STRENGTHENING CUSTOMER CENTRICITY THROUGH CIVILITY

At BMC, two of our guiding [principles](#) are Do the Right Thing and Prioritize People. It's something we adhere to internally for our workforce and externally for our customers and partners. August is [National Civility Month](#) and a great reminder to revisit some of the concepts of civility.

Civility also ties into customer centricity, which [Gartner](#) defines as "the ability of people in an organization to understand customers' situations, perceptions, and expectations. Customer centricity demands that the customer is the focal point of all decisions related to delivering products, services, and experiences to create customer satisfaction, loyalty, and advocacy."

At the end of the day, it's a concept tied to our humanity. We're humans first, workers second. We gain a better understanding of our customers and each other when we lead with our humanity, and the Platinum Rule (discussed in a previous blog on [allyship](#)), which is about treating people the way they want to be treated. In an increasingly digital-first world and workplace, humanity, civility, and customer centricity mean taking extra steps to listen, learn, and understand our employees, colleagues, and customers, and their expectations and preferences.

The business impact of customer centricity and civility

As companies continue to adapt in the face of change, many are beginning their evolution to an [Autonomous Digital Enterprise (ADE)](#), which is grounded in actionable insights, business agility, and customer centricity. One of the tenets of the ADE is delivering a Transcendent Customer Experience, which is something I'm passionate about in my role as Chief Customer Officer.

Customers make or break a business, and PwC's new [*Customer Loyalty Survey*](#) reveals that in the last

year, a quarter of customers stopped using or buying from a business that delivered a bad product, service, or customer service experience. And even in a digital-first world, humanity, and by association, civility, matter. One-third to one-half of respondents said human interaction is important to their loyalty.

The impact of customer service—and especially, poor customer service—was significant among those surveyed. According to PwC, "55 percent of respondents said they would stop buying from a company that they otherwise liked after several bad experiences, and eight percent said they would stop after just one bad experience. While eight percent may not seem like much, it is when you're talking about a market-leading company with millions of customers…And it doesn't just have to be 'bad' experiences for some to leave: 32 percent said they'd drop a company if it provided inconsistent experiences."

Customer centricity and civility in the workplace

In the workplace, and especially across a globally distributed and increasingly remote workforce, we're working more closely with colleagues and managers who, by nature of culture or region, have different behavioral expectations and preferences. When we take the time to understand those, it can help deepen and enrich our relationships.

What do I mean by this? Take the ever-present Teams or Zoom meeting. Are you a "jump on the call and get right to the point" person or a "take a minute to break the ice first before we dive in" person? When you're on a call with several people, the tone is usually set by the person who initiated the meeting, or the first one to dial in. Regardless of the tone, it's still a good exercise in civility to say hello, good morning or afternoon, and ask how everyone is (see above re: humanity).

In her blog on transitioning from the [military to the civilian workforce](#), my colleague, [Jannelle Allong-Diakabana](#), discussed the importance of civility in the workplace because it "sets the tone and shows teammates and stakeholders we're rowing in the same direction."

When you're having a smaller meeting, or engaging with colleagues for the first time, ask their preferences, and take their verbal, and if onscreen, physical, cues. If you open with pleasantries and they don't respond in kind, then take the hint and get on with your agenda. If they do respond in kind, take a few moments to have an engaged conversation before you talk shop. And be mindful of including everyone in the conversation. Our unconscious bias checklist for self-aware leaders is [here](#).

Everyone has a limited amount of time in the day, so being present is also very important. Whether meeting in person or virtually, show up on time and give each speaker your full attention. Turn off your notifications so texts and emails don't ding in the background; review any materials supplied ahead of time; and be ready to respond if you're likely to be asked questions.

The adage about "this meeting could have been an email" has a point. Don't take time out of people's day for a conversation that could have been handled over email or a Teams chat. Be mindful of others' schedules. If you only need 20 minutes or 45 minutes, only schedule that much time. Give people that ten or 15 minutes back in their day.

And about those email communications. Civility also comes into play, there, too. If you need more time to formulate an answer, say so. If a deadline is untenable, say so and offer an alternative. Ask for what you need, and accept the same boundary-setting from others. Also, read the whole email, including embedded emails. Take the time to understand the conversation and what's being asked

of you, and then respond accordingly.

Don't just take my word for it, Christine Porath has a short TED Talk dedicated to the business benefits of workplace civility called "Why being respectful to your coworkers is good for business."

Civility as part of DEI

Civility is part of the larger discussion of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), which we champion at BMC, and write about in our ongoing blog series.

Building an inclusive workforce that truly includes everyone—no exceptions—ensures civility across the board. And that means being mindful of words and actions, from the point of hiring and throughout the employment tenure. It's something I take very seriously.

At BMC, we conduct a Voice of Our People survey to see how our employees are feeling and learn what's working and what we could be doing better. To help my team continue their professional development, I established an inclusive leadership journey of the six LinkedIn Learning courses below, which are open to everyone with a LinkedIn Learning account.

Each of the courses is dedicated to learning behaviors that encourage civility. I asked my direct reports and their teams to take one class a week for six weeks, have constructive conversations about the coursework, and implement the best practices they learned in their work and personal lives.

- Developing Your Emotional Intelligence
- Leading with Emotional Intelligence
- Developing Self-Awareness
- Teaching Civility in the Workplace
- Developing Executive Presence
- Bill George on Self-Awareness, Authenticity, and Leadership

As BMC strives to build an Autonomous Digital Enterprise that includes everyone, everything we do begins and ends with people. Our employees, customers, and partners are the heart of our business, and setting a standard for civility raises us all up. To learn more about civility, check out the resources at The Muhammed Ali Center on Civility and Compassion, an organization that BMC is proud to sponsor.