



Kind Colleagues Month 9: Kindness and Change



Question of the Month

How can we maintain kindness in times of change?

Kind Colleagues Week 1

Rejection: Rejection is a normal part of our lives. We propose a great idea, but our team doesn't respond enthusiastically. We share an invitation to participate in an event or project, but don't receive much interest from our colleagues. Rejection hurts because our brains are designed to respond powerfully to this experience. Citing experiments involving MRIs, psychologist Guy Winch has observed that "the same areas of our brain become activated when we experience rejection as when we experience physical pain."^{1,2} It's easy to feel discouraged when we experience rejection, or skepticism towards new ideas, but we can make a change and mediate those feelings by creating a supportive work climate that values new insights, thoughtful listening and response, and self-kindness. Another study found that self-compassion both predicts and promotes adaptive responses to rejection, such as coping in a way that lessens its sting.³ When we create a culture where people feel connected, we help them to practice kindness towards themselves and others, even in difficult situations.

Kind Colleagues Week 2: Self-Kindness

Exploring Something New: Exploring something novel just for the fun of it can ease stress, and it's also a great way to increase social connections and strengthen your community. This month, think about exploring a new hobby, learning about a new culture, or taking a class. If time is a concern, remember that trying something new could also mean making a small change. Consider trying a new food or sharing an idea with coworkers. We're often resistant to change or risk because it exposes us to potentially uncomfortable feelings like frustration, disappointment, or embarrassment. However, Professor Joan Rosenberg notes that "you are at your greatest emotional strength when you consciously choose to 'put yourself out there'—to take risks to pursue what is meaningful to you."⁴ New experiences foster creativity, expose you to diverse perspectives, and prepare you for future challenges, all of which contribute to your self-kindness practice.



Kind Colleagues Week 3: Kindness in Action: Everyday Practices

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. During times of change when we may be feeling scared, vulnerable, or stressed, it's helpful to remember that our coworkers are experiencing these reactions as well. 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, and we can acknowledge the difficulties we all experience. This month, try using the following phrases during moments of frustration with a coworker or when you're having trouble communicating with someone; repeat each phrase out loud:

- 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.
- This person deserves compassion and support, just like me
- This person might be going through a difficult time, just like me
- This person might be having trouble navigating change and uncertainty, just like me
- This person is a fellow human being, just like me.

This exercise will help staff members see their connections and treat one another with kindness.



Kind Colleagues Week 4: Kindness in Action: Everyday Practices

Gratitude for Support During Change: 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. Have any of these changes gotten easier to navigate over time? Have there been any positive outcomes from these changes? In some cases, the actual changes may be less overwhelming than we'd first thought. Meanwhile, seeing a list of constants may provide comfort. Next, write Thank You notes to acknowledge and encourage those staff members who are working to make the process of change more comfortable and manageable. 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. And by expressing gratitude we're practicing kindness towards ourselves and others which can support us through change and uncertainty.



Thank You Notes
English · Spanish

Additional Activities

Kind Leadership: As organizations adapt to rapid change and higher numbers of workers who need or wish to work remotely, kindness is of particular importance. Software CEO Saïd Ziouani notes that “With remote teams or a hybrid structure, kindness is imperative to strengthen company culture and foster empathy in a high performing organization.”⁵ Changing workplace expectations and understanding around work/life balance are an opportunity for leadership to exhibit trust and embrace learning and adaptation. Kindness can also be a useful tool as we learn to work and collaborate successfully across new platforms: “With kindness as a priority, employees and leaders get accustomed to and familiar with a considerate approach that permeates across communication platforms, be it a mobile text, Slack message or email.”⁵ One thing that may be lost during remote working is potential moments of connection.⁶ Commit to finding ways to cultivate social connections and recognize kindness during online meetings with ice breakers, sharing examples of kindness witnessed, or expressing gratitude.



Kindness at Home: It’s crucial to prioritize kindness when working from home, whether we’re doing so a few days or every day of the week, especially since this schedule may be newer to many. Setting specific work hours is one way to set boundaries and assure we’re not cutting into personal time or answering emails late at night. Some organizations have begun adding working hours to their email signatures, a kind version of which might look like: “My working hours may be different than yours. Practice self-kindness by responding during your normal working hours, unless otherwise requested (X Based | Time Zone: X).” Employees should be encouraged to prioritize and schedule self-care opportunities and time with family. Flexible work schedules and location are increasingly sought-after benefits that fit individual needs and may improve our wellbeing, and it’s important to implement kind strategies around them.



References

1. Winch, G. (2015, Dec 8). Why rejection hurts so much – and what to do about it. *Ideas.TED.com*. Retrieved from <https://ideas.ted.com/why-rejection-hurts-so-much-and-what-to-do-about-it/>.
2. Kross, E. et al. (2011). “Social rejection shares somatosensory representations with physical pain.” *PNAS*, 108 (15) 6270-6275 <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1102693108>.
3. Koch, E.J. (2020) “Remembering that ‘Everybody Hurts’: The Role of Self-Compassion in Responses to Rejection.” *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 42:3, 167-175, DOI: 10.1080/01973533.2020.1726748.
4. Rosenberg, J. (2020, Aug 15). How to Be More Vulnerable and Authentic. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/emotional-mastery/202008/how-be-more-vulnerable-and-authentic>.
5. Ziouani, S. (2021, Jul 5). The Kindness Imperative: Creating An Intentionally Kind Culture. *Forbes*. www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2021/07/05/the-kindness-imperative-creating-an-intentionally-kind-culture.
6. Sezer, O., Nault, K., & Klein, N. (2021, May 7). Don't Underestimate the Power of Kindness at Work. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2021/05/dont-underestimate-the-power-of-kindness-at-work>.