

Hey! What's New? 2025-63

How to Get Workplace Kindness Right

An article on the *INSEAD Knowledge* webpage, written by Nadav Klein, Eliot Gattegno and Rachel Eva Lim says that gone are the days when ruthlessness was synonymous with doing business. "Today, kindness is extolled by many as an important virtue to bring into the workplace. Researchers have highlighted its potential to boost employee well-being in hybrid work settings and contribute to positive business outcomes, while numerous companies have expressed a commitment to kindness values and pledges."

Defined simply as doing nice things for others, say the authors, kindness is universally appreciated. Without proper qualification, however, "the recommendation to be kind is like the recommendation to exercise: great in principle, but impractical without knowing the scope and dosage. How kind should one be at work? How often? Should we be kind to others to the point of self-immolation, or is it enough to be a little kind to reap the benefits of kindness for ourselves and others?"

The authors suggest that there are several ways that we can practise kindness at work. "We suggest that the answer lies in expanding the definition of the term to include leadership actions that benefit people in both the short and long run. Once this new definition is set, new opportunities to practise kindness arise."

1. Interpersonal kindness: This type of kindness is traditionally defined as being nice to others, the authors say. Offering to lend a hand on a project, giving a compliment, bringing a peer a cup of coffee or their favourite snack – all these behaviours fall under this category. They are beneficial in creating a collegial environment and elevating the happiness and well-being of those around you."

2. Practical kindness: Beyond treating others well, practical kindness means doing your best to help people do their jobs better. "This can be achieved by thinking through the opportunities, manpower and resources your teams have for doing their current jobs and allocating these effectively. For instance, to motivate and challenge employees, you can give them stretch goals, along with the proper support to fulfil them. It also means switching people away from jobs they are not suited for and steering them down a different path. At its core, the basic leadership action involved in practical kindness is giving honest feedback and not shying away from communicating negative feedback when needed."

The outcome of practical kindness is not necessarily happiness, the authors note. "Sometimes, such actions by leaders can make people happy in the short term, but they could also make them unhappy – especially when difficult but necessary conversations arise. Instead, the desired outcome is empowering your people to perform their jobs to the best of their abilities."

They add that there is a contradiction between making individuals happy in the short run and helping people be successful in their jobs in the long run. Leaders must master this contradiction if they are to practise practical kindness that helps people increase not just their output but also their impact. They will be better off for it. Over time, they will be able to accomplish more, feel more fulfilled and have greater freedom and agency in their careers."

3. Developmental kindness: The article points out that a third form of kindness takes an even longer-term perspective. “Developmental kindness is helping people acquire skills to get to the next level. Here, the focus is on the people themselves (whereas for practical kindness, it is the job they perform).” That, they say, “first requires identifying what the next level is for each person. For some, this may entail a promotion in your organization. For others, it could mean an unconventional path – a lateral move, a transfer or an exit from the company to take up an entrepreneurial role. The next step is helping people get to this next level.”

One of the most powerful actions you can take as a leader is delegating with an eye for the future. “Handing people tasks and responsibilities lies at the heart of being a leader – it practically sums up the job description. It is one thing to tell people what they should do to reach the next level. It is another thing to give them opportunities to learn these skills. If you can delegate not only tasks required of their current job but also tasks required of their desired future job, you will be acting kindly towards them in a meaningful way.”

According to the authors, “developmental kindness means acting as a mentor and taking individuals’ careers and future success seriously. It requires incorporating their goals while also providing your input, gaining their trust and respect, and challenging them when you believe they are short-changing themselves or holding themselves back. It’s a much more demanding form of kindness than doing nice things for them.”

Kindness in business can be valuable to both those who personify it and those who receive it, the article concludes. “By broadening the definition of the term, leaders can show kindness in ways that don’t just benefit employees in the short run but can also have lasting positive effects.”

For more, check out [How to Get Workplace Kindness Right | INSEAD Knowledge](#),