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THE NEED FOR KIND LEADERS

Is your organization led by kind leaders? This year has been like no other. Most leaders and managers are eager to put it behind them. Yet, we're not out of the woods. A culture of kindness will make it easier.

Researchers have found that kindness is associated with better and stronger physical and mental health; relationships, teams, and communities; life satisfaction, and even economics. According to researcher and psychologist Dacher Keltner, PhD, "The science of human emotion, kindness and goodness are not to be taken lightly, they are actually good for our bodies and minds."

Unfortunately, uncertainty, increased stress, and frustration have challenged and tested many organizational cultures: the way we collectively perceive, think, and feel at work. Add to that tribalism, polarity, and over exposure to vitriol, and incivility is easily sparked. Organizational culture is damaged, and left unchecked over prolonged periods, altered.

THE IMPORTANCE OF KIND LEADERS

Over the past two decades, thousands of employees have been polled about their treatment at work. According to research referenced in the recent Harvard Business Review article, 98% report experiencing uncivil behavior, often prompted by thoughtlessness, rather than malice. Common forms include:

- Interrupting others
- Discussing other employees
- Acting in a condescending manner; belittling someone and/or their contributions
- Arriving late; responding late (or not at all)

- Ignoring others
- Negative eye contact—giving the side eye, dirty looks, rolling eyes, or staring
- Yelling, shouting, and/or verbally assaulting others (insults, harassment)

While subtle forms (and microaggressions) are often easier to overlook, they erode engagement, morale, and ultimately, organizational culture. Consider this: while most employees will try to ignore, bury, or hide their feelings when experiencing incivility, some often “punish their offenders and the organization.” Managers, and leaders, must intervene, not in kind, but in kindness.

Being kind can boost oxytocin, dopamine, and serotonin, a neurotransmitter that helps regulate mood. In turn, our outlook, creativity, efficiency, and productivity improve.

THE LEADERSHIP SKILL OF KINDNESS

Kindness is an interpersonal skill that requires a certain amount of strength and courage. It is made up of the moment-by-moment choices and actions that we make. Even though sympathy and caring for others is instinctual, consideration, empathy, and compassion are often required to lead and support others with kindness.

Kind leaders and managers increase morale, decrease absenteeism, and are better able to retain employees. Moreover, they may even improve their employee’s health and longevity: less stress improves our cardiovascular health.

Kind leaders and managers understand that there is no kindness in allowing problematic behavior to continue. They have the difficult conversations with their employees to prevent ongoing failure. They work to improve the lives of others. How? First, they cultivate feelings of kindness.

PUT KINDNESS ON YOUR RADAR

To be sure, it’s easy to focus on the negative. But when we intentionally look for acts of kindness, our bodies are rewarded in a very positive way.

Research from 88 studies involving over 25,000 participants found that those who witness an act of kindness—from cooperative action to comforting someone in distress—increase their own kindness at work. In the

A message from Nancy...

Let me ask you:

- Are the people on your team engaged and committed or just collecting a pay check?
- Do you have the right people in the right seats on the bus? Are you in the right seat?
- Is the high cost of turnover eating away your organization’s bottom-line?
- Are your processes and procedures (or lack thereof) delivering productive and efficient results?
- How comfortable are the members of your senior team managing and leading others?

In today’s highly competitive environment, it’s no surprise that “what got you here may not get you there.”

At Proffitt Management Solutions we are fully committed to providing a unique blend of team and individual development and executive coaching sessions where participants achieve more focus, a sense of purpose, and better results in their leadership roles.

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study, the definition of witnessing included reading about, watching in a video, or seeing the act of kindness “live.”

The research also examined the motives and specific actions: whether people felt kindness performance pressure or were copying behaviors. They found neither was true, rather, people become motivated to spread kindness in ways that were tailored to different needs and abilities. When people witness others being praised for their kindness, motivation to act kindly also increases. However, the more time that passes after bearing witness to a kindness, the less inspired people feel.

If you're not already, keep a journal. Make a note about acts of kindness at work. It could be a simple list with name, place, date, and action; a folder of emails; a collection screen shots; whatever works for you. Also consider the social conditions that prevent kindness at work.

PRACTICE SELF-KINDNESS

Today's leaders and managers are under extraordinary pressure to do more with less. This often impacts their own well-being and tolerance levels. That's why self-care is so important today. Leaders must stay physically and mentally healthy.

Of course, every person is different, but proper self-kindness includes regular exercise, eating well, and getting enough rest. It's also essential to develop supportive relationships, outside interests, and other strategies to foster self-care and kindness.

