



Values in Action Foundation Created the Kindland Movement to Deliver Benefits of Kindness

For almost 30 years, across 1.7 million students in more than 9,000 K-12 schools in all 50 states, Values-in-Action Foundation has been involved in empowering students to build communities of Kindness, Caring and Respect. The results have shown a consistency in reduction of violence, increase in happiness and boost in learning — especially with graduation rates — whenever Kindness has been introduced. Kindness is easily understood and grows organically. In the Cleveland Metropolitan Schools, conditions for learning (a happiness and satisfaction metric) increased 15% in middle schools within three months after programming was introduced. In its most violent school, John Adams High School, the graduation rate increased from 50% to 93% and there were zero fights within the school following Values-in-Action’s Kindness programming. Among the most at-risk girls, teen pregnancies were reduced to zero.

In 2020, Values-in-Action decided that Kindness programming should not be confined to schools — you cannot separate the air or the influencers between school, community, business and government. So, Values-in-Action resolved to make kindness the embedded core value of our nation with the introduction of its Kindland Movement. Kindland is an all-encompassing community-wide content, programming, messaging and community-building program with the message Just Be Kind at its core. Through the JustBeKind app (www.justbekindapp.com), roadside billboards, community messaging, school programming and kindness reporting by businesses and government municipalities, kindness becomes embedded as a culture and core value and citizens create a Kind Land. When introduced and modeled in Northeast Ohio, Kindland attracted more than 100 other nonprofit organizations, schools and governments, media, 500 community leaders and businesses whose employees total more than 100,000.

Recently, the Surgeon General called upon all Americans to act urgently to dissipate “an epidemic” of social disconnectedness and loneliness that are linked to some of these negative trends. He called upon leaders, organizations, schools, businesses, media and governments to more intentionally embrace people and push acts of kindness. Here is his op-Ed: <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/30/opinion/loneliness-epidemic-america.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share&referringSource=articleShare>

The following article discusses some of the research that shows why Kindness is compelling, infectious, results-oriented and so needed in our nation today. Kindness is a cultural overlay that increases health and wellness, boosts happiness, reduces depression and anxiety and increases performance and productivity at all levels. We hope you will join us in our movement to make our great country a kinder place.

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WHY KINDNESS IS IMPORTANT

The United States has descended into a place over the last two decades where the cultural norm of being kind to one another has been displaced by mean discourse, road rage, trash talk, belligerence, implosiveness, intolerance and a variety of other behaviors that are now thought of as being cool, strong and sadly, acceptable.

Some of the deplorable statistics in the US:

- ` according to the Gun Violence Archive mass shootings are increasing: 417 in 2019;610 in 2020; 690 in 2021 across 44 states and Washington,DC. and 647 in 2022

- ` CNN reports that there have been at least 160 mass shootings as of April 16,2023

- ` a homicide rate of 7.8 per 100,000 in 2020, 30% greater than 2019and the highest recorded since 1994

- . an age adjusted suicide rate of 13.42per 100,000,almost 132 per day and the highest of any wealthy nation

- ` 24.8 % of US women experience rape or attempted rape in their lifetimes

- ` a US violent crime rate of 5.50 according to the Global Crime Index,higher than many developed countries

- ` a US violent crime rate of 395.7 per 100,000 of population in 2021

- ` of 1.3 million violent crimes committed in the US in 2020, according to Statista 921,505 were aggravated assaults making this offense the most common of violent crimes: in 2021 the statistics were 2,552,446 and 2,335,159, respectively.

- ` according to surveys conducted over twenty years, 70% of Americans don't trust one another. Twenty years ago, the number was 20%.

- ` a child goes missing or is abducted every 40 seconds in the US

The tragedy of these statistics and others just as painful to report certainly proves why Kindness is not only important but absolutely necessary NOW.

Next to unconditional love there is one great act that defines the best there is in being human. That is being kind. And being kind is the best path to uplifting our culture so that meanness is no longer in vogue and violent crime is arrested. Performing an intentional act that benefits someone else when you do not have to do it is virtuous. This is because selfless concern for others does not expect anything in return. It is the purest form of giving.

But why should we engage in this seemingly altruistic behavior? What results are obtained by being kind? And how can we best be kind in whatever circumstances we find ourselves – especially in a workplace environment?

