Understanding RN-RN Hostility

Why Civility Matters

Nebraska Quality Conference
Kathleen Bartholomew, RN, BS, MN
kathleenbart@msn.com

"The world as we have created it is a process of our thinking.

It cannot be changed without changing our thinking."

Albert Einstein



“Alas, culture is not what we say, what we think, what we mean, or even what we intend;

it's what we do.”

Jon Burroughs, MD





INCIVILITY is disrespectful or discourteous behavior that violates norms of mutual respect and may occur once or repeatedly, whereas

BULLYING generally involves persistent, repeated negative behavior that makes it difficult for the target to defend themselves,
often perceived or actual power differential

Horizontal Hostility

A consistent (hidden) pattern of behavior
designed to control, diminish,
or devalue another peer (or group)
that creates a risk to health
and/or safety

(Quine 1999, Farrell 2005)

Shares 3 elements common to racial and sexual harassments laws:

1. Defined in terms of effect on recipient
2. Must be a negative effect on victim
3. The bullying behavior must be consistent

(Quine, 1999)

Overt:
name-calling, sarcasm, bickering, fault-finding, back-stabbing, criticism, intimidation, gossip, shouting, blaming, put-downs, raising eyebrows, etc.

Covert:
unfair assignments, eye-rolling, ignoring, making faces (behind someone's back), refusal to help, sighing, whining, sarcasm, refusal to work with someone, sabotage, isolation, exclusion, fabrication, etc.

Most Frequent Forms

- Nonverbal innuendo (raised eyebrow, faces, rudeness, condescending)
- Verbal affront (covert or snide remarks)
- Undermining activities (being unavailable)
- Withholding information
- Sabotage (deliberately setting up a negative situation)

J. Advanced Nursing ‘97

WA State ER Nurses

- **Withholding information 45%**
- Being ordered to do work below level of competence 40%
- Opinions and views ignored 33%
- Pressure not to claim entitlements 28%
- Having key areas of responsibility removed 27%
- Being ignored or excluded 25%
  - JONA Vol. 39 No 2 (2009)



“Of all types of aggression nurses experience, peer to peer hostility is the most harmful.”

Farrell, 1999

Overt:
name-calling, sarcasm, bickering, fault-finding, back-stabbing, criticism, intimidation, gossip, shouting, blaming, put-downs, raising eyebrows, etc.

Covert:
unfair assignments, eye-rolling, ignoring, making faces (behind someone's back), refusal to help, sighing, whining, sarcasm, refusal to work with someone, sabotage, isolation, exclusion, fabrication, etc.

How frequently do you see these overt and covert behaviors?

1. Not at all
2. Once or twice a week
3. Several times a week
4. Several times a day

Aftermath…

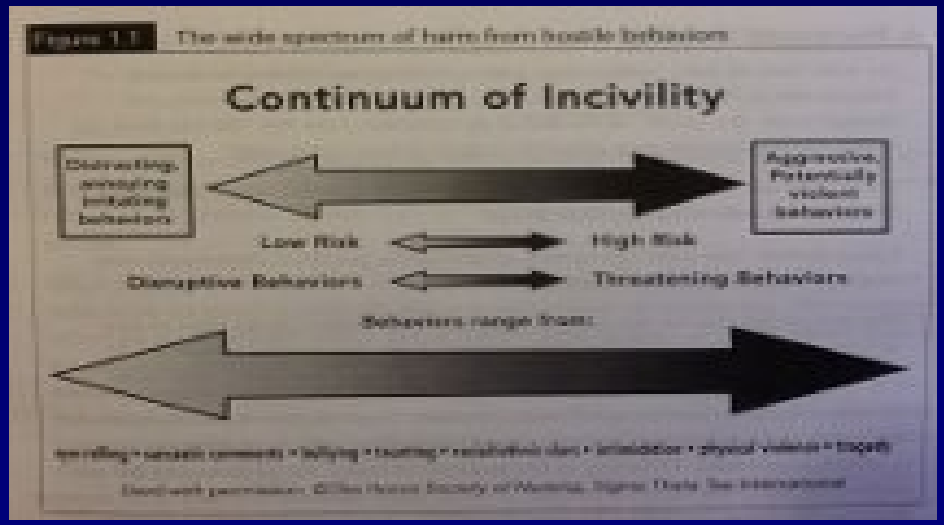
- "Nearly everyone got even"
- Intentionally lower productivity -66%
- Cut back hours – 80% lost work time
- Give minimal effort
- Quit – months afterward 12%
- Lost respect for boss

