

make
kindness
the norm.

KINDNESS IN THE
WORKPLACE

7 Steps to Creating Kindness in the Workplace

The origin of the word *culture* comes directly from the Latin word *cultura* which means to grow or cultivate. Culture is key to a company's success or failure. Creating a workplace where people feel connected, have a sense of purpose, and are appreciated and recognized for their contributions makes for a stronger, more successful organization.

This action planning guide includes seven key ingredients that make for a positive and kind culture where people want to show up and do their best:

1. Setting a Tone
2. Modeling Behavior
3. Creating a Safe and Supportive Environment
4. Strengths, Mistakes and Growth Mindset
5. Trust, Boundaries and Belonging
6. Communication and Collaboration
7. Celebration

Research shows that engaged workers are present at work more often, are more productive, have fewer accidents and make fewer errors. In addition, employees stay with the company longer and feel better about their jobs.

The benefits of an engaged, kind, and positive workplace grow exponentially over time. Positive emotions are as contagious as negative emotions. When a company or team is focused on building kinder, encouraging, and positive work environments there is a windfall of good stuff happening including happier, healthier employees. It helps improve resiliency when dealing with challenging times. Organizational effectiveness goes up, including productivity, customer satisfaction, and employee retention.

HOW TO USE THIS ACTION PLANNING GUIDE

Think about this guide as a way to connect with others at work—your team, your boss, your employees, remote workers or anyone! If you embed these elements into your workplace, you'll see that employees are not only more connected at work, but they are more connected at home and in their communities. Used alongside the Kindness in the Home book, the Workplace Kindness Calendar and the Kindness in the Workplace Pledge, you'll see a ripple effect that goes well beyond the walls of your organization.

We've broken down the components of creating a culture of kindness in the workplace into seven sections. Each section addresses common opportunities in companies where growth can occur. There is a short explanation about the section along with relevant actions and activities that align. Lastly, we've added an "At Home" piece to each section which encourages you to take these practices home to your family, neighbors and community!

1. Setting a Tone

INTRODUCTION

The first thing we need to do is set the tone for what we expect from others. What do you think employees say about your company, the team and their work environment? Is it supportive, fair, encouraging, flexible, communicative, and compassionate?

Gratitude is an easy and powerful way to set a tone. Expressing and receiving gratitude is meaningful even when it is a simple 'thank you'. Taking the time to reflect on the things for which you are grateful at work is also important. A wonderful article from the Greater Good Science Center¹ says "gratitude recognizes how the positive things in our lives - like success at work - are often due to forces outside of ourselves, particularly the efforts of other people." It goes on to say, "evidence suggests that gratitude and appreciation contribute to the kind of workplace environments where employees actually want to come to work and don't feel like cogs in a machine."

Diversity, inclusion and **equity** are key to creating a workplace culture where people feel comfortable and safe. The words are often grouped together, but let's take a moment to look at the definition of each.

In the workplace, **diversity**² means employing people who may be different from each other and who do not all come from the same background. The differences may be those of national origin, physical appearance, religion, education, age, gender, or sexual orientation.

Inclusion³, while closely related, is a separate concept from **diversity**. The Society for Human Resources Management defines inclusion as "the achievement of a work environment in which all individuals are treated fairly and respectfully, have equal access to opportunities and resources, and can contribute fully to the organization's success".

Equity⁴ in a workplace means everyone receives fair treatment. There's a transparency to cause and effect, and everyone knows what to expect in terms of consequences and rewards. When **equity** exists, people have equal access to opportunities. It sets up an advantageous environment for both the employees and the employer.

EASY ACTION

Start by taking the kindness pledge! By stating that you believe in creating a workplace that has a foundation of kindness you are letting your employees know that you mean what you say and say what you mean. Proudly display the window decal in your lobby or on your entry door to show that you are committed to kindness! You can email us at info@randomactsofkindness.org to get a decal for your office!

STEP IT UP

Review your company's mission and values. Sometimes these words become stale or irrelevant. People come and go. Times change. Companies grow. So should your values and mission. If they are relevant and powerful, make sure people know what they are! Find ways to familiarize your employees with what your company stands for and how it is reflected in their work. Your mission and values tell everyone (inside the

company and outside) who you are and what you believe. It is the touchstone for setting a tone for your employees, customers, clients, and contractors.

ACTIVITIES

Take the concept of gratitude and bring it alive in your organization. Spend 15 minutes writing a letter of gratitude to someone who has made your job easier. It can be a couple of paragraphs or a couple of sentences. Make it sincere and be specific about how that person has made your job easier. Then, deliver it! Better yet, read it aloud to them. It's a powerful way to create connection and strengthen relationships. Not to mention, you both feel wonderful afterwards.

