



Love in the Workplace

As a business leader, how are you leading with love? How is love practiced in your organization?

Given the volatility of 2021, I've been exploring this facet of leadership. Tension and anger in the workplace is on the rise. Some HR researchers anticipate this will continue throughout 2022.

In a recent article published by [Harvard Business Review](#) (January 2022), eleven current trends foster ongoing workplace volatility. Some of the top issues leaders and managers will face include:

- Fairness and equity
- Vaccine mandates and testing
- Shorter work week
- Employee turnover
- Permanent shift to remote technology/tools
- Permanent hybrid work model
- Wellness tactics, technologies, and metrics
- The need for a Chief Purpose Officer (CPO)
- Manager-employee interpersonal relationships

There is a growing urgency to strengthen manager-employee interpersonal relationships, and for some organizations, a shift or addition of a CPO. You see, at a minimum, the volatility we are experiencing creates stress for individuals, poor working relationships, and decreased productivity. Left unchecked, psychological abuse, violence, and ruin ensue. Great leaders can manage and even avoid these worst case scenarios by leading with love.

Our Need for Love

All humans need love: we need to be loved and nurtured, and we need to express love. It's one of our most fundamental needs. And it's no surprise that this need carries into the workplace. For many,

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."*

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having healthy business and professional relationships is a top goal. That's why they practice love in the workplace.

Leading with love is *doing the right thing, at the right time, in the right spirit* (motivation). This type of love embodies courageousness, discernment, justice, and humility—it's not about our natural preferences. Leaders who practice this type of love know that expressing love, empathy, and compassion is a mutually beneficial endeavor.

Even the smallest act of kindness can help meet our need for love. According to researchers, committing kindness over a seven day period increases our sense of happiness. And, it matters not if it is offered to strangers, acquaintances, co-workers, or close friends—all have an equally positive effect.

Leadership, Love, and Blind Spots

When it comes to leadership and love, even the best leaders have blind spots. Generally speaking, this is a good thing: it can even be a playing field. However, as Steven Snyder wrote in [Leadership and the Art of Struggle](#), "*Blind spots are the product of an overactive automatic mind and an underactive reflective mind.*" This can be especially dangerous for leaders.

In [Thinking Fast and Slow](#), psychologist and economist Daniel Kahneman describes how our fast, automatic mind reaches conclusions (re: judgments) quickly, typically prematurely, and frequently incorrectly; but our slow, reflective mind challenges assumptions, generates alternatives, and objectively evaluates and analyzes them.

Fast thinking happens frequently. And it's understandable: slow thinking requires a lot of energy. Unfortunately, the alternative fast thinking does not address leadership blind spots, especially when it comes to self-perception.

You see, many of us have a blind spot for our good qualities and a magnifying glass for our flaws. Whether we recognize it or not, this can do a lot of damage to our confidence, happiness, and ability to love others.

The more we deny these blind spots, the more miserable we become. This distorted image is not the truth; rather, it reinforces the inner dialogue that can keep us stuck. Instead, we can change the stories we tell ourselves that result from habitual fast thinking.

Practice Self-love

First, take a deep breath to slow your pace and clear your mind. Look at the whole picture. Instead of beating yourself up, think about how you

would feel if your best friend had a similar flaw, made the same choice, or acted in a similar manner. From this perspective, it probably doesn't look so bad.

Now, give yourself a break. Think back to something you recently did that was loving and kind. Allow yourself to linger in that memory to rebalance your feelings.

Then, practice forgiveness. One helpful technique is a loving-kindness meditation. Here is a very simple, basic meditation to start:

- May I be happy
- May I be well
- May I be safe
- May I be peaceful and at ease

The way we treat ourselves matters more than we realize. Self-compassion empowers us to work through different moments of life with more resilience and grace.