(The Cost of Bad Behavior, Porath and Pearson)

Continuum of Incivility

Low Risk > High Risk

Disruptive Behaviors > Threatening Behaviors



Eye-rolling- sarcasm-bullying-taunting-racial/ethnic slurs – intimidation-violence – tragedy

Cindy Clark, PhD Incivility Matters

New Grads

- **60% of newly registered nurses leave their first position within 6 mo. <u>because of some form of lateral violence</u>** **Griffin**

- **Almost half of new grads experienced humiliation and rudeness; and distress**

McKenna

New Graduates

Participants described deeply distressing experiences involving toxic nursing culture, fear, shame, isolation, vulnerability, and the cycle of violence.

Krut et al (2021) Nursing Education in Practice





Emotions running strong…

Because nurses

- do emotional work
- do not have an outlet for frustration
- do not have an opportunity to process (reflection)
- are wounded by horizontal hostility
- lack a support system/solidarity
- have adapted to an increased pace of work and workload

Individual Impact

Psychological, physical, emotional and social

Nurses who report highest degree of conflict also report the highest degree of burnout

Decreased job satisfaction and morale, and increased intent to leave

50% of new nurses leave their positions within the first two years, with 18% leaving within their first year

(Nurse.org Nov. 2024)

Impact on Nursing Profession

- Recruitment/ Retention in a shortage
- Lack of staff due to increased sick days related to stress and burnout
- Creates a toxic work environment
- Failure of nursing to achieve solidarity
- Patient safety – can't think clearly when upset

Time and Motion Study 2017

- Average of 124 communications and 208 tasks in 4 hours (624 tasks in 12 hours)
- Increase from 160 to 416 tasks in 8 hours from 2007
- Multitasking - communications and tasks 131 times or 40% of the time

2026

- DPC remains below 50%
- Interruptions are constant and unsafe
- Multi-tasking dominates workflow
- Documentation burden is 25-35%

Sumner, J., Ho, E. H., *et al.* (2026). *Implications for Virtual Nursing Role Development in Acute Nursing Care: 24-Hour Time-and-Motion Study*. JMIR Nursing, 9.

Summary

- History of powerlessness
- Lack of time for reflection
- Decreased social capital
- Human Adaptability
- Inadequate confrontation skills


TR UST

Health Care Culture

- Fear based
- Culture of self silencing
- Hierarchical
- Specific norms
- Cognitive dissonance

NEW NORMS

- Fear based – Break from the pack
- Culture of silencing – Take risks
- Skill deficit – Hard conversations
- Hierarchical - Everyone matters
- No feedback – Ask. Create the space

Strategy

1. **Decrease** negativity, gossip and a culture of blame by maintaining a zero tolerance for any communication that is unhealthy

2. **Increase** a climate of safety and healthy communication by role modeling and utilizing opportunities to teach interpersonal and confrontation skills.

Leaders

should model respectful behavior,
establish clear expectations,
address misconduct consistently and
create organizational cultures in which
civility is valued and reinforced.

