

# The power of kindness at workplace

**On World Kindness Day, Reji Varghese explores what it means to be a kind leader and why it is good for employees and businesses**



The words 'leadership' and 'kindness' aren't two words seen together usually. Kindness is not considered a critical quality that leaders should possess and is usually not advocated by human resource trainers and leadership coaches. Being kind may feel like a vulnerability, but it is a potent leadership tool that is largely overlooked.

When leaders and managers are in perpetual crisis mode and more concerned with increasing shareholder value, profit, targets, etc., kindness, in the form of the simplest words and gestures, often gets lost. Stress can alter behaviour. Calm, high-performing employees can show confusion and burnout in a stressed-out workplace.

According to a recent Gallup survey, 55% of employees felt that their employer does not care about their well-being. Many companies are beginning to realise that this needs to change. Practising active, unconditional kindness can transform the workplace. While developing other skill sets takes time and effort, developing empathy does not.

Varghese Jacob, Chief Integrator of the Byrju Foundation, says, "Unconditional kindness is an essential quality that a leader should have. This earns a leader the respect of others, and they will be perceived as a good human being and a fair and trustworthy person."

"Unconditional kindness will earn them the love and trust of their colleagues, and they will inspire others rather than be

### Kindness is not a weakness

Being kind doesn't mean avoiding making the hard decisions or coming across as weak. It simply means considering your decisions' impact on people and ensuring they are treated fairly and empathetically.

Dr Madhuri Menon, former mental health education academy dean, says, "Kindness is often seen as a fluffy quality not to be exhibited by a macho leader. It is associated with feminine traits, a quality that makes a leader a pushover. But today, leadership has come a long way from the macho model of brawn and brashness to firm, understanding, empathetic, sensitive and many such 'gentler' qualities."

"Rather than making a leader a pushover, it makes a true leader capable of more rational decisions since it takes into account more repercussions and perspectives before arriving at that decision," she says.

### Benefits of kindness

■ **Kindness affects the bottom line:** A landmark study by Nathan Podsakoff and Steven Whiting analysed more than 3,500 businesses and found that acts of courtesy, helping and praise were predictive of productivity, efficiency, and lower turnover rates. This contributed to higher business success and facilitated a culture of collabo-

■ **Improving morale, teamwork:** Kindness creates a positive culture where people feel respected, appreciated and valued. Empathetic leaders understand that everyone has unique skills and strengths and that working together leads to better outcomes. A 2018 study by Joseph Chancellor and Seth Margolis found that people treated kindly at work repay the favour by being 27% more generous to their co-workers than a control group. The study also found that kindness sparks increased well-being in the workplace, which, in turn, creates higher energy levels and increased positivity.

■ **Cultivating loyalty and retaining talent:** Kind leaders develop strong relationships with their employees, which leads to increased employee engagement and loyalty. Team members who feel connected to their leaders are inevitably more committed to the organization and its goals. Working for a leader that employees respect, trust and admire is critical in retaining top talent. A 2021 survey by Ernst and Young in the US showed that 90% of workers say empathetic leadership leads to higher job satisfaction, and 79% agreed it decreases employee turnover.

■ **Ripple effect:** Kindness creates a ripple effect. If you are kind to your direct reports,

they manage, creating a virtuous cycle of kindness that benefits the entire organisation.

■ **Good for health:** The first beneficiary of an act of kindness is the giver of the kindness. Dr CMA Bellappa, chief medical officer of a healthcare chain, says, "Research has shown that engaging in acts of kindness produces oxytocin, endorphins and serotonin. These feel-good chemicals improve your well-being, calm you down, and make you happy. Studies have also shown that perpetually kind people have 23% less of the stress hormone cortisol and age two times slower than the average population."

### Promoting kindness at work

■ **Be kind to yourself.** Being kind to others is difficult if you are perennially overworked, stressed, and tired. Take care of yourself by eating healthy, getting enough exercise and sleep, and taking time out.

■ **Set an example by being kind and supportive to your coworkers** to create a climate that practices these values. Recognise the acts of kindness inside the organisation. ■ **Encourage honest communication and show appreciation.** Be sure to listen to others with an open mind. Take the time to thank and recognise your coworkers for their challenging work and contributions. ■ **Be inclusive in group activities and decision-making.** It is important to understand different people, cultures, orientations, abilities etc. to appreciate each other's qualities.

■ **Practise forgiveness and offer support.** Be there to support your coworkers when they need help or have a problem. Don't hold grudges.

■ **Train yourself in practising kindness.** Ritchie Davidson of the University of Wisconsin has compared practising empathy and compassion to weight training: "People can build up their compassion 'muscle' and respond to others' suffering with care and a desire to help."

Dr Madhuri says, "In today's competitive business, human resources and training departments cannot expect this quality in everyone's DNA. It's crucial to articulate it everytime and consciously build it into the system."

## Building a career in sports management

Becoming a sports manager requires education, skills development, and practical experience. Here's a step-by-step guide on how to pursue a career as a sports manager:

- **Obtain the right education.** Start by earning a bachelor's degree in sports management, business administration, marketing, or a related field. Some universities offer specialised programmes in sports management, such as sports law, finance, marketing, and organizational management. A master's degree in sports management or a related field can enhance your knowledge and competitiveness in the job market.
- **Gain relevant experience.** Seek internships with sports organisations, teams, or agencies to gain practical experience in the industry. Volunteer for local sports events, clubs, or organisations. It demonstrates your passion for sports and provides experience and networking opportunities.
- **Skills:** Develop strong verbal and written communication skills to convey ideas clearly and work collaboratively with athletes, coaches, sponsors, and other stakeholders. Develop leadership qualities, including decision-making, problem-solving, and inspiring others. Negotiating contracts, sponsorships, and other agreements is a common aspect of sports management. Hone your negotiation skills to ensure favourable outcomes for your organisation or clients. Good time management skills are crucial for handling multiple tasks and deadlines effectively. To analyse data, trends, and performance metrics and strategies, develop analytical skills. Build a professional network within the sports industry by attending conferences, seminars,

and networking events. ■ **Specialise in an area of interest,** such as event management, marketing, player development, or sports analytics. It can make you more marketable and allow you to focus on areas that align with your interests and strengths.

■ **Stay informed and adapt.** Keep abreast of industry trends, regulations, and emerging technologies. The sports industry is dynamic, and staying informed will help you adapt to changes and remain competitive in your career.

■ **Build a professional portfolio.** Showcase your education, experience, and accomplishments in a professional portfolio. Include any successful projects, internships, and relevant coursework. A well-crafted



portfolio can impress potential employers or clients.

■ **Look for entry-level positions** in sports management, such as assistant roles, coordinator positions, or internships. Gain practical experience and progressively move up the career ladder.

By combining education, hands-on experience, and developing essential skills, you can position yourself for a successful career as a sports manager. Remember to stay proactive, network within the industry, and continuously seek opportunities for growth and advancement.

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