)
- 48%* (Employees in Uncivil Workplaces)

■ Employees in Civil Workplaces   ■ Employees in Uncivil Workplaces**

*significant difference
**small base size

When leadership is civil, these numbers further improve. Employees who work in civil places and think their leadership is civil feel safer reporting incivility or harassment to their supervisor (48%) and are less likely to distrust management to handle complaints about incivility (6%). There is a clear need for civility to start at the top of an organization.

These findings do not mean that employees in uncivil work environments have accepted incivility as normal and give their leaders a pass. Approximately half of employees in both civil and uncivil workplaces believe that leadership has a responsibility to enforce civility in the workplace (52% vs. 46%, respectively). Furthermore, the research uncovered a lesson for those employers who don't instill a culture of civility in their organizations: Incivility multiplies when not curbed – more than twice as many employees in uncivil workplaces vs. civil workplaces report they are hearing more uncivil comments at work than they used to (37% vs. 16%, respectively).

Incivility at work has consequences. Among the relatively small group of Americans who report their workplaces as less than civil (8%), the top impact of incivility on job performance is identified as "anger towards coworkers or employer" (45%), but most (84%) report some sort of negative impact on their lives or job performance. It is certainly not in the best interest of an employer for its employees to feel as though they are working in an uncivil culture.
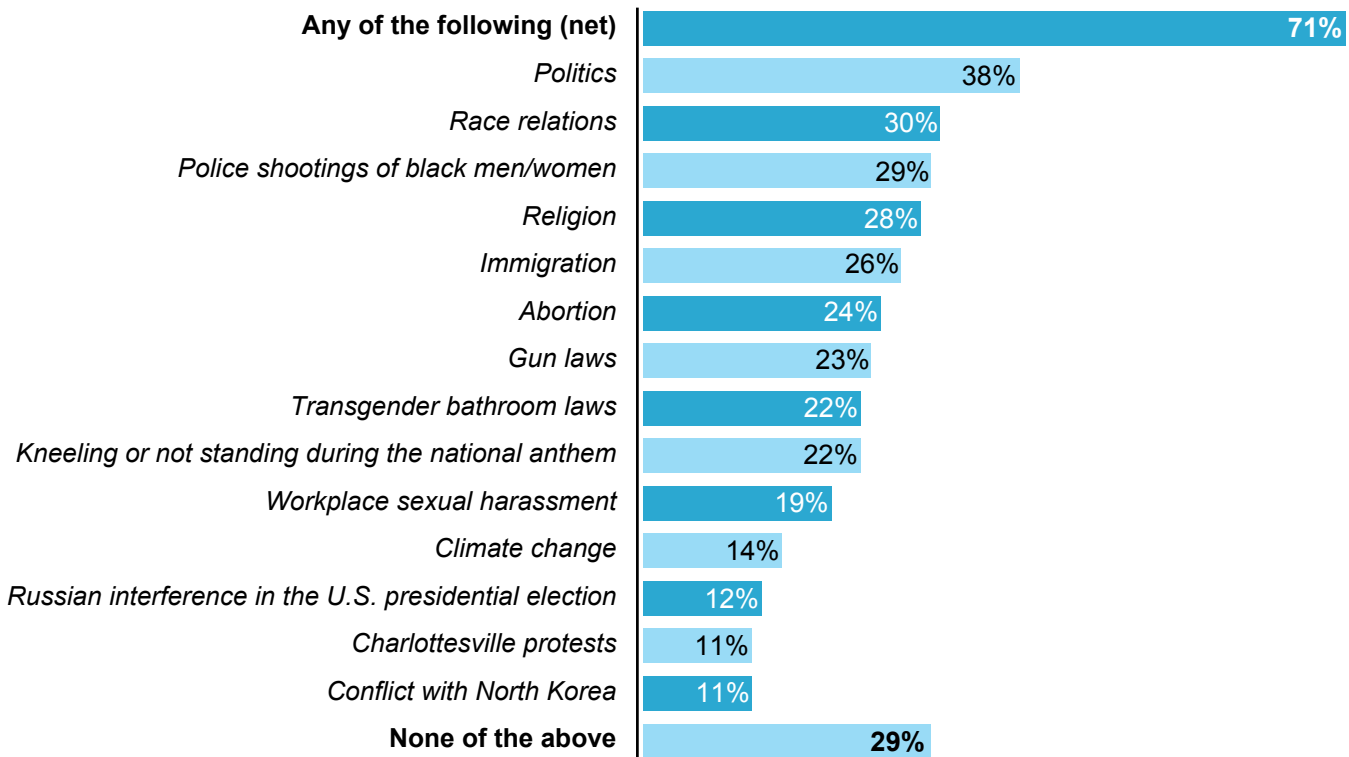
When Americans overall are asked to respond to a list of actions that would improve the level of civility in the country, 42% are in favor of civility training in the workplace and 40% are in favor of employers encouraging employees to report incivility in the workplace. It seems that the workplace may be ground zero for civility progress.