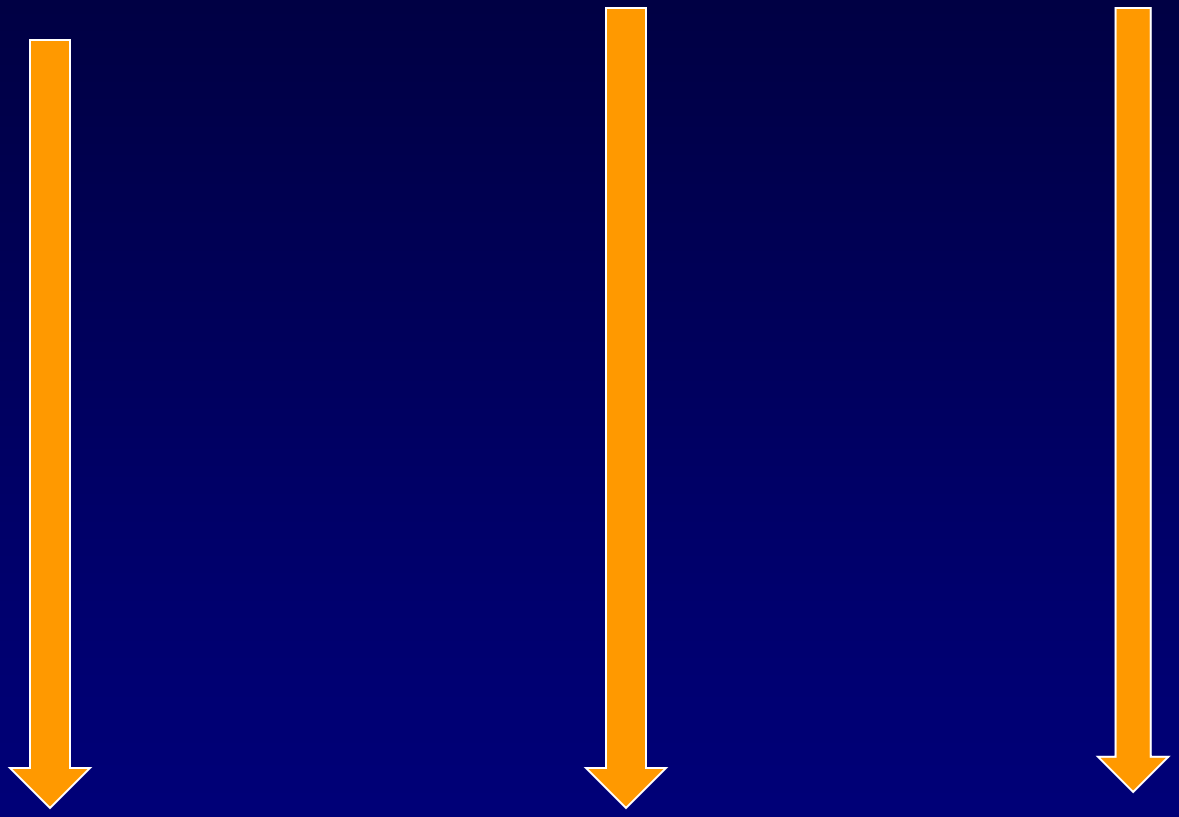
Porath and Pearson, “The Cost of Bad Behavior”



