

Kindness

**Improving the
workplace
through kindness**

“ Unexpected kindness is the most powerful, least costly, and most underrated agent of human change.”

BOB KERREY

It's definitely time to talk

As we approach Time to Talk Day on February 4th 2021, there has never been a better time to get involved in the kindness revolution.

Time to Talk Day is all about how a small conversation about mental health has the power to make a big difference. Likewise, a small act of kindness can make a huge impact on a colleague's life.

In our latest Workwell wellbeing guide, we examine how to spot the signs that a colleague is silently crying out for your kindness and practical ways to help others.

We also offer some practical guidance about how you can get involved in workplace initiatives that have kindness at the core of their ethos.

How kindness became the new watchword

In 2020, #bekind became one of the most prolific and talked about hashtags that launched a movement for change.

Last year we clapped for our NHS and key workers, we helped neighbours in isolation and shopped for strangers, who soon became friends, as we pulled together and united in our COVID compassion. We donated food, clothes and toys to the most vulnerable, baked bread for the elderly, and provided sleeping bags for the homeless.



The UK's kindness movement reached into every aspect of life – and can be mirrored even in business where empathy and compassion are not typically associated with boardroom priorities.

Spotting the signs of a colleague in need

Nobody truly knows what goes on behind closed doors and while one person may seem 'to have it all' to the outside world, the reality may be that they are struggling with loneliness, depression, anxiety, bereavement or even abuse.

In our busy lives and in particular as many are working from home, it is easy to overlook slight changes in a colleague's appearance or behaviour. But it may be a cry for help – a sign that they just need one person to take notice and talk to them or offer a small gesture of kindness.



Here are some of the obvious and not so obvious warning signs that someone needs you to lend an ear or a virtual shoulder to cry on:

- upset or tearful for no obvious reason
- moving slowly, restless, agitated or irritable
- down on themselves and negative
- withdrawing from social events
- unable to relate to other people
- finding no pleasure in life or things they usually enjoy
- unexplained weight loss or gain
- unexplained change in appearance
- difficulty speaking, thinking clearly or making decisions
- difficulty remembering or concentrating on things
- using more tobacco, alcohol or other drugs than usual
- difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much
- feeling tired all the time
- taking more sick days than usual
- changes to normal work routine such as avoiding going home or logging off

7 steps to a happy and harmonious workplace

Although management plays a key role in establishing and sustaining the momentum for an empathetic work environment, everybody must get involved from the top down.

If colleagues show compassion to others, from taking regular breaks together, to getting involved in charity events and communicating in a respectful manner, they are setting the benchmark for workplace self-care and kindness as the norm.

Here are seven practical ways everyone can get involved in making work a happy place.



Kindness matters

#1

It's good to small talk

It may seem obvious but simply asking somebody how they are, including them in office banter or the brew round or taking time to chat about their weekend plans or family can make a big difference. Verbal recognition of colleague contributions to a project, reminding them of their achievements, and remembering birthdays or baking a Friday team cake are also great ways to forge workplace friendships through a small gesture of kindness.

Making colleagues feel that someone is genuinely interested in them can boost their morale, mood and self-esteem - and yours. Remember that being kind is a two-way stream benefitting the receiver and giver.



Kindness matters #2

Support when needed most

Creating a peer-orientated support network, such as trained mental health champions, can help banish the stigma of depression and anxiety, as it brings mental health into day-to-day discussions.

As well as acting as a confidante and directing fellow employees to sources of support, mental health champions can seek feedback from staff on how to improve mental health at work, advise organisations on specific areas of concern, encourage activities that promote healthy behaviours and set companies on a path to creating a more resilient, compassionate and empathetic working environment.



Kindness matters

#3

Charity begins at work

Pool skills and resources to get involved in a collaborative pro-bono work for a local charity or arrange workplace fundraisers.

The act of kindness will raise serotonin happy hormone levels - and money for a good cause.



Kindness matters #4

Stand up for the underdog

Unfortunately, bullying can be rife in the workplace. It can be blatant or subtle, face-to-face, on email and even via social media. Don't turn a blind eye. Stand up and speak up if you, or one of your colleagues, is a victim. Be assertive, not aggressive, in the face of adversity. There are plenty of online bullying support resources to know your rights and advice on how to make the bullies back down. Showing kindness through courage rather than retaliation is far more effective in beating the bullies.