Develop an integrity award to acknowledge those who exhibit integrity in your organization. Make this a team activity by encouraging each member of your group to submit a name for a monthly/quarterly/annual winner of the award. Have them consider their peer's actions and write a couple of sentences about why they chose this individual to win the award. This helps your group realize that others can watch and learn from their positive actions. Provide the winners with an award you all decide upon. Find a way to acknowledge the winners' actions or traits that helped them win the award (newsletter, email to the company, etc.).

AT HOME

Showing gratitude is so important. Consider writing a similar letter of gratitude to your partner, children, neighbors or community leader. The power of giving and receiving a letter that expresses gratitude is deeply meaningful. Often those letters are kept and re-read many times

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throughout a person's life. At the dinner table (turn off the television and put down the devices) share something good that happened today and ask others to share the best part of their day.

There is a game that has been adapted in a few ways called Rose, Bud, Thorn. One way to play it is to ask everyone what their "rose" was today - what was the best thing that happened today? Then, what was your bud - what was

something good you did for someone else today? Lastly, what was your thorn - what is one way you can improve things for a better tomorrow?

2. Modeling Behavior

INTRODUCTION

Model the behavior you want to see in others. **Be who you say you are and allow others to do the same.** When we do our best, others follow suit. When we show respect and care for our teammates, they will return the love. And if they don't, that's alright because you can always keep your head held high knowing you are putting your best self out there.

EASY ACTION

One of the easiest things we can do is greet those around us with "good morning" or "how are you?" Acknowledgment of others is a powerful thing. When you feel seen, you feel included. When you feel included, you feel purpose and companionship. All of that from saying "good morning"!

STEP IT UP

Work with your team on setting shared goals. It's great to get your team to agree to the goals set in a boardroom or an executive meeting, but what if you actually include them in the goal-setting process? How much more engaged do you think they would feel? If they feel part of the process, they will feel ownership. Consider working together on creating SMART goals (specific, measurable, agreed upon, realistic, timely) and build a collaborative action plan to attain those goals.

ACTIVITIES

Mindless/Mindful Listening

Step 1: Inform participants about the upcoming exercise: "In the following exercise, you will team up with another person and have a few brief conversations with this person. You will take the role of both the speaker and the listener in this exercise."

Step 2: Mindless listening: Ask one partner to share for one solid minute about their favorite activity. Listener should interrupt, ask questions, look bored, cross arms, etc.

Step 3: Mindful listening: Now ask the other partner to share for one solid minute about their favorite activity. Listener should pay close attention, not interrupt, maintain eye contact, etc.

Step 4: Evaluation: Outside person should ask the storyteller and listener the following questions:

- What was it like in the first round to be the storyteller?
- What was it like in the first round to be the listener?
- What was it like in the second round to be the storyteller?
- What was it like in the second round to be the listener?
- Are there times that you recognize yourself as a mindless listener? If so, when?

- Are there times that you recognize yourself as a mindful listener? If so, when?

Respect Shout-Outs

Start your meetings with a one to two minute 'shout out' of respect for someone. Let them know what you respect about them and call out a specific time when they have been helpful or done something meaningful for you. It could even be something you witnessed them doing for someone else.

The expressions can be verbal or written. Find out what works best for your team. In small teams, everyone should have an opportunity for a 'shout out'. In larger teams, think about choosing one person to focus on for a weekly or monthly meeting.

Example: "Jessica, one of the things I respect most about you is how you always find a solution to a problem, no matter what challenges come up.

You don't let them get in your way. Just the other day, I saw you working with a difficult customer. You were patient, listened to them and found a solution that worked for them and for the company. I really respect that about you."

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AT HOME

When you arrive home from work give your family your undivided attention

for awhile. Turn off technology, listen, laugh and talk. Consider creating a SMART goal for your family or a personal SMART goal for yourself that

includes service to your community or self-care.

3. Creating a Safe and Supportive Environment

INTRODUCTION

Make space for open discussions. When you encourage open dialogue you create opportunities for brainstorming and generating new ideas. In order to promote a safe and positive environment for the whole team, develop a system where everyone gets the chance to voice their ideas and opinions.

EASY ACTION

Change your meeting structure to allow for everyone to have an opportunity to speak and voice an opinion or a new idea. Thank them for sharing.