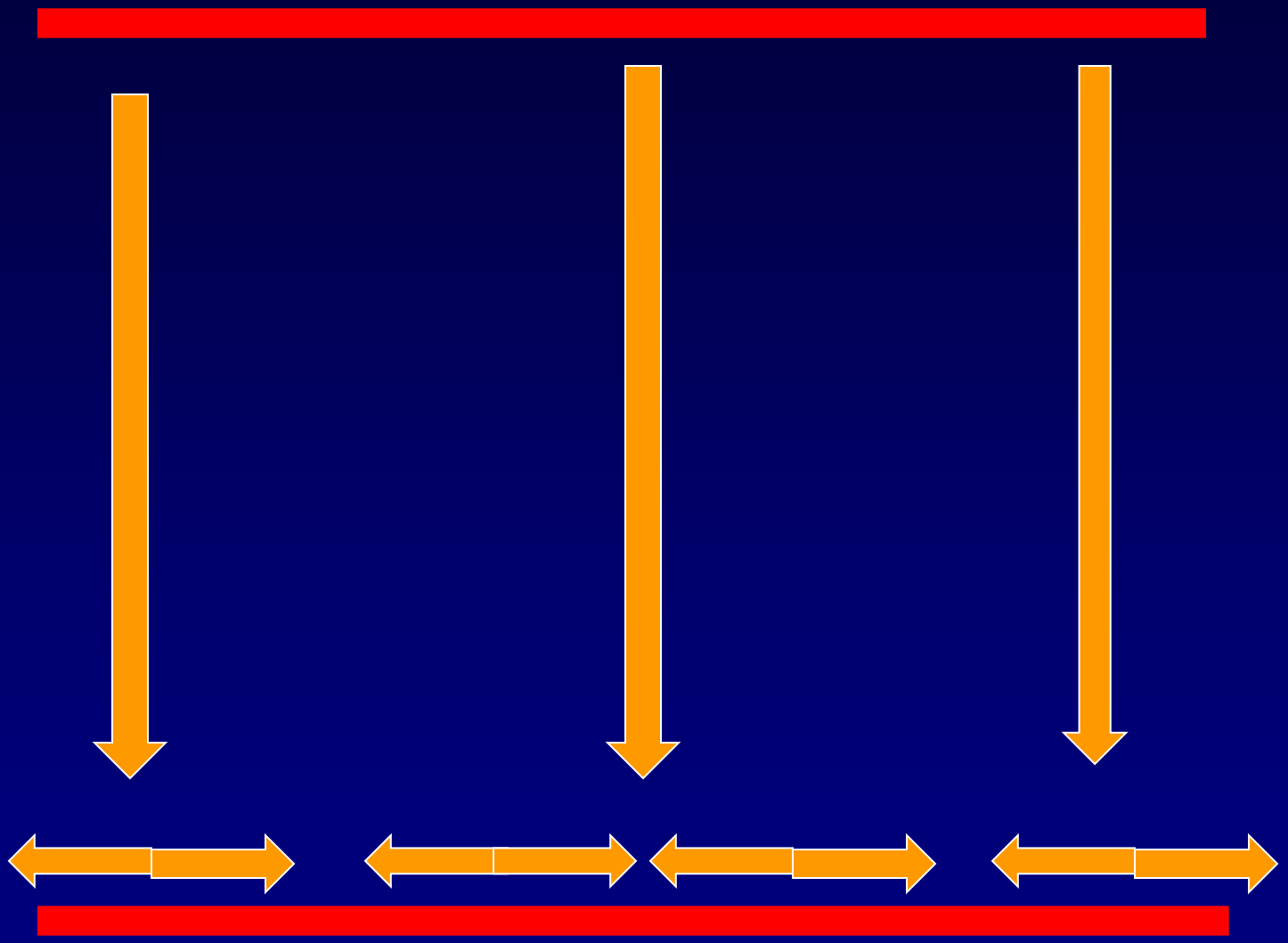
HIERARCHY

- Staff complain to mgr. or each other
- Boss solves problems
- People know their place
- No feedback sought
- Secrecy and blame
- Control as key
- Different rules for different roles

Dominant Group



Oppressed Group



“Our lives begin to end
the day we become silent about
things that matter”

M. L. King

Polling Question

Would you like
a written guarantee
that a conversation would go well?

NO or YES

Polling Question

Without a guarantee, how uncomfortable
Or painful would the conversation be?

1 _____ 10

Easy Painful

Culture of Silence

- Fear of retaliation: isolation, gossip, bad assignment, refusing help, sabotage
- Fear of hurting others feelings, or making things worse
- Fear of the unknown; or emotional response
- Why bother: nothing will change anyway



