

The making of a Kinder Professional - Compassion at work

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Have you seen people who are professionals and are critical of themselves, who believe that self-flagellation or being critical of oneself will move and motivate them to do well? In fact, the impact is the reverse. Beating ourselves up only creates deep stress. As deep stress converts into self-doubt, it limits us from seeing our co-workers also with compassion. Is there a direct co-relation between self-doubt and compassion towards others? Apparently yes. When we are kind and compassionate to ourselves, we are less judgmental of us and others. To be a kinder professional and to transform your workplaces, be kind to yourself first. It is then sure to get translated to others. Keeping this in mind, even a single act of compassion by a manager or a co-worker can relieve workplace tension and make a kinder professional.

What is compassion and how can we define it? It is the quality that all human beings have as “emotional response when perceiving suffering and involves an authentic desire to help”. We know that suffering in some form and varied intensity is inevitable in every human being’s life. It could be personal suffering, like losing a loved one that causes emotional trauma or it could also be experienced & triggered in work environments through bad behavior from supervisors, peers and cause a

total disconnectedness. Research reveals that, companies have spent billions to handle some concern situations like job stress, burnouts and employee grief. Will reaching out for the kind features of compassion reduce the stress levels and soothe emotions to solve the organizational concerns? Yes, and it is interesting to note that employees are drawn to bosses who are kind and compassionate and they consider these managers as trustworthy.

Is compassion then a great quality for a manager in organizations, where they shape & coach many others? The answer is a resounding yes. As a junior learns concepts, new roles, technology, there are bound to be few faltering steps. Instead of the expected response of getting upset and acting tough with the concerned team member, a manager can opt for compassion, be non-judgmental, understand the underlying issues and build a favorable working relationship. Compassion creates warm feelings about oneself and others. So when a team member sees a compassionate manager who doesn’t have the ‘gotcha’ approach when things go wrong, they ‘elevate’ them, a term coined by social psychologist, Jonathan Haidt of New York University. Team members look up to such managers and are absolutely loyal to them. The kindness

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demonstrated by the compassionate manager can also influence loyalty of others who have witnessed their behavior. The reverse is, when a manager vents his frustration at his team member when things go wrong. Feelings of distrust emerge for the senior and a fear of failure is born. Such managers could even snuff out a culture of experimentation and creativity necessary for competitive workplaces.

How could we cultivate ways of being self-compassionate professionals & respond with compassion towards others?

Step away:

It is good to do this when we see our juniors, peers commit a mistake. We need that time to reflect on our emotional response and be thoughtful so that we do not break relationships.

Empathize with others:

As we step back, it gives us an opportunity to see others perspectives. Recently, when one of the project leads I was coaching on presentation skills began to flounder, I could immediately recall my nervous stammering during a client presentation few years ago. I could thus take a hold on my building anger and irritation and not demotivate the already distressed colleague.

Be mindful:

Mindfulness is said to be 'living in the moment' with an open attention on our thoughts and feelings from a distance. It will help us not feel isolated and open us to our imperfections and those that exist around us. One of the hallmarks of people who are mindful is their ability to control anxiety and build compassion and one of the ways is to be aware of one's breath which

will help us be in the present. Another way is the practice of yoga that been found to be useful. Practice of the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction technique (MBSR) can also help cultivate compassion. MBSR is a confluence of divergent methodologies of practices of the Buddhist meditative traditions, & teachings and of science, medicine and psychology.

Learn and adopt appropriate physical gestures:

This could calm us down like a gentle touch, placing one's hand on one's heart or even using a gentle voice.

Write a compassionate letter to oneself:

Though difficult, at least we can start with one paragraph whenever we face negative restrictions or moments of suffering. This would alert us and lead to use of kind language in interactions.

Nurture a forgiving heart:

Forgiveness brings about connectedness and also promotes better health. Negative emotions are kept at bay and instead feelings of trust and loyalty build in giving rise to better interpersonal relations and client outcomes in organizations.

When we practice the above mentioned ways of building compassion, it will bring us many benefits:

- The tremendous physical and mental wellbeing that compassion generates is one of its' main benefits as it encourages us to spend a meaningful life. b) Compassion acts as a buffer against stress and improves longevity. The health care sector also

has many examples where compassion has relieved the patients of stress. c) With compassion, we tend to broaden our perspectives beyond ourselves and can manage anxiety and depression better. d) Finally, it also improves our sense of connections with others. A sense of pride and belonging builds in for the organization where compassion in interpersonal relationships is witnessed as a culture. However, as we strengthen our compassionate selves, we would need to be aware of few derailers.

As human beings, we may all have felt anger at some point in our professional lives when we come across mistakes. Pretending not to be angry when we clearly are, is not the solution. Instead, a good actionable for all of us when we get angry is to step back and reflect. A criticism or blame will only make situations worse for co-workers & team members who are already feeling terrible because of the goof

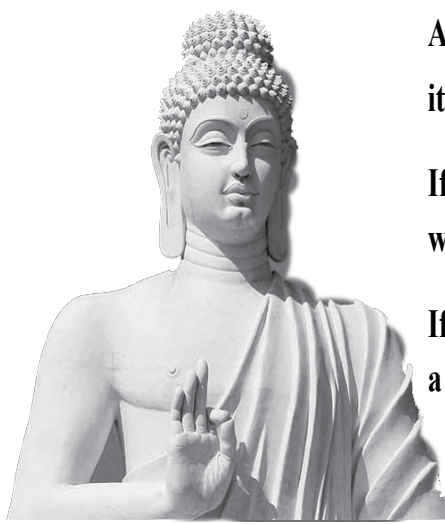
up. Compassion when practiced at workplaces helps to shape ourselves as better professionals.

The pressures of productivity and effectiveness at work environments may make us less observant of others' suffering. Moreover, means of communication like emails, rather than face to face interactions, further reduce the capacity to connect and be compassionate. Building higher quality relationships either through spontaneous ways or by promoting an ethic of compassion should be explored by well-meaning organizations. It goes a long way in building a healthier and happier work environment that also improves the organization's bottom line. However, the journey of compassion towards others begins with us.

As Buddha says-*"If a man going down into a river, swollen and swiftly flowing, is carried away by the current, how can he help others?"*

Isn't it true of compassion?





**All that we are is the result of what we have thought:
it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts.**

**If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him, as the
wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the carriage.**

**If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him, like
a shadow that never leaves him.**

Gautama Buddha