STEP IT UP

Try spending time together outside of work, if possible. Your employees are human, and as such they enjoy fun time. Take time to do a non-work related activity together. Create ways to engage with each other and get to know one another on a more personal level. This can help rejuvenate the team while creating bonds and stronger relationships. When your team feels comfortable with each other, it creates a positive and safe working environment.

ACTIVITIES

Best Future Self

Write down your best possible future to get a boost in optimism about your career, making that best possible future more likely to come true. On a piece of paper, answer the questions about the aspects of your best possible future, three years from now at work.

In an ideal world, three years from now, at work:

1. What projects are you working on?
2. Who are you working with?
3. What position do you hold?
4. What else is going on in your career that is contributing to your happiness and success?

Return to this activity at least once a year to boost your optimism about your ideal future; and to celebrate any progress you've made so far!

Credit: HappyBrainScience.com:
<https://www.happybrainscience.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Best-Possible-Future.pdf>

A Little About Me

Divide your team into groups of four or five people. Pass a bag of M&M's around each group and tell each person to "take as many as you need." That's all you will tell them. If they ask, just repeat the instruction.

Once everyone has gotten some M&M's, tell them they will go around the circle and tell the other members of the group one unique thing about themselves for every M&M they took.

Have group members continue until all M&M's are gone. Switch up the groups and do it again.

AT HOME

Vulnerability is an important skill that fosters a safe and supportive relationship. Look for moments to be vulnerable, open and honest with your children, friends and family. There is no need to 'overshare', but find opportunities to share times when you have made mistakes, learned from them, grown and moved forward. Listen without judgment to someone who might be going through a difficult time and hold space for them.

4. Strengths, Mistakes and Growth Mindset

INTRODUCTION

People are hired based on their strengths and their personality. But, oftentimes we find hidden strengths and value that weren't initially apparent. When those become known, leaders should encourage them whenever possible. If you hired someone as an administrative assistant and find out they have an affinity and talent for writing, find ways for them to help with a marketing campaign or writing a piece in the company newsletter.

Allow for mistakes. In fact, celebrate them! What if we praised our employees for doing something brave, trying something new, sharing an idea or going outside of their comfort zone even if it didn't work out as they hoped?

EASY ACTION

Instead of chastising someone for making a mistake, discuss what they learned from it, something positive that came from it and opportunities to do better next time.

STEP IT UP

Work on changing your mindset. A growth mindset allows us to look at areas where we can grow, rather than where we feel we have failed or have no aptitude. If you tell yourself you're disorganized, try changing your language to say to yourself, "I'm working on my organization skills." Or, if you think that you aren't creative, say to yourself, "I have skills and ideas that are unique to me." There is always room to grow and get better at something, so start telling yourself (and others) that!

ACTIVITIES

My Gifts

Using a sheet of paper, create a table with three columns labeled "My gifts, talents and attributes", "Value to Me", and "Value to Others".

In the first column, list all of your gifts, talents and attributes (for instance, athleticism, creativity, caring, empathy, intelligence, etc.)

For each gift, use the second column to describe a way it brings value to your life. (Example: athleticism helps keep me in shape and healthy)

Last, for each gift, describe how it brings value to others. (Example: Intelligence means I can share new ideas that others might not have known about.)

Then, look at the "Value to Others" column and think about how you can do something to put that skill into action. Set goals for at least two of those attributes.

Example of a completed goal:

I am creative and I think outside the box. I can engage people in new ideas or information by volunteering for an organization and helping them think of new and creative ways to raise funds or awareness about their mission.

Activity adapted from
"Promoting Altruism to Enhance Purpose"
by Delvina Miremedi-Baldino, Ph.D

Be the Change

At the beginning of this month, ask the team to think of an area where things could be improved at work. It can be a physical space or an effort in creating a better culture, for instance, making the community break room more inviting by adding color, visual flare, etc.

Task each person (or ask for volunteers) with something they are going to do to reach the goal. Create a timeline, budget (if necessary) and roles. If needed, build in milestones to make sure things are getting done and encourage team members to work with each other towards the end goal.

At the end of the month, celebrate everyone's work and accomplishing the task!

AT HOME

Challenge your family and friends to use growth mindset language when you hear them suggesting they 'can't' do something. The simplest way to do this is by telling them to end a sentence with the word 'yet'. So, if a child says, "I'm not very good at math.", you can ask them to add the word 'yet' to the end of that sentence. It gives them hope and something to strive towards.