www.silencekills.com

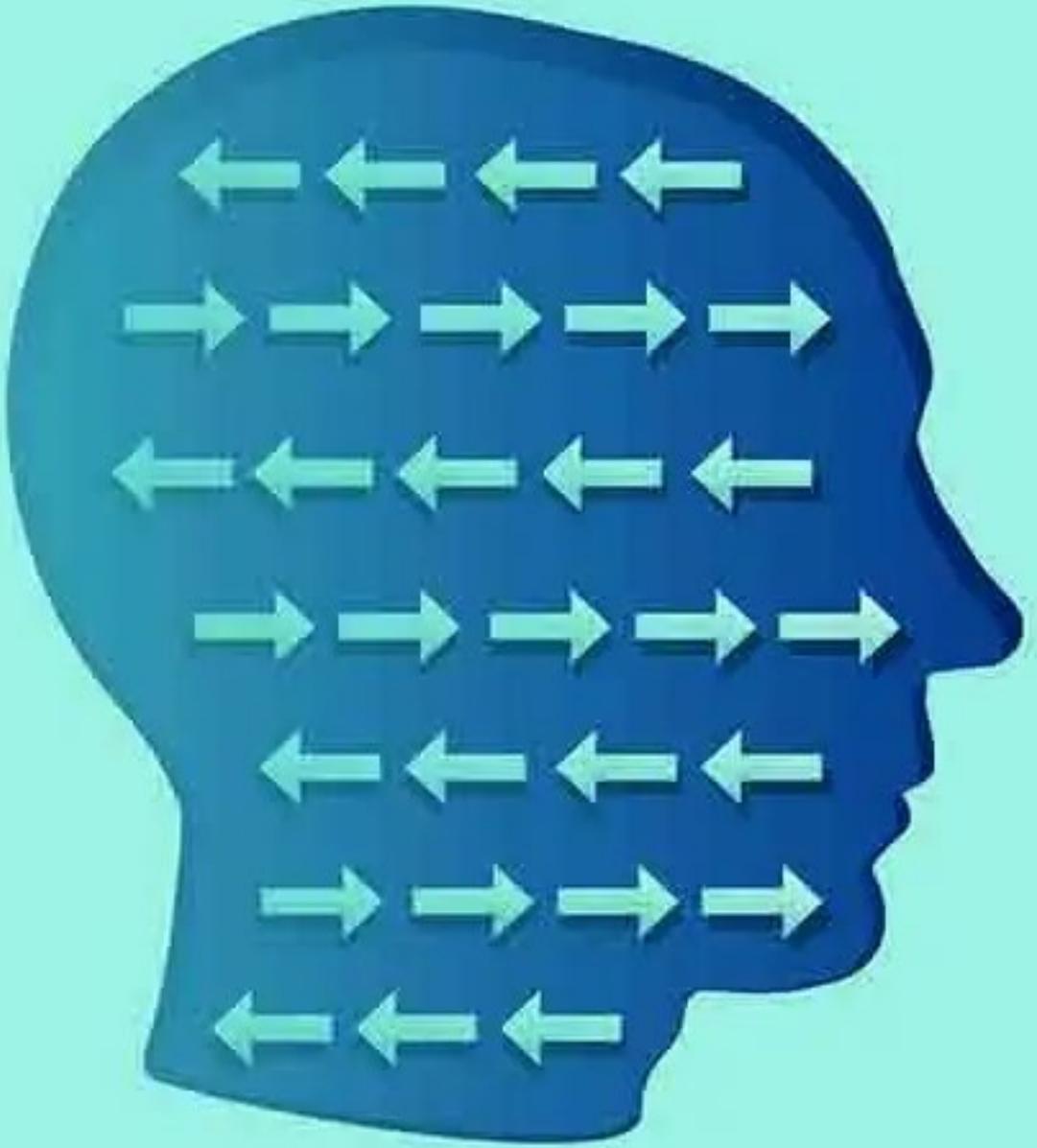
- 84% of MD's have seen coworkers taking shortcuts that could be dangerous to patients
- 88% of MD's say they work with people who show poor clinical judgment
- Fewer than 10% of MD's, RN's and clinical staff directly confront their colleagues about concerns

“First Do No Harm”

Found disrespect was widespread…

79% experienced disrespect
60% witnessed disrespect

ISMP Study 2022



https://www.openmindsfoundation.org/blog/cognitive-dissonance-work/

HIERARCHY

- Staff complain to mgr or each other
- Boss solves problems
- People know their place
- No feedback sought
- Secrecy and blame
- Control as key
- Different rules for different roles

