

A white cloud-shaped logo with a black outline containing the text "Kind Colleagues MONTH 9".

Kind Colleagues
MONTH 9

A green rectangular banner with a black outline containing the text "Kindness and Change".

Kindness and Change

A green chalkboard background with the text "ARE YOU READY FOR CHANGE?" written in white chalk. A hand is shown holding a white paper airplane, and there are white chalk drawings of clouds and a sun.

How can we maintain kindness in times of change?

Consider This

The growth of an organization relies on effective organizational change. When change is managed successfully, it can be positive and important to the vitality of an organization. However, many people are resistant to change, with much of change management literature focused on strategies for helping employees cope with the discomfort of change. But research also indicates that positive emotional resources—including hope, optimism, resilience, and efficacy—among employees facilitate positive organizational change. This suggests that promoting positive emotional resources across the workplace may be a key ingredient to invoking positive organizational change (Avey, Wernsing & Luthans, 2008). Practicing intentional kindness and creating a culture that prioritizes kind leadership and vision can result in more successful organizational change.

Kind Leaders

What changes are occurring in your workplace? How do they affect staff members and their relationships? Is your organization experiencing more change than usual? Discuss the reactionary fear that change may be causing in the unconscious brain (reptile or lizard brain). Come up with techniques for helping staffers acknowledge that change can be scary, recognizing that change increases stress for many (Smith, 2014). Next, brainstorm ways your leadership team can help colleagues practice using their conscious brain (frontal lobe response), and encourage individuals to participate in the process of change. Remind staffers about the Growth vs. Fixed Mindset (see Month 1), and return to gratitude practices through Kind Notes, the #bekindchallenge, or Kindness Coins. By validating uncomfortable feelings about change, we can help foster positive attitudes toward transition that are grounded in transparency, flexibility, and positive mindset (Smith, 2014).

Developing Awareness


Rejection: Rejection is a normal part of our lives. We propose a great idea, but our team doesn't respond enthusiastically. We post an opinion on social media, but people criticize or ignore it rather than "liking" it. Or we make a friendly joke in a meeting, and instead of laughs, colleagues giggle with embarrassment. Rejection hurts because our brains are designed to respond powerfully to this experience. Through experiments involving MRIs, psychologist Guy Winch has observed, "the same areas of our brain become activated when we experience rejection as when we experience physical pain" (2015). It's easy to feel discouraged when we experience rejection, but we can mediate those feelings by creating a supportive work climate that values new ideas, thoughtful listening, and self-kindness. When we create a culture where people feel connected, we help each other practice self-kindness instead of self-criticism.




Kind Environment

Because so many of us experience fear around change, especially in the workplace, normalizing change can help calm staff members' anxieties about uncertainty, fears about job performance, or questions about the value of individual contributions (Smith, 2014). To visualize your discussion about change management in your organization, make a poster for your Kind Colleagues Bulletin Board through which staffers can share some of the biggest or scariest—or even funniest—changes they've experienced. Extend these conversations into small team or one-on-one meetings to ensure that staffers feel supported and can try to adopt a positive approach to change. By opening a space in work environments to communicate with kindness and openness about our fears surrounding change, we can reduce some of the anxiety that sometimes accompanies it.

 **The Kind Mind**

 **Mindful Walking:** It's easy for our minds to feel cluttered with the rush of daily life. This is especially true in times of change, when it is difficult for our minds to “turn off” and relax. This month, clear your mind with a walking meditation that focuses on what is happening right now, rather than worrying about the change to come. The goal of Mindful Walking (sometimes called Tortoise Walking) is not to get anywhere, but to become aware of the process of walking. Mindful Walking can be performed inside or outside as long as there is room to walk slowly in a big circle or back and forth for 15 to 20 paces. Watch the Kind Mind video (available online) to join with colleagues in this activity. Evidence shows that Mindful Walking helps reduce stress and can achieve positive results in as little as 10 minutes per day (Greater Good Science Center; http://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/walking_meditation#data-tab-how).

 **Self-Kindness**

Manage Attention, Not Time: We often feel overwhelmed by everything that competes for our attention—meetings, emails, phone calls, text messages, budgets, Excel sheets, presentations, and more. While we can't slow down the clock, we can practice self-kindness and intentionality to manage our attention, rather than judging ourselves because we aren't better at managing our time. We may think we're mis-managing our time when in fact we're letting our attention drift or trying to multi-task too many things at once, says professor Jeremy Hunter. This month, center your self-kindness practice on understanding individual distractions, and then working to minimize them and set priorities that help staffers focus effectively. Identifying priorities and asking questions, such as, “Is this the best use of my energy?” (Hunter 2016) will help your workplace develop an intentional environment in which self-kindness helps colleagues feel supported and achieve success.



Social Kindness

Just Like Me: Talk about how easily we can feel different from others, and how focusing on that difference can lead us to be unkind to each other. This is especially true when the other person is disrespectful or the other person holds a very different opinion. Explain that if we focus on getting into a kind state of mind, then we can prioritize how we're connected, rather than how we're different. The following prompts will help staffers see their connections:

- 1) Ask staffers to stand in 2 lines facing each other.
- 2) The leader reads the following statements while staffers face each other:
 - This person has a body and a mind, just like me.
 - This person has feelings, emotions, and thoughts, just like me.
 - This person has experienced physical and emotional pain and suffering, just like me.
- 3) As a group, come up with several more "just like me" statements together.
- 4) Encourage staffers to think of one positive wish for their partner.
- 5) Lead staffers in saying out loud together, "Because this person is a fellow human being, just like me."
- 6) Have one line shift places so that everyone has a new partner.
- 7) Repeat the exercise for as long as it resonates with the group.



Kindness in Action

In the midst of change it's easy for our fear response to overwhelm us with stress hormones. Take some time to make a list of what's changing in your work life and what remains the same. The actual changes may be less overwhelming than first thought, and seeing a list of constants may provide comfort. Then use "Thank You for Your Kindness" notes to acknowledge and encourage those staff members who are working to make the process of change more comfortable for others.

Cast a positive light on change by working together to help a local nonprofit organization that's also experiencing change. By shifting the focus from ourselves to the needs of others, we encourage a new perspective, and we see ourselves as members of a larger community. Celebrate the idea of "change" by collecting coins for the nonprofit of your choice. Make a big deal about the "change" drive and present the donation at the end of the month.

Kind Dialogue

Communicating with Kindness Through Change: Knowing that most people dread change at work (even if they are currently dissatisfied), make dilemmas and communication around change the focus of your Kind Dialogue practice this month. In small groups, create field-specific scenarios that help teams think through kind responses to helping others cope with change, as well as self-kindness practices around our own discomfort with change. Use these change-oriented discussions to help pay attention to initial reactions, which often may stem from fear and be centered in our unconscious brain. Instead, think through possible kind choices and think about how our responses might change if we can strive for equanimity and gentle matter-of-factness with others and ourselves.