5. Trust, Boundaries, and Belonging

INTRODUCTION

When it comes to workplace culture, trust and boundaries can be difficult to talk about and often more difficult to put in place. Trust doesn't occur without boundaries and boundaries can't exist without trust. Take the time to set personal and collective boundaries. This is one of the most important, but also most challenging skills. It requires assertiveness while considering the needs of yourself and the whole. Collective boundaries are determined as a team. Priorities are set, requirements are created and tasks are assigned. Negotiating boundaries across and within the team develops buy-in, reduces conflict, and builds relationship skills.

It is essential that you trust your team. Avoid micromanagement, or taking over tasks for which others are responsible. Instead, nurture an environment of trust and give your team freedom (with responsibility, of course) and this will create positivity throughout your employees.

EASY ACTION

Review *The Seven Elements of Trust (BRAVING)* by Brené Brown with your team.

Boundaries: You respect my boundaries, and when you're not clear about what's ok and not okay, you ask. You're willing to say no.

Reliability: You do what you say you'll do. At work, this means staying aware of your competencies and limitations so you don't over-promise and are able to deliver on commitments and balance competing priorities.

Accountability: You own your mistakes, apologize, and make amends.

Vault: You don't share information or experiences that are not yours to share. I need to know that my confidences are kept and that you're not sharing with me any information about other people that should be confidential.

Integrity: You choose courage over comfort. You choose what is right over what is fun, fast, or easy. And you choose to practice your values rather than simply professing them.

Non-judgment: I can ask for what I need, and you can ask for what you need. We can talk about how we feel without judgment.

Generosity: You extend the most generous interpretation possible to the intentions, words, and actions of others.

STEP IT UP

Read "Dare to Lead" by [Brené Brown](#)

ACTIVITIES

Volunteer

Think about a person or a group of people at work with whom you struggle to set boundaries. This could mean that you keep them at a distance, or you open up too much to them. Think about (or write them down if it helps) some specific actions you can take to improve your boundaries. Perhaps it's saying "no" more often or letting that person into your life a bit. How do you think the other person will respond to these changes? How will your work day look different once these boundaries

have been established?

Step things up and create a sense of togetherness and belonging by finding a local organization that could use your help. Schedule a day when everyone can volunteer together.

Gratitude Ping Pong

Have your team share what you are grateful for with one another.

Ask your team to break into pairs and face each other. Have enough small, simple office objects for them to gently toss back and forth (you can use post it notes, a marker, a stress ball, etc.)

For three minutes have them pass the object back and forth, each time sharing something for which they are grateful.

When the three minutes are up, bring the group back together and ask them to share how they felt during the activity. Ask if anyone is willing to share some of the things they said. See if anyone felt that it was too much time or not enough time.

AT HOME

When is the last time you played a board game or threw a frisbee outside as a family or with your friends? What about doing a puzzle together? Or baking cookies? A great way to build a sense of belonging is to simply be together sharing space and time. Think of something you can do together that ensures laughter, love and conversation. Try playing gratitude ping pong at home or with a friend!

6. Communication and Collaboration

INTRODUCTION

When teams foster a sense of collaboration and positive communication they are at their best in terms of productivity. Welcoming different perspectives, ideas and opinions is important for any team environment. Too often, people get caught in the belief that they must do it all themselves or that they are the only ones who know how to do it right. Good leaders know that the key to a strong team is developing interdependence and creating an environment primed for successful collaboration.

In a Harvard Business Review article titled “Why Do So Many Managers Forget They’re Human Beings?”⁵ there is a great quote - “True leadership comes from our abilities to form personal and meaningful bonds with the people whom we lead.” Think about all the bosses you’ve had in the past and ask yourself if that statement is true. Is it true of you?

According to Forbes contributor Dan Schwabel, “Companies will continue to promote their workspaces and design them to facilitate interpersonal relationships between employees. Leaders who encourage personal connections will have more committed, satisfied, and productive workers.”

EASY ACTION

Read this [Harvard Business Review article](#)⁵ where the author offers four pieces of advice for leaders who want to be more effective:

Be personal. Put yourself in your employees’ shoes and imagine they are family members or friends.

Be self-aware. When you understand yourself, you are better able to understand and empathize with the people you lead, and in turn, you can speak to their intrinsic motivation.

Be selfless. Leadership is not just about you, but about the people and organization you lead.

Be compassionate. When it comes to leadership, nothing beats compassion. It is a universal language that is understood by everyone, everywhere. Make a habit of asking one simple question whenever you engage with anyone. How can I help this person have a better day?

STEP IT UP

Start a conversation with someone you don’t normally talk to—ask simple questions about their weekend or family. Try to get to know them a little more on a personal level.