Extending Love at Work

The loving-kindness meditation published on [Greater Good Science Center at Berkeley](#) is a helpful way to extend love at work. This meditation was created by Stanford University's Center for Compassion and Altruism Research Education, who define compassionate love as:

"...An attitude toward other(s), either close others or strangers or all of humanity; containing feelings, cognitions, and behaviors that are focused on caring, concern, tenderness, and an orientation toward supporting, helping, and understanding the other(s), particularly when the other(s) is (are) perceived to be suffering or in need." (Sprecher & Fehr, 2005).

The Platinum Rule

People are starving for connection and hope amidst all of the uncertainty and fear we experienced over the past two years.

In light of these issues, it's crucial for leadership to offer love using what anthropologist Dr. Helen Fisher describes as, The Platinum Rule: treat others not as *you* want to be treated (The Golden Rule), but as *they* want to be treated. Ask, listen, confirm, offer, and if agreed, act.

Loving What You Do at Work

According to a recently published article ["Managing a Polarized Workforce,"](#) (Harvard

Business Review, March-April 2022), “conflict is an inescapable part of work life for employees at all levels.” Their recent survey of US companies reveals that 89% of respondents report experiencing conflict at work and “*spend about 3.5 hours a week, on average, dealing with it.*”

Given this environment, especially for those who do not thrive in conflict, how are we able to love what we do at work? It boils down to identifying that which is truly meaningful.

Language Matters

Language is powerful. It doesn't merely describe, it shapes reality. Language becomes the filter through which we perceive the world.

When we talk about work that is truly meaningful, we are talking about the fundamental and essential human need of purpose. Many leaders have broadened their vocabulary to include words such as, “community, meaning, service, contribution, joy, passion, vocation, and soul,” knowing they are powerful, meaningful, and engaging. They understand that *who you are* and *what you stand for* are as important as *what you do* and *sell*.

Great leaders and managers tap into what is truly meaningful by daily asking (and answering) three questions:

1. **What ignites my passion in today's work?** Reclaim your resources—energy, time, and attention—from the urgent to the meaningful.
2. **How can I bring true value to this moment?** Disengage from emotional entanglements and take constructive action.
3. **What would I like my legacy to be in this assignment?** Bring more value and meaning to a seemingly onerous task.

Managing (and meeting) external responsibilities while fulfilling internal goals is a process. A bit of self-talk can help reframe a task: “If I do this, then:...”

1. “I'll be one step closer to...”
2. “I will free up time for...”
3. “It will enable us to move forward to...”

Workplace Romance

On February 2, 2022, the president of CNN Worldwide publicly announced his resignation because he had failed to disclose a personal relationship with a CNN senior executive. According to both parties, the relationship was consensual and had grown from professional, to personal, to

intimate. This leads many to ask: when co-workers seek connection and friendship, should love or dating be verboten?

Views and opinions on workplace romance vary greatly depending on the size of the organization, the history (of the organization and the individual), and the perceived risk of intimate alliances. And so do company policies.

According to a 2018 survey conducted by Challenger, Gray & Christmas, and published by Harvard Law School, the number of close personal relationship policies is on the rise. They report that in 2017, more than 50% of respondents have formal, written policies and 78% discourage supervisor-subordinate relationships. However, this does not mean they have anti-fraternization policies. Why?

Non-fraternization Cons

- Grey areas: what is a close, personal relationship?
- Enforcement: who monitors compliance?
- Paternalism: should employers have the authority regarding personal matters?

Many of us have heard meet-cute stories that originated in the workplace. This is no surprise, given that 35-40% of those surveyed report having a workplace romance, and 72% would do so again. Surprisingly, 22% dated a supervisor. So would a non-fraternization policy prevent this?

Non-fraternization Pros

- Prevent sexual harassment
- Mitigate organization's legal risk
- Curtail workplace favoritism/toxicity
- Outline accountability processes and consequences

Clearly, there are multiple considerations, including the approach, the scope, and the consequences. While every employee should review their organization's policies, leaders and managers should review for:

- How does the policy address employee's concerns?
- What channels are in place to support employees? How can they report/disclose their intentions/status? Who must do this? (The more senior in the relationship?)
- Where are the grey areas? Who is responsible for decisions in these areas?

Truly successful organizations are led with love; what's happening in your organization?



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