Why is civility so much better in the workplace than in everyday life? Perhaps the answer lies in what people *don't* do at work. The majority of Americans (81%) agree that highly controversial subjects can be discussed in a civil way, but employees seem to be steering clear of controversy at work. Approximately three in 10 Americans with coworkers (31%) say they avoid discussing sensitive topics in the workplace for fear that the conversation will turn uncivil. It is possible that employees find some contentious issues inappropriate for discussion in the workplace. This is not to say that avoiding controversy defines civility, but there may be limits on what employees can and cannot talk about at work, giving the workplace a civility advantage over other areas of society.

Many Americans with coworkers (71%) report that at least one of the following topics is difficult to discuss civilly at their workplace:

DIFFICULT WORKPLACE TOPICS

(among employed Americans with coworkers)

Topic	%
Any of the following (net)	**71%**
Politics	38%
Race relations	30%
Police shootings of black men/women	29%
Religion	28%
Immigration	26%
Abortion	24%
Gun laws	23%
Transgender bathroom laws	22%
Kneeling or not standing during the national anthem	22%
Workplace sexual harassment	19%
Climate change	14%
Russian interference in the U.S. presidential election	12%
Charlottesville protests	11%
Conflict with North Korea	11%
None of the above	**29%**

Further reflecting an environment of "not for work" topics of discussion:
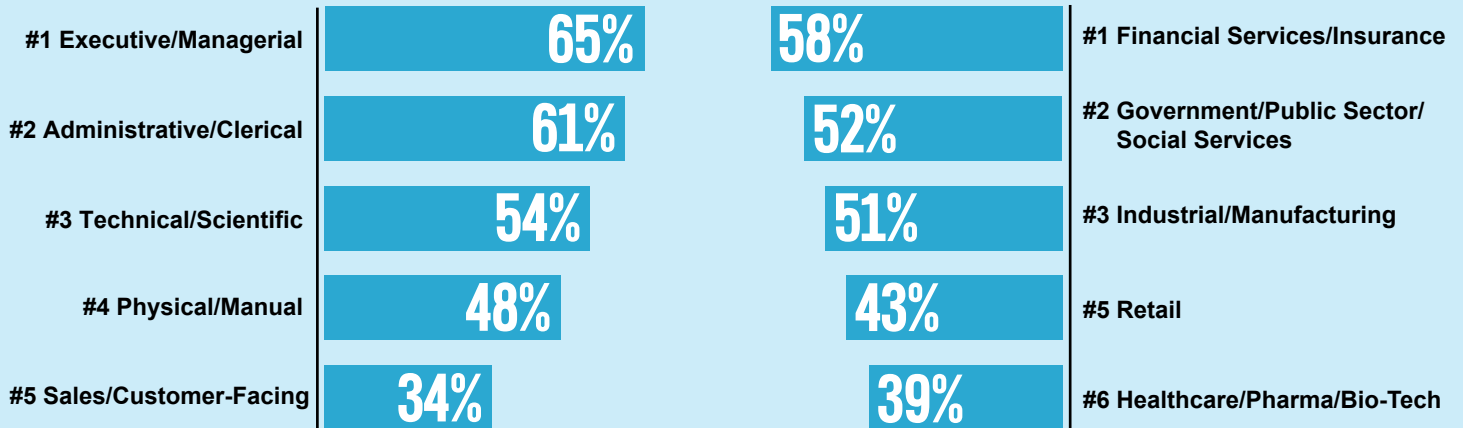
- Only 15% say they feel more comfortable than they used to expressing opinions about controversial societal and political issues at work. Millennials – born between 1981 and 1996 – are twice as likely as Boomers and older workers – born before 1965 – to report a higher comfort level (20% vs. 10%, respectively).

