

Why Kindness is the Key in Promoting Employee Engagement

How “kind” is your workplace? Are employees or co-workers stressed to the max, overly competitive, and habitually secretive? Or are people open, communicative, helpful, and friendly? According to Susan Mangiero, too many workplaces are missing the kindness factor, and it’s more damaging than your employee clients might realize. Why? Because kindness is integral to employee engagement—and cultures of engagement are integral to high-performance organizations.

“Doing business revolves around relationships,” says Mangiero, author of *The Big Squeeze: Hugs & Inspirations for Every Grown-Up Who Loves Teddy Bears* (www.ipaintwithwords.com). “Without strong, positive relationships, people can’t work together productively. They can’t communicate well. They can’t innovate. And positive relationships *cannot* flourish in the absence of kindness.”

When kindness is not present, everyone in the company detaches, stops communicating, and loses trust. What’s more:

- Teamwork suffers.
- Morale drops.
- Productivity falls.
- Absenteeism and turnover rates rise.
- And yes, customer satisfaction plummets—and eventually, customers leave.

In today’s high-stakes, fast-paced business climate, it’s easy to focus on survival at all costs (one of those costs being positive

relationships). But Mangiero says the most hard-driven workers need to remember to infuse kindness into their daily interactions, not only with clients (obviously) but with each other as well. She says kindness is the element that makes organizations great places to work—and it’s also the secret sauce that helps companies thrive.

You don’t have to be a leader to change a company’s culture. When a single employee commits to kindness, his or her actions tend to spread. Just know that you can’t “turn on” kindness at will, and you certainly can’t fake it. To develop nurturing muscles—the ones that will make someone relatable in a world yearning for connection—being kind needs to be part of one’s daily life in the workplace *and* outside of it.

Here are Mangiero’s ten best tips for making genuine kindness a habit.

❖ **First, practice being kind to yourself.** If you don’t know how to nurture yourself, it’s hard to nurture others, like co-workers and clients. Mangiero says practicing self-care is the best way to learn kindness and establish that you deserve kindness too. She suggests doing something kind for yourself (enjoy a cup of tea, take a short break, etc.) every day. And periodically get a massage, treat yourself to some nice clothes, or enjoy a hot bath and a good book.

“Finally, stop being so hard on yourself—forgiving yourself is an important component of kindness,” notes Mangiero. “Whether you fail to impress on a work



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project, underperform on an evaluation, or otherwise disappoint yourself, ease up on the punishing self-talk.”

❖ **Make time to play or commit time to a new hobby to balance out the hard work you might be doing.** You may be working aggressively for a promotion, or simply grinding away at an endless list of work projects, says Mangiero. Either way, don’t let life be all work and no play. Whether you enjoy hiking, art, community theatre, or sports, make time for it.

“When your life is all about work, it’s impossible to stay balanced,” she says. “Trust me, you can’t do your best when you don’t find ways to bring joy into your life. Playfulness is vital for the creative energy you need to excel professionally and personally. And it’s all part of being kind to yourself.”

❖ **Volunteer for a good cause.** Finding a way to help others gets you in touch with your humanity and keeps you humble and kind. Every city has multiple opportunities to volunteer, so find a cause that resonates with you. Your employer may sponsor activities that you can do with your colleagues. Whether you’re tutoring underprivileged kids, working with the elderly, walking shelter dogs, or collecting food for the homeless, you’ll be working on your connection and kindness skills. As a bonus, volunteering looks great on a résumé.

❖ **Stay in touch with your friends and family.** Don’t get so wrapped up in the rat race that you forget about your tribe, warns Mangiero. Stay close to your cherished family members and make time for your friends. Visit favorite people regularly. Meet for coffee or dinner to catch up. If your job has taken you far away, schedule regular video chats

to keep in touch. Sometimes sending a quick text can make you feel closer to those in your support network.

“You have to nurture these established relationships to get the most from them, the same way you would nurture new relationships,” says Mangiero.

❖ **Celebrate the “wow!” in the lives of friends and co-workers.** Nurturing others means showing that you care when good things happen in their lives and resisting the urge to be jealous! Take a moment to applaud and praise others’ accomplishments instead of breezing right past them.

“Congratulate your colleague on her promotion even if you’re working thanklessly at your job,” says Mangiero. “One day you’ll appreciate it when someone makes a big deal out of *your* accomplishments. The same goes for your friends. Be genuinely happy for their good news, be it a personal win or a business milestone such as getting the rights to a new patent or adding a new customer. And let it show.”

❖ **Practice your manners.** Small niceties like *hello*, *please*, and *thank you*; holding doors for people; and asking how others are doing really do matter and shouldn’t vanish when tensions are high. In the hard-charging corporate world, however, manners can take a back seat when deals and deadlines are involved. Keep your work in perspective and remember that rude behavior makes a stronger impression than kindness, but not in a good way! Remember to be courteous to individuals in different jobs and at different levels, not just the boss.