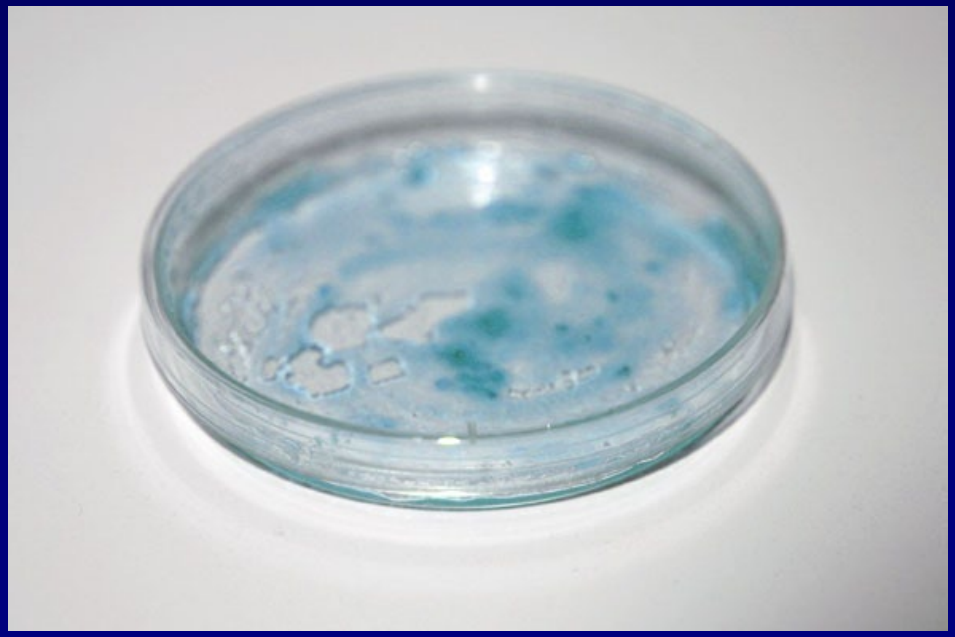
CIRCLE

(Community)

- Staff take accountability
- Staff seek resolution
- People know their value
- Peer evaluations
- Just Culture – open sharing
- Relationships as key
- 100% of staff held to same standard



To *thrive* horizontal hostility needs:



secrecy
shame
silent witness *



"Nothing About Me, Without Me"

DESC Communication Model

- Describe - Lead with the facts
- Explain – Let them know the impact
  (pause, pause, pause)
- State – What you want. Be descriptive
- Consequences – Describe the impact
  (individual, social and work env.)

What do I do when I walk into the manager's office, and I can tell by her tone and expression that she has made up her mind already?

D

E

S

C

D – As soon as I walked into your office I noticed that your jaw is set and your face looks stern

E - I am defensive, anxious and afraid that the open dialogue that I wanted to have with you just isn't going to happen

S - What I need is for you to listen to me before you make up your mind because I need your support and understanding. Ask me questions instead of jumping to any conclusions

C - So that I can tell you what I know and together we can solve this issue

New Nurses

1. Educate nurses about culture
2. Make communication a competency
3. Ask students to share their stories
4. Teach new norms
   - Set clear expectations; ask for feedback
   - Call out all non-verbals: *"I noticed that…"*

"The world as we have created it is a process of our thinking.

It cannot be changed without changing our thinking."

Albert Einstein

Am I Dauntless?

- ❑ I don't talk about someone who isn't present.
- ❑ I routinely ask my peers for feedback
- ❑ I don't email or text when I am upset with co-workers
- ❑ I help others when I am caught up with my work.
- ❑ I hold important conversations in private.
- ❑ I don't join into the blame game when something goes wrong.
- ❑ I don't tear someone down to lift myself up.
- ❑ I invite new people to join me for a meal or coffee.
- ❑ I don't sigh, roll my eyes or raise my eye-brows. I use words.

DESC Communication Model

- Describe - Lead with the facts
- Explain – Let them know the impact
  (pause, pause, pause)

- State – What you want. Be descriptive
- Consequences – Describe the impact
  (individual, social and work env.)