What happens to us and others when we are genuinely kind

Studies published in the Journal of Positive Psychology ⁽¹⁾ and the journal Emotion ⁽²⁾ showed that givers became less depressed and more satisfied with their lives and that their acts inspired others to act. Furthermore, practicing everyday kindness is both emotionally reinforcing and contagious. The same study also showed that receivers became happier after two months and paid their acts of kindness forward with 278% more prosocial behaviors than the control group.

CIC Well Being ⁽³⁾ states that encouraging acts of kindness in the workplace can have a positive transformative effect on mood. They also note that acts of kindness have been found to have the following benefits for both the giver and the receiver: lowered blood pressure and overall heart health, increased energy, greater happiness and the stimulation of serotonin.

Christine Carter, PhD, wrote in a Psychology Today ⁽⁴⁾ article that half of the participants in one study conducted by the Random Acts of Kindness Foundation felt stronger and more energetic after helping others.

She also noted that kinder people live longer and healthier lives. “ And nearest and dearest to my heart, kindness makes us happy,” concluded Dr. Carter.

”When people benefit from kindness, they “pay it forward” by helping others who were not originally involved, and this creates a cascade of cooperation that influences dozens more in a social network,” wrote Dr. James Fowler. ⁽⁵⁾

The authors in a recent Harvard Business Review ⁽⁶⁾ article noted similar effects, “In workplaces where acts of kindness become the norm, the spillover effects can multiply fast. When people receive an act of kindness, they pay it back, research shows — and not just to the same person, but often to someone entirely new.”

The Gallup⁽⁷⁾ organization has found in numerous surveys of US employees that “receiving a compliment, words of recognition, and praise can help workers feel more fulfilled, boost their self-esteem, improve their self-evaluations, and trigger positive emotions. They also note that being kind brings a sense of meaning because it involves investing in something bigger than ourselves. It improves our reputation and also how we view ourselves. Kindness make us believe that we have what it takes to be a good person.”

Authors Kumar and Epley in an article in the Journal of Experimental Psychology⁽⁸⁾ noted in a study they conducted that people who practice kindness get that being kind makes them feel good, but they underestimate how good receiving kindness makes the other person feel.

How companies benefit from a kindness culture

The evidence is conclusive that being kind and receiving kindness has positive impacts on individuals. But what occurs when a kindness culture evolves among employees in a workplace environment?

In analyzing more than 3,500 business units with more than 50,000 individuals, researchers ⁽⁹⁾ found that higher acts of courtesy, helping, and praise were predictive of productivity, efficiency, and lower turnover rates.

In an article in the academic journal *Emotion* the authors ⁽¹⁰⁾ analyzed how acts of kindness create positivity throughout an organization. The people on the receiving end of acts of kindness reported a sense of camaraderie, a feeling of being in control, and significantly higher levels of happiness.

In essence a **culture of kindness creates a positive work environment** that is capable of transforming a company. Shawn Achor, CEO of Good Think Inc., wrote on his website that when people work with a positive mindset performance on nearly every level—**productivity, creativity and engagement improves**. Importantly positive employees build teams and cultures where people really want to work.

Emma Sappala and Kim Cameron⁽¹¹⁾ have also found that a culture of comfort and happiness can **lower stress and increase engagement levels** while a culture of fear and pressure does the opposite. The authors also noted that happier employees are more willing to put in extra effort and help those around them.

Marina Krakovsky reported on a study by the Association of Professional Executives of the Public Service of Canada (APEX) ⁽¹²⁾ that employees who are respectful and kind to each other have **26% more energy, 36% more satisfaction with their work, and 44% more commitment to their organization**.

Kindness through recognition of good work also **builds trust** that allows employees to emotionally connect with their colleagues, driving innovation and productivity.

Jamil Zaki, an assistant professor of psychology at Stanford University, wrote in the Scientific American⁽¹³⁾ ,“We find that people imitate not only the particulars of positive actions, but also the spirit underlying them. This implies that . . . **kindness itself is contagious**, and that . . . it can cascade across people, taking on new forms along the way.” Melanie Rudd⁽¹⁴⁾ a professor at the University of Houston explains why kindness is contagious because, the “act of helping others and seeing others happy . . . gives us this warm glow (which she calls imperfect altruism) , which benefits us.”