First, recognize the hard stuff. Here are two important questions to consider:

1. In what ways has life become more challenging?
2. What is the current state of your social ties?

Write your answers.

SELF-KINDNESS BOOSTERS

Work to cultivate greater feelings of kindness. Think of times when you felt a strong connection with someone—a meaningful conversation; a shared success or loss—and journal about the experience. This exercise will reinforce your sense of connection, and satisfy that human need to belong.

Recognize ways life has gotten a bit better. Have you been able to spend more time with family? Have you explored or developed different interests? What about greater understanding of different perspectives, beliefs, or opinions?

Reinforce your self-worth. Honor who you are, and act with authenticity. Exercise your power to choose, especially when it comes to attitude.

Finally, tackle the hard stuff. Prioritize ways you can strengthen your social ties.

For example, if your exercise includes walking outside, consider walking with a partner if you don't already. If you already engage in this activity, extend your time by five minutes, slow your speed, and allow time to stop and notice. Take a photo, make a mental note, or even write down your thoughts and feelings.

According to Keltner, our health derives from being part of a strong community. Our happiness derives from enjoying things with other people. Has this been your experience?

Leaders who practice self-kindness accept reality with sympathy, achieve emotional equanimity, and build greater resilience. They reinforce their self-worth, and extend kindness to others.

LEADING A KIND ORGANIZATION

“Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.” – Philo of Alexandria

As humans, we are hardwired for kindness. It helps us work together to survive. And yet, it can be difficult to be kind when we are stressed out, over-whelmed, or exhausted. How do we

experience kindness in the workplace under these circumstances?

While some argue that friendships between a leader and an employee are near impossible, it's worth the effort. Clear boundaries and a willingness to make difficult decisions are necessary. This requires emotional courage and specific skills to avoid the formation (or reputation) of an exclusive clique. Wise leaders and managers practice mindful kindness.

PRACTICE MINDFUL KINDNESS

There are two components of mindful kindness:

1. Consideration and action regarding the social conditions, practices, and policies that prevent employees from finding the good in human nature.
2. Random acts of kindness conducted in mindful ways that are sensitive, inclusive, and equitable.

Both of these components focus on treating everyone with mutual care and respect:

- Practice honesty with consideration. Brutal feedback is not kind. Be clear, direct, and compassionate.
- Show you care with unconditional acceptance. While you might not like or accept certain behavior, separate the action from the person.
- Step through fear to do what is right, right now. Be courageous, and practice justice and compassion for all.
- Welcome others into your circle. Extend kindness to everyone; grow your circle of friends.

Even the smallest acts of mindful kindness can go a long way, especially under the microscopic gaze of others. While the biochemical boost is powerful, research has found it only lasts three to four minutes. That's why it's so important to make kindness an ongoing daily practice.

EXPANDING KINDNESS TO COMMUNITY

A new analysis of studies reveals that witnessing goodness inspires us to be kind. When we see or hear about people acting kindly or helpful, we are inspired to do the same. Even the smallest gesture can have a meaningful ripple and go a long way.

In *Working Knowledge*, published by Harvard Business School, researcher, professor, and author Boris Groysberg and journalist Susan Seligson identified seven simple phrases we can use everyday to communicate kindness:

1. "I hear you."
2. "Are you okay?"
3. "What can we/I do to help?"
4. "How are you managing these days?"
5. "I'm here for you."
6. "I know you're doing the best you can."
7. "Thank you."

Incorporating these phrases into our daily conversations expand kind communities. They help to satisfy our need for love and belonging, and create unity.

DAILY KINDNESS PRACTICE

Kindness in community sustains our capacity to thrive. When given freely, it moves beyond our immediate circle (family, co-workers, organization) to our greater community, through:

1. Service: reach out to those around you. This time of year, generosity and giving are top of mind. Consider ways you can extend kindness beyond the holiday season to make it a daily practice.
2. Responsibility: take positive action wherever you are. Don't give in to hopelessness, cynicism, or blame shifting. Even the smallest deed can have a positive impact.
3. Integrity: do the right thing. Acknowledge the hurdles, and work to overcome them.
4. Tolerance: Honor the strength in diversity. Point out the goodness and kindness in your community.

Tara Cousineau, PhD, author of *The Kindness Cure* (New Harbinger Publications, 2018), writes that “how we learn from our past and envision our future depend on how we choose to live in the present moment.”

When kindness is our north star, compassion, generosity, and forgiveness become natural, and spread exponentially.