

## Kindness in Troubled Times

Kindness seems like a misnomer during this time of conflict and war. American novelist Henry James noted, “Three things in human life are important. The first is to be kind. The second is to be kind. And the third is to be kind.” He is not too far wrong. However, there is a disdain for kindness in leadership. Kind leaders are perceived to be weak. But, kindness can have even greater impact especially when days are dark and dreary. To be kind is one of the highest expressions of human values.

Allow me to make some suggestions on how you as a leader can make this a personal value in leadership style and in your life.

### **Kindness comes from the heart.**

For kindness to be sincere, it must come from the heart. It cannot be forced or coerced. Genuineness cannot be manufactured. Kindness, at its best, stems from a sincere heart, without any string attached. We do it because we do not expect any reward. Kindness stems from the paradigm that humans are important regardless of their status or race or religion – important enough for us to pause to think about others and exercise goodness to others.

### **Kindness is the offspring of gratitude.**

The genesis of kindness is gratitude. For kindness to stem from our heart, we need to learn gratitude. Ungrateful leaders will find it difficult to be kind. They will always feel short-changed, left out, and neglected. On the contrary, grateful leaders realize that the world does not owe them a living. They are grateful for all the little blessings in life and that they are where they are because of the efforts or contributions by other people.

“You don’t find success just inside yourself. You find success outside yourself. Success is due to other-persons in your life: boss, friend, family member.” Jack Trout, Marketing Guru, *The Power of Simplicity*.

Great leaders don’t take life or success for granted. They are grateful for a new day, appreciative of others and able to see the light in the midst of darkness. Therefore, they are reaching out, finding ways to share their resources with other people because they recognize that true contentment comes from the joy of developing others. Out of a grateful heart, they can shower kindness spontaneously.

It was Wendy Lustbader, a mental health counselor, who observes that the words ‘genius’ and ‘generous’ come from the Latin root ‘genere’ meaning ‘to beget.’ To have a genius for life is to possess the ability to generate warmth and well being in others.

### **Kindness must be affirmed.**

Kindness begets kindness. I believe that many of us are kind. The problem is we have not been observant enough and/or have taken other people’s kindness for granted. We should affirm and applaud kindness. We need to be observant and notice the kind deeds that others do for us and for each other.

In the office, when our subordinates take the extra effort to assist in a project or work late to complete a deadline, leaders should applaud these kind acts. Unfortunately, most of us have taken kindness for granted.

For the virtue of kindness to become an organization's culture, we must learn to spot people doing things right, going the extra mile, applauding effort and not just performance, and when there is a show of a good co-operative team spirit. Typical Singaporeans are not only demanding but also unkind. It is truism that when we do something well, nobody remembers. But when we do something wrong, nobody forgets. Let's reverse this trend and create a kinder society. Let's observe kind acts and be spontaneous and generous in affirming them.

### **Kindness is doing small things for others.**

The practice of kindness consists of little acts – a word of thanks, a nod of approval, a tip at a restaurant, a smile for a weary worker, a greeting on the street, a hug for a friend. In my 20 years of marriage, I realize that it is not the big crises that would threaten to break up a marriage but rather it is the small irritations or conflicts a couple experience daily. I call these "termites in relationship."

If it is true that small things break up a marriage, conversely, it is also true that small things can enrich a marriage. In my mediation work with divorce couples in the family court, the most frequent cited factor for the breakdown in marriage is no TLC – no Tender Loving Care.

A do-nothing relationship will not do. In our fast-paced and achievement oriented corporate life, relationships are seldom nurtured but allowed to slide into neglect and indifference. We become presumptuous of one another. One of the hallmarks of a great team in an organization is when team members are kind to each other.

When staffs are considerate to each other,  
When a staff enquires about an exhausted colleague's health,  
When we send an email to cheer a colleague after a difficult project,  
When a leader's notices and encourages the team when they are losing steam,  
All these small things count!

But, truly, we have lost the art of being kind. That is why we need to promote kindness as a virtue and a value because it may be the clue in salvaging our negative-laden corporate life.

### **Kindness has reverberating effects.**

Largesse enlarges our lives. Frederick Buechner writes, "The life I touch for good or ill will touch another life, and that in turn another, until who knows where the trembling stops or in what far place my touch will be felt." Our acts of kindness have reverberations that are felt way beyond our imagination.

Hence, we must remember that small things count. It will make a great difference to our marriage, family, organization and society. Like charity, kindness begins at home. However, it can ill afford to stay within the confines of the home. It must spread to our neighbors, our schools and our corporate worlds.

No wonder Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel near the end of his life concludes, "When I was young, I used to admire intelligent people; as I grow older, I admire kind people."

Let's work towards being kind leaders!

"Kindness is the oil that takes the friction out of life" - Anonymous

"Do all the good you can  
By all the means you can,  
In all the ways you can,  
In all the places you can,  
At all the times you can,  
To all the people you can,  
As long as ever you can." John Wesley

"I expect to pass through life but once, If, therefore, there is any kindness I can show, or any good thing I can do to any fellow human being, let me do it now, and not defer or neglect it, as I will not pass this way again." William Penn

“You cannot do a kindness to soon, for you will never know how soon it will be too late.” Ralph Waldo Emerson

“No act of kindness, no matter how small, ever is wasted.” Aesop

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<sup>i</sup> Trout, J. “The Power of Simplicity.” [McGraw-Hill. 1999.](#)