Emma Sappala’s research ⁽¹⁵⁾ has also shown that **kindness makes people healthier**. That means lower absenteeism and fewer sick days and more productivity, too.

How to develop workplace kindness – initial steps

Understanding what kindness is and how companies can benefit from a culture of kindness and talking about it is not enough. Action to develop and implement a consistent culture of kindness is necessary to reap its benefits. And it must start at the top.

Kindness is a catalyst that enables individuals to be great leaders. As Simon Sinek, founder of the Optimism Company says on his website, “leadership is not about being in charge. Leadership is about taking care of those in your charge.” Kindness makes everyone happier. When leaders are happy, that trickles down to employees . And when employees are happy, they are more willing to put in extra effort and help those around them,” indicated Emma Sappala.⁽¹⁵⁾She also notes other research⁽¹⁶⁾ has shown that acts of altruism (read kindness) actually increase someone’s status within a group.

People are naturally sensitive to the behaviors of high-status team members. By giving compliments and praising their employees, leaders are likely to motivate team members to copy their behavior and create norms of kindness in teams. In summary,” Kind Leaders make kinder employees,” wrote Marina Krakovsky⁽¹²⁾.

What it boils down to is that kindness and generosity of time and talent builds connections so management must make it easier for employees to get and give support. Here are some simple and inexpensive ways recommended by Steve Sonnenberg ⁽¹⁷⁾ to start the process.

Encourage employees to greet each other with a smile. Smiles improve one’s mood, lower blood pressure, increase endurance and reduce pain and stress. They are also contagious and deliver the same benefits to the recipient.

Initiate employee recognition programs. Recognized employees feel more valued and appreciated. They are also more motivated and loyal. According to a survey by the American Psychological Association (APA) conducted online among 1,714 adults between January 12 and 19, 2012 on behalf of the APA by Harris Interactive, more than 80% of employees agreed that recognition improves their experience, relationships, engagement and happiness at work.

Employees who are treated as individuals will feel more supported and cared for. Consider offering flexible work arrangements. Whether that means a hybrid in-office/work-from-home schedule or flexible PTO rules, this flexibility can improve an employee's work/life balance, which increases happiness.

Other simple initiatives include but are not limited to include taking the time to listen to employee ideas, sharing positive feedback with staff, finding ways to balance workloads, ensuring inclusion in meetings and most of all reminding employees what you appreciate about working with them.

On behalf of Born This Way Foundation and Indeed, Benenson Strategy Group conducted 1,200 online interviews (from February 24 to March 1, 2022) with 18-29 year olds who are currently or soon-to-be employed across the United States.

Gen Z (late1990s- 2010) and young millennials prioritize mental health and kindness at work but believe many employers do not offer adequate support systems, despite an overwhelming majority (89%) of young workers seeing mental health and kindness as high priorities in the workplace.

Creating a kind workplace can help employers recruit applicants in a difficult job market. The vast majority of respondents (77%) were more likely to apply for a job posting that listed 'kindness' as an important value of the company.

Kindness has no limits and no boundaries because it is contagious

It can certainly be said that any group of people – be it a classroom, an athletic team, a private club or a religious group – functions best when there is kindness. Of course, that is especially true for companies, where people spend the better part of their weekdays together.

Instituting a culture where acts of kindness are not only appreciated but expected in a company will create a workplace where people are motivated to really work. That will not only improve a company's bottom line but bring new meaning to the phrase," the best place to work."

The kindest places to work will inevitably lead to the kindest places to live and learn. The aforementioned research shows that kindness in the workplace can create positive, sustainable change, and, if kindness can drastically affect the workplace, it can change our communities and schools as well. Corporate

America employs 135 million people whose behavior will impact their children, families, friends, and colleagues, ultimately resulting in a kinder culture for us all. An online publication “ Kindness Matters Guide” (<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/kindness/kindness-matters-guide>) lists several benefits of being kind at work, in the community and at school.

Kindness should not be limited to the best places to work or to school programs, or religious organizations. Research shows that cultures of kindness that are infused in the aforementioned segments of society and others will grow outward to communities at large and be accepted so that all can benefit from its adoption.

Nothing is easier or more important, especially now , than being kind.

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