- Nearly one-quarter of employees (23%) say they avoid discussing topics of diversity in the workplace for fear the conversation will turn uncivil. This level is similar for African Americans (26%), Hispanics (24%) and Whites (23%), but higher for Asians (34%).

RANKING THE CIVILITY OF
PROFESSIONS IN AMERICA*

(% very civil)

#1 Executive/Managerial	**65%**
#2 Administrative/Clerical	**61%**
#3 Technical/Scientific	**54%**
#4 Physical/Manual	**48%**
#5 Sales/Customer-Facing	**34%**

RANKING THE CIVILITY OF
INDUSTRIES IN AMERICA*

(% very civil)

58%	#1 Financial Services/Insurance
52%	#2 Government/Public Sector/ Social Services
51%	#3 Industrial/Manufacturing
43%	#5 Retail
39%	#6 Healthcare/Pharma/Bio-Tech

*Of those professions and industries with sample size of 40 or more

> **"** In a very uncivil America, we are gratified to see civility is alive and well in the workplace. However, we also have to remind those who lead and manage that they cannot afford to become civility-complacent. The stakes are high and employees are looking to leadership to not only ensure a civil workplace, but to be civility stewards.
>
> **Pam Jenkins, President of Global Public Affairs, Weber Shandwick**

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION: CIVILITY'S PARTNER IN THE WORKPLACE

More than eight in 10 employees with coworkers (83%) describe their workplace as diverse and inclusive (see sidebar for definitions of diversity and inclusion presented in the survey). Diversity and inclusion (D&I) goes hand in hand with civility in the workplace, as respondents in uncivil workplaces are twice as likely to describe their employers as weak on diversity and inclusion (37% vs. 15% of civil workplaces).

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION BY CIVILITY OF WORKPLACE

(among employed Americans with coworkers)

15%

37%*

85%*

63%

Employees in
Civil Workplaces

Employees in
Uncivil Workplaces**
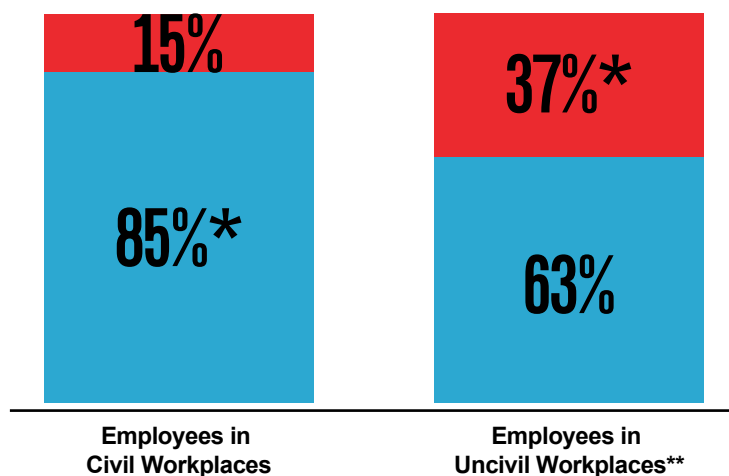
■ Workplace is diverse and inclusive   ■ Workplace is not diverse and inclusive

*significant difference
**small base size

DEFINITIONS PROVIDED TO RESPONDENTS:

