



Kind Colleagues Month 7: Creating a Kind Environment



Question of the Month

Why is it important to consider our surroundings? How do we show kindness to the earth and its creatures?

Kind Colleagues Week 1

Being Kind in Response to Unkind Behavior: It's not always easy to be kind, and it's particularly challenging when someone is unkind to us. Our tendency is to mirror the emotions, feelings, and mood of that person. This is called "complementary behavior" and it's the behavior we expect.¹ When someone is warm to us, we're warm in return. Likewise, if someone is rude, dismissive, or hurtful, our tendency is to react with similar disrespect. However, we can choose to act with intentional kindness when someone has been unkind or inappropriate. Stop, take a breath, and think about the kind way to respond. We might choose to be kind to ourselves and walk away from the situation, especially if speaking up feels too hard or not safe. Or, we may choose to calmly let the other person know their behavior is hurtful. When it comes to our coworkers, one study found that an act of rudeness witnessed in the morning can lead to greater perceptions of workplace rudeness throughout the workday, causing lower task performance and goal progress, and greater interaction avoidance.² When we're regularly practicing our kindness skills and feel good about ourselves, we can prioritize kind responses to unkind behavior, even if that means putting ourselves first. It can be an act of self-kindness to decline to mirror negative behaviors.

Kind Colleagues Week 2: Self-Kindness

Benefits of Spending Time Outdoors: 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.³ Studies have shown that exposure to the natural world—in both urban green spaces and rural natural environments—has significant and wide-ranging health benefits, including reduced risk of cardiovascular disease and high blood pressure.⁴ Encourage staff members to take their breaks outside, be it at the office or at home, and then reflect on how they feel directly afterward. Consider what spending time outdoors has to do with kindness. In staff or team meetings, talk about how being in nature helps with productivity, improves mood, and boosts work engagement. Commit to making time outside a priority for staff—especially if that time is free of personal technology.



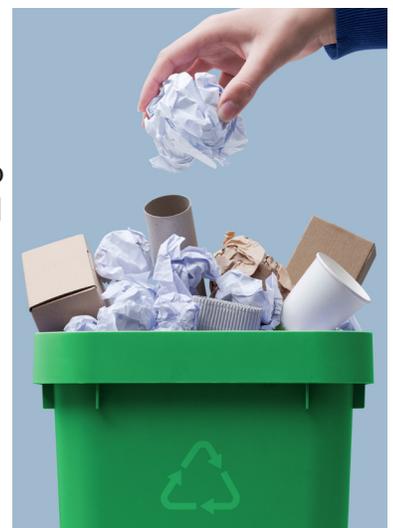
Kind Colleagues Week 3: Kindness in Action: Everyday Practices

Consider your Work Environment: 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. Research has also revealed benefits to employee health, job satisfaction, and overall comfort when environment-related design features are considered.⁵ It's clear that an organized, comfortable, aesthetically pleasing, and responsive environment is conducive to strong work performance. Consider how your environment affects your mood and overall workplace culture, and extend this consideration to staff members who are working from home. Encourage them to take the time to set up their home workspace with thought and kindness. This may include establishing a designated workspace with good lighting and low noise distraction, decluttering, using a room divider or tall plants for privacy, and reducing online distractions.



Kind Colleagues Week 4: Kindness in Action: Everyday Practices

Kindness to the Earth and Animals: Showing kindness towards the earth and its creatures can have a huge impact on our surroundings, and an organization's attitude towards responsible environmental practices can directly influence employee behavior. In a study examining the small, everyday sustainability behaviors that individual employees might choose to perform, researchers found that workplace attitude directly impacted moral reflectiveness, coworker pro-environmental advocacy, and environmental commitment.⁶ Educate and motivate staff members about the value of creating spaces that support intentional kindness—at work, at home, and in our communities. Discuss why a diverse local ecosystem helps us all thrive and how preserving a safe environment for many species is an act of kindness. 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. Examples include collecting old towels and sheets to donate to an animal shelter, being sure to recycle in the office and at home, or thinking of ways to create less waste.



Additional Activities

Kind Leadership: Signal your organization’s commitment to environmental awareness by supporting programs that make a conscious effort to reduce waste. According to the research, “Employees are more likely to take responsibility for environmental sustainability practices if they get sufficient support from above, and ‘green leadership’ in organizations is helpful to support environmental sustainability, as these leaders inspire cultural changes and are recognized by the employees.⁷ Consider providing training sessions to increase knowledge of environmental issues, and think about how you might track and report back progress in order to inspire action. Model kindness to the environment with ideas such as providing reusable water bottles for all employees, reducing single-use plastics, setting up clearly marked recycling bins, discouraging printing and going paperless where possible, working with vendors to reduce packaging, etc.



Kindness at Home: Encourage staff to apply awareness of their role in producing less waste, and the value of creating spaces that support intentional kindness, to the home. Come up with a list of suggested actions that staff members can take to look after the earth and its creatures in their own neighborhoods, such as organizing community trash pick-up events or landscaping with native plants. The influence of office-wide programs like reducing single-use plastics or food waste can extend to our personal spaces and be encouraged among household members.⁸ Link environmental awareness-building and kindness by sharing progress or ideas at staff meetings.



References

1. Hopwood, C.J. (2016, Jul 16). Don't Do What I Do: How Getting Out Of Sync Can Help Relationships. NPR. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2016/07/16/485721853/dont-do-what-i-do-how-getting-out-of-sync-can-help-relationships>.
2. Woolum, A. et al. (2017). “Rude color glasses: The contaminating effects of witnessed morning rudeness on perceptions and behaviors throughout the workday.” *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 102(12), 1658–1672. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000247>
3. Zhang, J.W. et al. (2014). “An occasion for unselfing: Beautiful nature leads to prosociality.” *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, Volume 37, Pages 61-72, ISSN 0272-4944, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2013.11.008>.
4. Twohig-Bennett, C. & Jones, A. (2018). “The health benefits of the great outdoors: A systematic review and meta-analysis of greenspace exposure and health outcomes.” *Environmental Research*, Volume 166, Pages 628-637, ISSN 0013-9351, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envres.2018.06.030>
5. Candido, C. et al. (2019). “Designing activity-based workspaces: satisfaction, productivity and physical activity.” *Building Research & Information*, 47:3, 275-289, DOI: 10.1080/09613218.2018.1476372.
6. Afsar, B. & Umrani, W.A. (2019). “Corporate social responsibility and pro-environmental behavior at workplace: The role of moral reflectiveness, coworker advocacy, and environmental commitment.” *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, Volume27, Issue1, <https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.1777>
7. Young, W. et al. (2015). “Changing Behaviour: Successful Environmental Programmes in the Workplace.” *Business Strategy and the Environment*, Volume24, Issue8, <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.1836>
8. Luu, T.T. (2021). “Can food waste behavior be managed within the B2B workplace and beyond? The roles of quality of green communication and dual mediation paths.” *Industrial Marketing Management SI: Food Waste*, Volume 93, February 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2020.07.012>.