❖ **Go out of your way to make shy, left-out, or misunderstood people feel comfortable.** In life and at work, there’s going to be

an in-crowd and those who don't quite belong—just like in school.

“Make it your duty to be kind and welcoming to those in your office who may feel excluded from the group,” says Mangiero. “Outsiders hurt when they are not readily accepted, and it even happens in the workplace. So be sure to reach out and be friendly to those who need a little help socially. You will be doing what's right, setting a good example, and maybe even making a new friend.”

❖ **Send thank-you notes (the pen-and-paper kind).** It is good etiquette to send a thank-you note when anyone—a client, supervisor, or co-worker—goes above and beyond for you. Not only that, but you have plenty of opportunities to say “thanks” when somebody does something nice for you outside of the office. Get into the habit of writing old-fashioned thank-you notes now, instead of firing off an email or sending a text. This is also a great practice for organizational leaders to embrace.

“In the professional world, a non-virtual thank-you note sets you apart from others,” says Mangiero. “It's a nearly effortless and thoughtful gesture that goes a long way. And you never know who might remember your politeness; a gracious thank-you could help you win a new client or advance to a higher position.”

❖ **Listen more than you talk.** No matter how successful, no one really knows it all (and that's okay!). Be open to the wisdom of others. Mangiero points out that learning is a lifetime process and that listening to those in the know can freshen our perspectives and expand our horizons.

“When I commit to really hearing what others say, I learn a lot and feel so much more connected to them,” she says.

“Others appreciate the courtesy of being given a chance to express themselves. It's a way of showing respect and empathy when we are willing to lend an ear to our colleagues and our loved ones. In business, it's also a way of distinguishing ourselves from the competitors who don't embrace the importance of letting someone else talk. In a hurried world, the lost art of careful listening is a good skill to develop.”

❖ **Be a shoulder to cry on.** When someone in your life is hurting and needs comfort (or someone to vent to) and you think you can help, be willing to engage and support them. Yes, it can be uncomfortable and inconvenient to deal with another person's troubles on top of your own, but true kindness often requires this kind of sacrifice.

“Don't disconnect when a friend or work associate is upset and wants to talk about it with you,” says Mangiero. “Really taking the time to be present will make them feel heard and supported—which is crucial to building trust. If you walk away, you may close the door to a deeper relationship.”

Summary

“Being appropriately kind is not the same as being a pushover. To the contrary, being kind is a show of strength. Genuine kindness is a state of being,” concludes Mangiero. “It's not something you do just to get what you want in the moment. Kindness is a gift that keeps on giving, and you'll find that you are happier and more successful when you make it a part of your work practices and personal life.

“Throughout your professional journey, commit to being kind to everyone you encounter along the way, and you will reap the many rewards that come from caring for and connecting with others.”

Appreciation in the Workplace

Why is feeling appreciated so important in a work setting? Because each of us wants to know that what we are doing matters. Without a sense of being valued by supervisors and colleagues, workers start to feel like a machine or a commodity.

When team members do not feel valued, the results are predictable:

- ❖ Workers become discouraged, feeling there is “always more to do and no cares where I do a good job or not.”
- ❖ Employees begin to complain about their work and negative communication among co-workers increases.
- ❖ Negative behaviors increase: tardiness, absenteeism, conflict, stealing, lower quality work, and apathy.

There are four critical factors that need to occur for appreciation to be experienced as *authentic* appreciation for team members:

❖ ***Appreciation must be communicated regularly.*** If appreciation is only conveyed during performance reviews, employees don't believe the messages sent. Similarly, infrequent messages (once or twice a year) don't adequately communicate that the team member is truly valued.

❖ ***Appreciation must be individualized and delivered personally.*** People want to be

appreciated for what they *individually* have contributed. Unfortunately, most organizations use *group*-based acts of appreciation – an email blast thanking the department for completing a key project, etc. This type of communication often backfires, with employees becoming cynical or feeling offended by the general nature of the act.

❖ ***Appreciation needs to be communicated in the languages and actions that are meaningful to the recipient.*** Individuals have specific ways in which they prefer to be encouraged. When messages are sent repeatedly in ways outside of our primary language, the intent of the message “misses the mark.” Not only is this ineffective, it becomes discouraging as well – both to the sender and the receiver of the message.

❖ ***Appreciation needs to be perceived as being authentic.*** People want appreciation to be genuine. Workers are skeptical of programs implemented from the top down, where supervisors are given instructions to “communicate appreciation for each team member at least once a week.” While we all want to know that we are valued, we want it to be authentic, and not contrived.

Source: Dr. Paul White, a psychologist, consultant, speaker, and co-author of “The 5 Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace: Empowering Organizations by Encouraging People.”