By "diversity" we mean that the place you work has representation of all kinds of people, across sex, race, class, age and other categories.
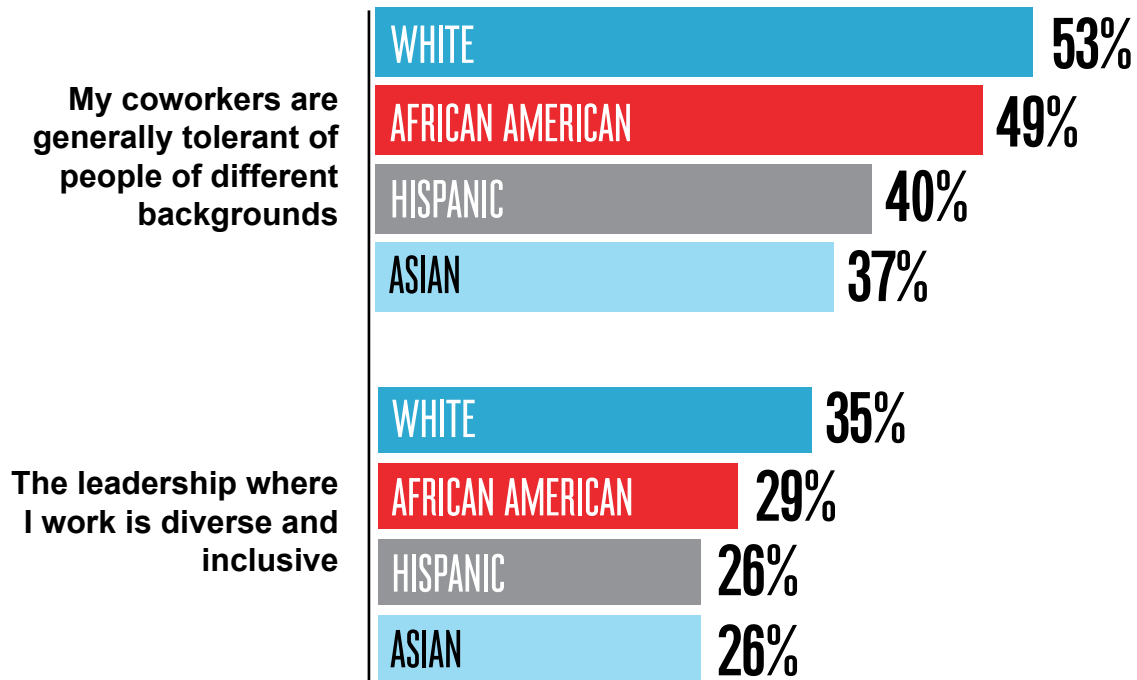
By "inclusion" we mean how well people of these different categories are equally valued, respected and supported by leaders, managers and other employees in the workplace.

All D&I questions were asked among employed Americans who have coworkers (53% of sample).

While D&I workplace ratings are very consistent among racial groups (Hispanic: 86%; White: 83%; Asian: 80%; and African American: 79%), experiences with coworkers and leadership vary somewhat by racial group. White employees are the most likely to say their coworkers are tolerant of people of different backgrounds (a significant difference over Asian employees) and are also the most likely to say their leadership is diverse and inclusive.

D&I WORKPLACE EXPERIENCES

(% of employed Americans with coworkers who agree with statements)

