

OPINION

Five ways being a kind person can help your career

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As devastating and difficult as the COVID-19 world has been, the one seemingly silver lining to emerge from this pandemic is the contagion of kindness. Countless acts of generosity and thoughtfulness abound. Shopping for housebound seniors, advice on applying for employment insurance, free hotel rooms to those who need them, homework help on Zoom, fostering of homeless animals, communal singing to lift spirits – all just a few examples of the thousands of ways people have stepped forward to help those around them. It has become increasingly evident that being kind is synonymous with strength and courage.

This is ironic, because the world of work has usually viewed kindness differently, through the lens of weakness or naivety. Workplace norms often translate friendly, generous and considerate behaviour to mean one is indecisive or a pushover, while blunt, arrogant and curt behaviour often unfortunately implies results and profitability. This, of course, is unequivocally false.

Genuine kindness can often do more to further your career than your exceptional work ethic, your results-focused determination or your dogged persistence. Doing good work will always be a necessary baseline for your success, but it is your kindness – empathy, open-mindedness and treating others with respect – that will carry you further, faster. When you are kind,

you build strong relationships that will stand firm in the years to come. Here are five workplace lessons that we can extract from the kindness pandemic that is currently afoot:

BE HELPFUL

Just like you would check in on a housebound neighbour to see if they needed help shopping for groceries or picking up medication, ask your clients, your supervisor and your peers if you can help them achieve their goals. Does your co-worker need you to cover for them while they juggle child care with their spouse? Could your supervisor use a hand in pulling together the graphics for a last-minute proposal? Is one of your staff members struggling to get things done without the in-office support of their peers? Ask, and then assist – not just during the pandemic, but longer-term as well.

BE A CONNECTOR

In the early days of the pandemic, you were likely thoughtful about creating connections. Maybe you saw a list of the grocery stores offering delivery, and you sent it to your grandparents who have mobility issues. Perhaps you found a site that offered homework help and you forwarded it to your teacher friend. So don't stop being a connector now. Introduce a colleague looking for work to the person who is hiring. Deliberately showcase your staff to senior leaders in your organization. Recommend your plumber to your neighbour. Look for ways to link others to whom and what they need.

STAY COMPASSIONATE

If there's one thing that has spread as fast as the virus, it is our compassion for others. We are increasingly considerate and sympathetic to the individual caring for an elderly loved one, to the person suffering from reduced immunity, and to the parent juggling both a job and child care. So ask yourself: What is stopping you from continuing to be this way in the future? Why can't you demonstrate the same compassion to your co-workers post-pandemic? Showing empathy and kindness to those around you will never go out of style.

BE GIVING WITH YOUR EXPERTISE AND TIME

When the pandemic arrived, you gave your time to volunteer your knowledge. Chefs made free meals, accountants offered financial advice, musicians played free concerts, you generously shared your expertise to help your community. So why not do the same at work? Call or meet a colleague to help them use unfamiliar software. Stay up late with a co-worker to get things finished before a pressing deadline. Offer an information session in your area of expertise to your clients. When you share what you know, you increase your worth in the eyes of others.

BE GENEROUS WITH PRAISE AND ENCOURAGEMENT

The pandemic has inspired us to acknowledge and thank our front-line workers. You've probably put up posters to express your appreciation for them; you may even have banged on pots at 7 p.m. daily to recognize their efforts. Why not do the same for your co-workers in the workplace? Make it a point to thank and praise your staff and colleagues when you see them do good work. Write a short note to acknowledge a teammate's help. Relay the positive feedback you heard about someone's work if they weren't there to hear it firsthand. Genuine praise and encouragement always translate into kindness, and kindness solidifies your relationships.

BENEFIT FROM THE KINDNESS TRIFECTA

Kindness is a triple bonus. First, being kind makes others feel good. Second, science has shown us that it increases our physical and mental health. Third, as we've now seen, kindness can actually advance your career.

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