**Rude Behavior In Office Environments Is Contagious 'Like A Virus,' Study Suggests**

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Rudeness can be contagious in a work environment, one study suggests. Jenny Kaczorowski

Beware of the rude person that works in your office; you may catch some of that attitude. People confronted with rudeness at work may falsely perceive rudeness in conversations with others, making them more likely to be rude in return, according to a [study](http://psycnet.apa.org/index.cfm?fa=buy.optionToBuy&id=2015-28930-001) from the University of Florida, published in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*. This may cause rudeness to spread like a virus throughout the workplace.

Researchers observed 90 graduate students as they practiced negotiations with their fellow classmates. They found that when a student rated their first negotiation partner as rude, that student in turn was more likely to be rated as rude by a subsequent partner. This pattern persisted even after a week had elapsed between the first and second negotiations.

"When you experience rudeness, it makes rudeness more noticeable," said Trevor Foulk, an author of the study and doctoral student in management at the University of Florida's Warrington College of Business Administration, in a statement. "You'll see more rudeness even if it's not there."

In addition to observing the graduate participants, the researchers tested how quickly 47 undergraduate students identified real or nonsense words from a list. But before the students were asked to identify the words, they observed one of two staged interactions between a late participant who was obviously sorry for being tardy and a study leader. When students saw that the interaction between the leader and the participant was rude, they were more likely to identify rude words on the list as real at a faster pace than those who witnessed the normal interaction.

While this experiment on the undergraduates was simply the effect of firsthand rudeness, the study on graduates shows how rudeness can have a secondhand effect. Not only were people exposed to rudeness more likely to end up being rude to others, but when participants watched a video of a rude interaction in the workplace, they were more likely to be rude in emails that they wrote later on — they used a more hostile tone in their responses when compared to those who saw a polite interaction before responding.

Unfortunately, the rudeness contagion isn't something that can be treated as easily as some health conditions. Being able to deal with it effectively may be key preventing it from spreading through an office environment. Taking time to clear your mind and recognize your thoughts before interacting with someone else could make a world of difference in your tone when speaking to another co-worker. This study could encourage employers to look into how employees treat each other.

"You might go your whole career and not experience abuse or aggression in the workplace, but rudeness also has a negative effect on performance," Foulk said. "It isn't something you can just turn your back on: it matters."

Source: Foulk T, Woolum A, Erez A. Catching Rudeness Is Like Catching A Cold: The Contagion Effects Of Low-Intensity Negative Behaviors. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. 2015.