Responding to Hostility

Non-verbal inuendos (e.g. making faces)

"I see from your facial expression that there may be something you wanted to say to me. It's ok to speak to me directly"

Sabotage (setting up a negative situation)

"There is more to this situation than meets the eye. Could you and I (or whoever) meet in private and explore what happened?"

Verbal affront (covert or overt snide remarks, lack of openness or abrupt responses)

"Can I talk to you in private? When you____ I got the feeling that you_____. Is that the case?"

Undermining (turning away or being unavailable)

"Can you help me understand how this situation could have happened?"

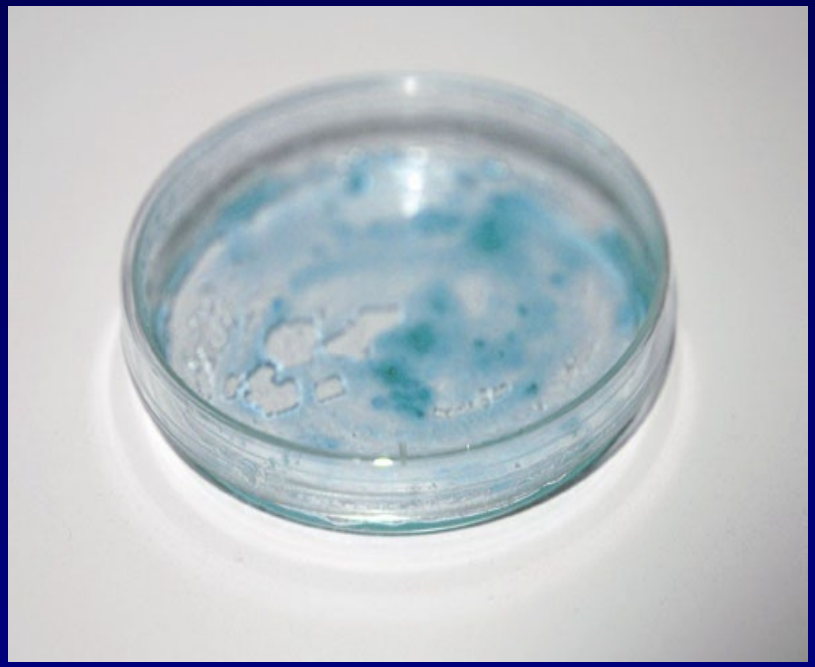
Withholding information (practice or patient)

"It is my understanding that there was more information available regarding the situation, and if I had known that, it would have affected what I did "

M. Griffin



To *thrive*
a toxic culture requires:



secrecy
shame
silent witness *



"Nothing About Me, Without Me"

Ask for Feedback

What do you like that I do well?

What do you like that I do well?

What would you like to see more of?

Key Points

- Hostility is a learned herding behavior that occurs in a hierarchy
- True competency and engagement can only happen if self esteem = voice
- Feedback is the fastest way to change the power structure



Goal



High trust

Everyone can identify “true north”

Anyone can take care of your loved one

•

To build trust….

- Correct communication skill deficit –
  Call out non-verbal communication
- Flatten the hierarchy
- 100% compliance
- Establish feedback as a norm
- Visibility and accessibility

"The world as we have created it is a process of our thinking.

It cannot be changed without changing our thinking."

Albert Einstein

Thank you!

- Kathleen Bartholomew
- kathleenbart@msn.com
- 206-356-2599
- www.kathleenbartholomew.com

Resources

TED Lecture: Brene Brown, PhD. The Power of Vulnerability
http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=brene+brown+ted&FORM=VIRE8#view=detail&mid=95E493CE358180F5527195E493CE358180F55271

Ted Lecture: Amy Cuddy. Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are
http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=amy%20cuddy%20ted&qs=n&form=QBVR&pq=amy%20cuddy%20ted&sc=8-12&sp=-1&sk=#view=detail&mid=586E6DB114506CCF5D1D586E6DB114506CCF5D1D

TEDx Lecture: Kathleen Bartholomew, Nursing lessons for the world,
Lessons from Nursing to the World | Kathleen Bartholomew | TEDxSanJuanIsland

Cleveland Clinic Empathy Video
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDDWvj_q-o8