Kindness matters

#5

Treat them well

Treat others how you want to be treated may be a maxim found in many religions and cultures, but it is a guiding principle which can have a positive impact on the way we conduct business too.

Showing compassion to colleagues in their time of need has never been more important in the workplace than now. Working in collaboration, everyone can play a role in establishing and sustaining empathetic, supportive and non-judgemental environments.

Warranted or not, the fear of judgement affects workers in many ways, holding them back from making decisions or speaking out about issues or sharing ideas that could have a positive impact. Use encouragement and support to get the best out the people you work with – not criticism.

In short, if you wouldn't want to hear it, don't say it.



Kindness matters #6

RESPECT. Find out what it means to me.

One of the most cited values that workers wish to feel at work is respect. It empowers and motivates us all.

Being kind and respectful is not weak, it is not being a door mat. It is about working with integrity, courage and compassion. It is mutual respect for fellow colleagues regardless of position, age or experience.



Kindness matters

#7

“ Find a job you enjoy doing, and you will never have to work a day in your life.”

MARK TWAIN

Businesses do well by doing good

It is not only people who flourish in a kind working environment. Businesses blossom too in a world where consumer decisions are increasingly influenced by ethical and environmental considerations.

When kindness is embedded into the DNA of a business, it provides a working culture that promotes compassion for colleagues and communities - and protects the planet.

If you're lucky enough to work for such an organisation, the chances are that you will feel rewarded and happy in your work as like-minded colleagues seek to align their careers with businesses that do good business.

As Mark Twain famously said, “Find a job you enjoy doing, and you will never have to work a day in your life.”



Kindness at work checklist

Here is a quick recap on how everyone can make kindness a work priority:

- 1** Take regular breaks such as cake bake-off breaks, Friday team lunches (or Zooms)
- 2** Achieve a positive work-life balance – and don't judge others who do not match your work timetable or goals
- 3** Ask for help or access to mental health resources if you or a colleague is struggling with stress or anxiety
- 4** Get involved in daily random acts of kindness and charitable initiatives
- 5** Acknowledge and support colleagues if they are struggling or being bullied
- 6** Share successes and celebrate achievements with colleagues
- 7** Take an interest in the personal life and interests of colleagues
- 8** Avoid using judgmental or emotive language and be respectful to everyone
- 9** Get involved in team social activities
- 10** Be positive, smile and say thank you!

Remember, in life you reap what you sow. So #bekind.



Putting their money where their kindness is

Many big household name companies have been extending their kindness beyond the office doors during the pandemic to help the NHS, the vulnerable and smaller struggling businesses.

So if you're looking for a bit of inspiration, here are just a few examples of how big businesses are doing their bit to spread a little kindness in a crisis.

Serious Tissue is donating 100% of its profits to the NHS and Change Please is helping homeless people off the streets by training them as coffee baristas.

Founder of Nouveau Beauty Group, Karen Betts, donated 100,000 items to support NHS staff and care homes including face masks, gloves and hand sanitisers.

Brewery and pub chain BrewDog also made hand sanitiser to assist with shortages in NHS hospitals, as well as charities and shelters.

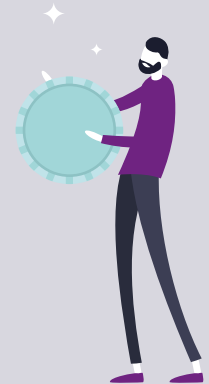
The distressing news that domestic abuse charity Solace saw a 200% increase in calls to its helpline during the UK's first lockdown prompted Boots to offer safe spaces inside its pharmacies for victims of domestic violence.

The president of Vice Media Group sent out a message to anyone he previously worked with who had recently lost their job, offering to write recommendation letters and put them in touch with personal contacts and opportunities.

The hospitality industry has been hard hit which inspired Camden Town Brewery to launch a new beer to help pubs when they reopen. Camden will give away 260,000 pints across the country and proceeds from its To The Pub American Pale Ale will be used to fund the production of kegs that it will give to pubs for free.

The support from local, family-run restaurants, shops and businesses has been overwhelming, from feeding the hungry, and educating and clothing vulnerable children to giving comfort to the lonely during this pandemic.

Proof that kindness always wins.



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