My coworkers are generally tolerant of people of different backgrounds

WHITE	53%
AFRICAN AMERICAN	49%
HISPANIC	40%
ASIAN	37%

The leadership where I work is diverse and inclusive

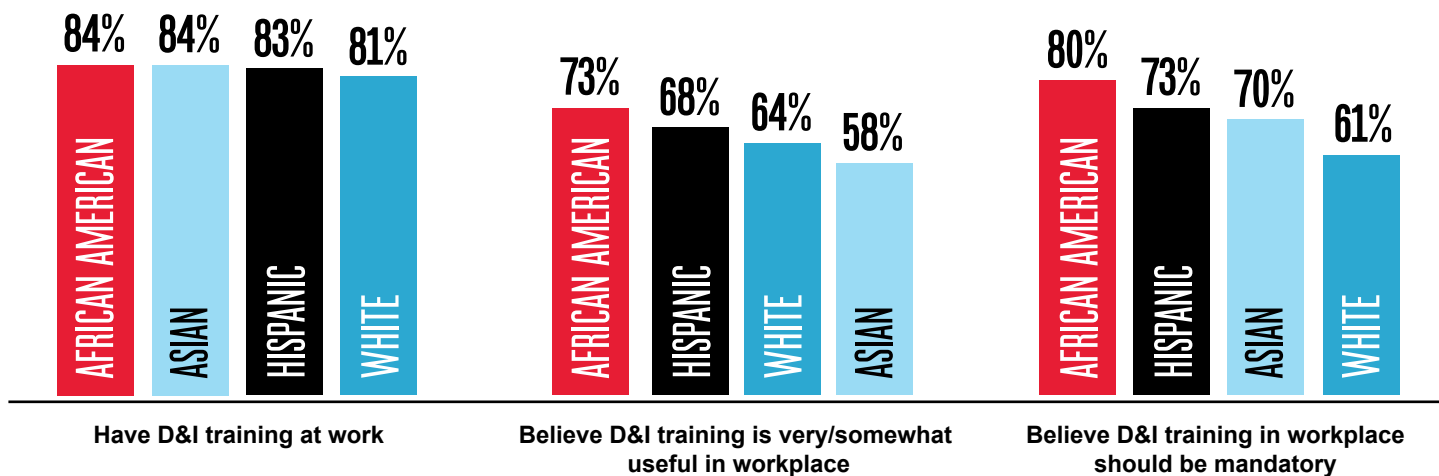|	
WHITE	35%
AFRICAN AMERICAN	29%
HISPANIC	26%
ASIAN	26%

This analysis tells us that people perceive their workplaces differently. With many employees (43%) believing that leadership has a responsibility to ensure a diverse and inclusive workplace, management cannot ignore the different ways people of diverse backgrounds experience the organization.

Employees have expectations for further improvements in diversity in the workplace. More than four in 10 (42%) believe their workplace will become more diverse in the next few years, while only 13% believe it will go in the opposite direction and become less diverse. Millennials in particular expect positive change (52%).

D&I training is also critical to moving this objective forward. Two-thirds (66%) believe that D&I training should be mandatory in the workplace, with African Americans by far the group most in agreement (80%). Among those who have D&I training at work, 65% find it useful. Again, African Americans lead in finding it useful (73%).

D&I TRAINING

(among employed Americans with coworkers)

