Kind Colleagues MONTH 7

Creating a Kind Environment

How do we show kindness to the earth and its creatures?

Consider This

Organizational psychologists have spent decades studying the impact of the physical office environment on work performance, focusing on factors such as color schemes, lighting quality, and office architecture and design. Some researchers suggest that office design may explain up to 15 percent of worker's performance and productivity (1999). In fact, Adrian Leaman and Bill Bordass have discovered "lack of environmental control is [workers'] single most important concern, followed by lack of control over noise." When employees feel they have some control over their space—and their workplace is responsive to change—productivity levels are higher (2010). It's clear that an organized, comfortable, aesthetically pleasing and responsive environment is conducive to good work performance. What that means is individual to profession and personal preferences, of course. As you revisit your "be kind" Code (see Introductory materials online), think about how your physical office environment can support kindness in your work culture.

Kind Leaders

As a Kind Leadership team, lead an effort that empowers staff members to take control of their individual office space. When staff members are encouraged to personalize their spaces, they feel better. Researchers Gregory A. Laurence, Yitzhak Fried, and Linda H. Slowik have discovered the positive neurological benefits: "Creating a place of one's own in an otherwise public workspace environment should further contribute to individuals' positive cognitive and affective states, resulting in enhanced mental resources, enabling better coping with the potentially debilitating interferences associated with low privacy" (2013). Kind Leaders can help share designs and provide suggestions for helping colleagues maintain emotional energy that will sustain them at work.

Developing Awareness

Noncomplementary Behavior: It is not always easy to be kind. We all know this, and we know that being kind can be difficult for different reasons. One of the most challenging times to be kind is when someone is being rude or dismissive to us. Our tendency is to mirror the emotions, feeling, and mood of that person. This is called "complementary behavior" and it's the behavior we expect. When someone is warm to us, we're warm in return. Likewise, if someone is impolite, our tendency is to react with similar disrespect. But psychology professor Christopher J. Hopwood affirms that we can choose to act differently by using noncomplementary behavior. Noncomplementary behavior is more difficult because it contradicts expected behavior. For example, we can act with intentional kindness when someone has been rude. Hopwood advises that noncomplementary behavior can sometimes be tensely received, so we should use it strategically (2016). Noncomplementary behavior is a powerful tool for diffusing situations and leading with kindness.

Kind Environment

Consider how your environment affects your mood and your overall workplace culture. Professor Kathleen Vohs demonstrates that cluttered office areas can be great for brainstorming and creativity, but that tidy spaces help facilitate effective meetings and overall efficiency (Mochari, 2014). Even in a creative workspace, there should be an ordered scheme. Before you organize, get rid of as many unnecessary items as you can. If an item isn't highly functional, meaningful, or beautiful, let it go (donating or recycling when appropriate). Make good lighting and comfortable, visually appealing furnishings a priority when budget allows. Extend this practice to common work areas, including break rooms and conference rooms. If your workspace isn't a traditional office, make it a priority to keep the space clean, organized, and comfortable. Well-ordered workspaces feel welcoming and calming to clients, too, so create spaces that best serve the different needs of your office.

The Kind Mind

Pay attention to some good facts in your life that you don't usually notice. When you notice something good, hold it in your mind for several seconds, letting the goodness sink in. Revisit the bracelet practice from Month 6, but focus on moving the bracelet when you notice kind acts or positive experiences. Psychologist Rick Hanson recommends "taking in the good" as a way to reshape the way in which our brain functions, which reshapes our perceptions and interactions in the world. He recommends three steps: 1) Pay attention to good facts, and then allow yourself to feel good about the experience. 2) Dwell on the positive aspects of the experience so that you really appreciate it. 3) Try to transform the good experience into something you can feel with your body (2009). Then relish these positive aspects and let them help you practice kindness with yourself and others!

Self-Kindness

Spending time outdoors improves our health. From breathing fresh air to taking a walk to enjoying a scenic view, experts agree that getting outside improves our perspective. In fact, when we immerse ourselves in the beauty of the natural world, it actually makes it easier for us to be kind to ourselves and to others (Zhang, Piff, Iyer, Koleva, & Keltner, 2014). Studies have shown that exposure to the natural world—in both urban green spaces and rural natural environments—enhances our physical health, including lowering stress and improving heart rate (Ulrich, Simons, Losito, Fiorito, Miles, & Zelson, 1991). Encourage staff members to go outside and then reflect on how they feel directly afterward. In staff or team meetings, talk about how being outside helps with productivity, improves mood, and boosts work engagement. Commit to making time outside a priority for staffers—especially if that time is free of personal technology.

Social Kindness

Create a Kind Environment team to educate and motivate staff members about the value of creating spaces that support intentional kindness—both at work and in our communities. Come up with a list of suggested actions that staff members can take to look after the earth and its creatures, especially in the community surrounding your workplace. In team or staff meetings, discuss why a diverse local ecosystem helps us thrive and how preserving a safe environment for many species is an act of kindness. Organize workplace cleanup days, recycling drives, and other activities to care for your workplace environment. Spend time creating a work environment that you enjoy and that supports your job and work style, and see if you notice a difference.

Kindness in Action

Kindness to the Earth: Brainstorm a list of ways in which employees can show kindness to the earth locally. Encourage staff members to share ideas on your Kind Colleagues Bulletin Board. Select a few ideas as an organization and create teams that commit to making a difference this month by supporting causes that improve and preserve our natural environment. Some ideas might include designating some work time for staff members to volunteer with an environmental organization, organize a recycling effort, or help clean up a local park.

Kindness to Animals: Sometimes we don't step up to help because we don't know how, or we assume someone else will do it. Distribute Ben's Bells "be kind to animals" cards to employees so that they may be empowered to help an animal in need. Encourage them to keep their card in their car or wallet so they'll always be ready to help. Show your support for animals at work by holding a food and supply drive for your local animal shelter.

Kind Dialogue

Kindness Beyond the Workplace: This month, focus on kindness dilemmas that involve more than just people. Think about how we might face kindness dilemmas when it comes to caring for our environment—plants, animals, and the areas in which we live, work, and spend leisure time. Some examples to consider might include witnessing an act of graffiti, neglect of an animal or a plant, or littering. Encourage staff members to share their own dilemma to problem-solve together. Break into small groups or work in partners as you consider how your workplace can model kind problem solving in your community.