ACTIVITIES

Letter-Writing

Spend 15-20 minutes writing a letter to someone at work who has made a difference in your life. Tell them what they did to make a difference and how much you appreciate them. Do this in a place where you can have quiet, reflective time. When you are finished, you can fold it up and mail it... or call them and read it to them... or, better yet, hand-deliver it and read it to them. It is a powerful thing to say the words out loud to them and to be on the receiving end!

Now, spend 15-20 minutes writing a letter to yourself. List your strengths, how you’ve managed to grow from difficult moments in your life and how

your experiences have made you a more resilient person. Listen to the voices of those who have told you what they love about you and what they appreciate about you. Let those words be reflected in your letter. When you are done with your letter, seal it up and place it somewhere where you will be able to easily find it on a difficult day or during a time when you are struggling. Read it to yourself or have a loved one read it to you.

Accountability Partner

Have each person on the team select an accountability partner for the month. Each person should come up with a simple goal for the month (I want to go for a walk three times per week during the lunch hour).

Write down your goal and hand it to your accountability partner.

Create an agreement with your partner that helps you stay on track and be responsible for what you agreed to.

Check in regularly with your accountability partner to see how you’re doing.

Celebrate your success at the end of the month!

AT HOME

Practice active listening with your children, partner or friends when you’re home. See if you can follow these steps at the dinner table, while cooking, in the car or when you’re at a restaurant.

- Maintain eye contact
- Don’t interrupt
- Ask questions
- Repeat back (in your own words for understanding) what the speaker said
- Listen for total meaning

7. Celebration

INTRODUCTION

In a 2017 study by WorkHuman it was revealed that 45% of workers had not received recognition in at least 6 months while 16% had never been recognized at all! But, according to Reward Gateway, 90% of leaders say they make employee recognition a priority. Celebration! The fun part! And yet, the thing we rarely do.

According to Globoforce nearly 50% of all workers say they would leave their job for a company that was better at recognizing employees. It's such an easy problem to solve. It comes back to gratitude, appreciation and recognition. Truly effective employee appreciation goes beyond thanking your staff at an annual party. That being said, "Not all employees respond to the same type of recognition and praise," according to Dr. Sherlene McHenry. Some people like words of affirmation, some like gifts, and others respond to quality time.

Celebration doesn't always equate to a party. There are moments where celebrating a success or someone's idea can be just as powerful. Authentic recognition is important for people to hear not only from their boss, but from their colleagues. However, a party is always a great way to celebrate everyone!

EASY ACTION

Make it a priority to schedule time to reflect on all the things you have to celebrate - perhaps you met or surpassed a sales goal, someone landed a new account, a positive review of the company was shared on social media or a personal success was made in one of your employee's lives. Whatever the reason, find ways to recognize and celebrate. As Dale Carnegie says, "People work for money, but go the extra mile for praise and rewards."

STEP IT UP

You can celebrate every day, but consider doing something as a team on Random Acts of Kindness Day⁶ (February 17 every year)! Take a look at www.randomactsofkindness.org for ideas. Encourage your employees follow us on LinkedIn⁷ and join the movement to **Make Kindness the Norm**.

ACTIVITIES

Celebration List

Make a celebration list where you add something new everyday. The list should include something you've accomplished as an individual or with your team, progress you've made as a company, all the ways you have personally changed for the better and how your team has improved over the last year.

Consider making the list public where people can add to it each day if you have a public/shared space like a cafeteria or break room. Encourage everyone to add to the list!

Generosity Board

Create a "Generosity Board" in a shared space like a lunch room or conference room.

Put up a bulletin board or use a whiteboard (or just use a blank wall). Have a meeting where everyone writes ideas for being generous - charities to donate to or activities that individuals or teams can do to show generosity on colorful sticky notes. For example, people could bring in trial size toiletries, granola bars, water, chapstick, and other items to create care packages for a local shelter.

Try to come up with at least five ideas per person. Write them on the whiteboard or put them on sticky notes and hang them on the wall in a common area. Leave them up all month.

As people come in and out of the space, they can pull a note from the wall and complete the idea/activity. People can pair up or create teams to complete as many of the ideas as possible during the month!

AT HOME

Create a celebration jar! Get a large jar and once a day (or week, or month) write down on a slip of paper something you can celebrate. Perhaps it is a good grade on a test or getting all the laundry done and put away... it doesn't have to be a 'big deal', just something you've accomplished. At the end of the year, read through all of your celebrations and accomplishments!

Citations

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