84%	84%	83%	81%
AFRICAN AMERICAN	ASIAN	HISPANIC	WHITE

Have D&I training at work

73%	68%	64%	58%
AFRICAN AMERICAN	HISPANIC	WHITE	ASIAN

Believe D&I training is very/somewhat useful in workplace

80%	73%	70%	61%
AFRICAN AMERICAN	HISPANIC	ASIAN	WHITE

Believe D&I training in workplace should be mandatory

> **"**
> **Our research makes it clear that employees expect greater diversity and inclusion in their workplaces. The evidence that D&I also contributes to civility and respect among colleagues suggests that acknowledging, addressing and adapting to our differences is a business imperative that companies must embrace to build reputations and organizational endurance in the future.**
>
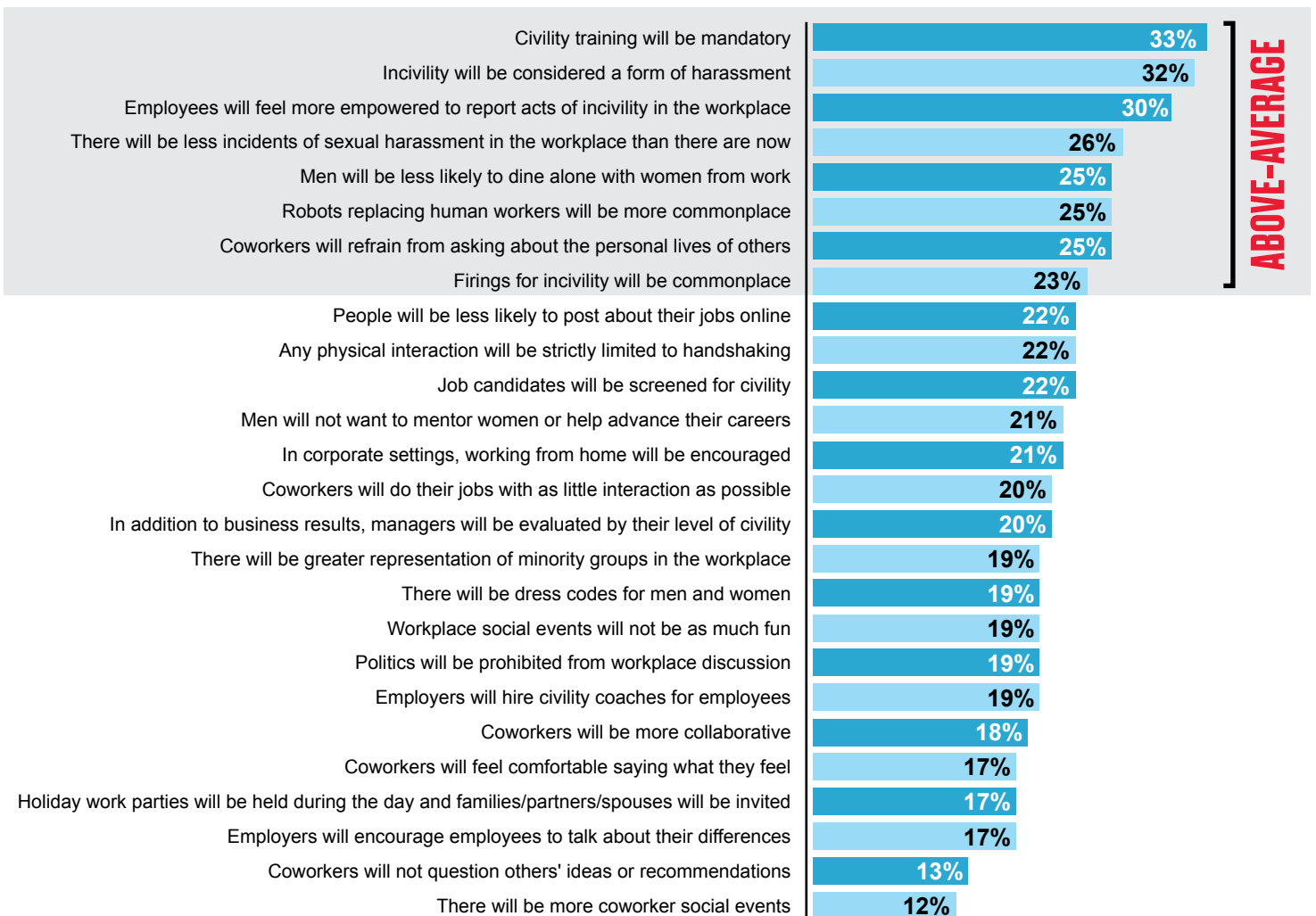> **Tai Wingfield, SVP, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, Weber Shandwick**

THE CIVIL WORKPLACE OF 2025

Building on an already civil workplace environment, the forecast for the future of civility at work is more optimistic than pessimistic: 36% think it will get better in the next five years compared to 20% who think it will get worse. The most common expectation, reported by 44%, is that it will remain about the same.

What does the civil workplace of the future look like? The survey presented a list of 26 possible characterizations of the workplace in the year 2025. Employees don't agree on any one particular descriptor, but identify a variety of changes. Those items that are above average in terms of response rates are shaded below, led by mandatory civility training (33%) and classifying incivility as a form of harassment (32%).

