

Kindness in the Workplace

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As I was walking my dog, Opie, I stumbled across a hand-painted sign nestled between some trees that were just starting to show their fall colors. The sign read simply “Be Kind.” These “Be Kind” signs are sprinkled all over our home base of Richmond, Virginia, thanks to Gini Bonnell, a local woman who decided to take action in response to what she felt was an increasingly mean-spirited environment. Her simple message is that kindness is a choice that we can all make, and her hope is that perhaps we just need a little reminder. Bonnell has given away more than 1,200 of her signs – to everyone from individual homeowners, like my neighbor, to public schools and business owners.

How might it change things if we were reminded to make the choice to “Be Kind” at work?

- **More empathetic leaders means higher retention.** According to research by Daniel Goleman and Richard Boyatzis, empathy is one of the twelve competencies that make up emotional intelligence, a key differentiator for leadership effectiveness. In addition, they found a strong correlation between employee retention rates and leaders who showed high degrees of empathy. But if kindness is empathy in action, how much more of a correlation there might be between kindness and retention? Paul Bloom in “Against Empathy: The Case for Rational Compassion,” argues that it is acting with compassion or kindness that truly makes a difference, not empathy alone. *A workplace filled with people who make the choice to “Be Kind” would certainly be one where most would want to stay.*
- **Extending kindness to ourselves might actually make us more successful.** In Shawn Achor's [TED talk](#), he talks about the “silent 75%” – what truly predicts job success is not IQ, it accounts for only 25%. The silent 75% include things like optimism and the ability to see stress as a challenge rather than a threat. I see a connection between those things and self-compassion, the ability to be kind to ourselves and shut down the negative voices in our heads that speak to us in ways that we wouldn't even dream of speaking to others. For another great resource, see Chris Reina's Mindfulness Blog

Series here: <https://innerwill.org/mindfulness-1/>. *We should see our failures as learning opportunities rather than evidence of our deficiency.*

- **But what about accountability?** Most would be quick to agree that kindness is a good thing... but some may be reluctant to embrace kindness for fear of losing ground on accountability. I fell into this group for many years – earlier in my career I worked as a project manager, and took great pride in my reputation as someone who could make things happen. My success hinged on members of my project teams contributing, so I focused on setting clear work schedules and firm deadlines. In fact, I once worked with a team where two of my team members left their homes at 5AM each morning of our workweeks together so that they could check on their fulltime job responsibilities before traveling to the site where our team was working together. I believed that if I recognized this sacrifice on their parts, if I showed any little crack in my expectations of them, they would no longer perform at the same level. Luckily, they were kind and patient practitioners of feedback, and through the course of the project, they worked with me to help me see that I could be kind and also be effective... and that an even stronger reputation is someone who can make things happen who people actually enjoy working with.

So is it possible to be kind and hold others accountable? Absolutely. With the help of so many great teachers, I can now approach work as both a place to make amazing things happen, and a place where I can connect with others with grace, empathy, and kindness.

How do you show kindness in the workplace? Comment below or send me an email at sharon.amoss@innerwill.org.

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