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING WILL CHARACTERIZE THE WORKPLACE IN THE YEAR 2025?

(among employed Americans with coworkers)

Civility training will be mandatory	33%
Incivility will be considered a form of harassment	32%
Employees will feel more empowered to report acts of incivility in the workplace	30%
There will be less incidents of sexual harassment in the workplace than there are now	26%
Men will be less likely to dine alone with women from work	25%
Robots replacing human workers will be more commonplace	25%
Coworkers will refrain from asking about the personal lives of others	25%
Firings for incivility will be commonplace	23%

ABOVE-AVERAGE

People will be less likely to post about their jobs online	22%
Any physical interaction will be strictly limited to handshaking	22%
Job candidates will be screened for civility	22%
Men will not want to mentor women or help advance their careers	21%
In corporate settings, working from home will be encouraged	21%
Coworkers will do their jobs with as little interaction as possible	20%
In addition to business results, managers will be evaluated by their level of civility	20%
There will be greater representation of minority groups in the workplace	19%
There will be dress codes for men and women	19%
Workplace social events will not be as much fun	19%
Politics will be prohibited from workplace discussion	19%
Employers will hire civility coaches for employees	19%
Coworkers will be more collaborative	18%
Coworkers will feel comfortable saying what they feel	17%
Holiday work parties will be held during the day and families/partners/spouses will be invited	17%
Employers will encourage employees to talk about their differences	17%
Coworkers will not question others' ideas or recommendations	13%
There will be more coworker social events	12%

For the most part, the above-average descriptors are the same regardless of gender, generation and race, but the following are additional above-average descriptors for each subgroup. It is not until the respondent's race is a factor that any kind of diversity or inclusion expectations come into the narrative.

ADDITIONAL ABOVE-AVERAGE DESCRIPTORS BY DEMOGRAPHIC GROUP FOR WORKPLACE IN 2025

MEN
- Job candidates will be screened for civility

WOMEN
- People will be less likely to post about their jobs online
- Any physical interaction will be strictly limited to handshaking

MILLENNIALS
(nothing additional for Millennials)

GEN XERS
- People will be less likely to post about their jobs online
- Any physical interaction will be strictly limited to handshaking
- Men will not want to mentor women or help advance their careers
- Coworkers will do their jobs with as little interaction as possible

BOOMERS+
- People will be less likely to post about their jobs online
- Any physical interaction will be strictly limited to handshaking
- Coworkers will do their jobs with as little interaction as possible

WHITES
- People will be less likely to post about their jobs online
- Men will not want to mentor women or help advance their careers

AFRICAN AMERICANS
- Any physical interaction will be strictly limited to handshaking
- In addition to business results, managers will be evaluated by their level of civility
- Coworkers will be more collaborative
- Employers will encourage employees to talk about their differences

HISPANICS
- In corporate settings, working from home will be encouraged
- In addition to business results, managers will be evaluated by their level of civility
- Workplace social events will not be as much fun
- Coworkers will feel comfortable saying what they feel
- Holiday work parties will be held during the day and families/partners/spouses will be invited

ASIANS
- Job candidates will be screened for civility
- In corporate settings, working from home will be encouraged
- There will be greater representation of minority groups in the workplace
- Employers will hire civility coaches for employees
- Coworkers will be more collaborative
- Coworkers will feel comfortable saying what they feel
- Employers will encourage employees to talk about their differences

Expectations worth noting:

- African Americans and Hispanics expect there will be more accountability for managers to be civil.

- African Americans and Asians expect that employers will encourage employees to talk about their differences.

IN CLOSING...

Civility in America 2018: Civility at Work and in Our Public Squares shows that incivility continues to be pervasive in American life. To realize the hope that most Americans hold for a more civil future, we suggest the following calls to action, based on our findings from this year's study:

EMPLOYERS SHOULD TAKE THE CIVILITY LEAD.

Workplaces are highly civil and there is an expectation that they will become even more civil. Leaders need to lead workforces by example, provide a safe environment for reporting incivility, take corrective action when needed to curb incivility and provide civility training.

ALIGN SHARED VALUES AROUND CIVILITY.

Commit to a culture of civility. Make civility a measurement of employee engagement and perhaps a job performance metric.

PUT DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION AT THE TOP OF THE AGENDA.

There is a positive relationship between civility and diversity and inclusion in the workplace. Having a diverse and inclusive workforce is a business imperative for organizations today. D&I training at all levels is a must-do.

DEVELOP STRATEGIC, CULTURALLY-RELEVANT EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATIONS.

Employers first need to recognize that how one segment of the organizational population perceives D&I may not be the same as how others perceive it.

DEMONSTRATE AN ORGANIZATION'S COMMITMENT TO ADVANCING D&I.

Depending on the organization, activities may encompass…
- Raising awareness and understanding around the business case for diversity
- Mitigating risk and navigating culture change and transformation
- Communicating around complex social issues
- Developing campaigns to effectively engage increasingly diverse audiences and stakeholders
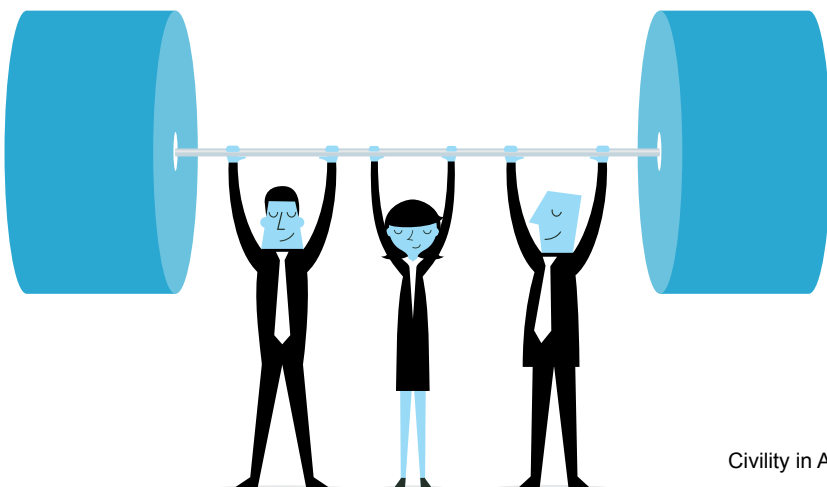
FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT CIVILITY IN AMERICA 2018: CIVILITY AT WORK AND IN OUR PUBLIC SQUARES OR OUR OTHER CIVILITY STUDIES, PLEASE CONTACT:

Andy Polansky
Chief Executive Officer
Weber Shandwick
apolansky@webershandwick.com

Jack Leslie
Chairman
Weber Shandwick
jleslie@webershandwick.com

Gail Heimann
President
Weber Shandwick
gheimann@webershandwick.com

Pam Jenkins
President, Global Public Affairs
Weber Shandwick
pjenkins@webershandwick.com

Paul Massey
President, Powell Tate
Global Lead, Social Impact, Weber Shandwick
pmassey@powelltate.com

Kate Bullinger
EVP & Global Lead, Employee
Engagement & Change Management
Weber Shandwick
kbullinger@webershandwick.com

Chris Perry
Chief Digital Officer
Weber Shandwick
cperry@webershandwick.com

Lance Morgan
Chief Communications Strategist
Weber Shandwick
lmorgan@webershandwick.com

Leslie Gaines-Ross
Chief Reputation Strategist
Weber Shandwick
lgaines-ross@webershandwick.com

Tai Wingfield
SVP, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion
Weber Shandwick
twingfield@webershandwick.com

Mark Richards
Senior Vice President/Management Supervisor
KRC Research
mrichards@krcresearch.com

f /WeberShandwick

🐦 @WeberShandwick

📌 /WeberShandwick

in /Company/Weber-Shandwick

▶ /WeberShandwickGlobal

g+ +WeberShandwick