



When push comes to shove, leaders may sometimes need to sacrifice being kind in order to get results...right? Wrong! Too many confuse benevolent attitudes with weakness — to the detriment of their ability to lead!

Kindness at work (even in a crisis)

Based on *Leading with Kindness*, **William F. BAKER** and **Michael O'MALLEY** (AMACOM, August 2008); "Peut-on être gentil et réussir?" (*Management*, December 2011); "La bienveillance est superproductive," (*Le JDD*, November 11, 2009).

Practicing kindness at work impacts bottom-line business results, especially during times of crisis: it increases motivation, retains the best and the brightest employees, facilitates collaboration, and improves morale and performance results in the face of uncertainty or even disaster. However, kindness remains controversial, with many stubbornly clinging to the out-moded idea that it represents a sign of weakness. Indeed, one in six employees in France today feel they have been victims of hostile behaviors (contemptuous attitudes, degrading treatment, or gratuitous sabotage) at work,¹ while another study by the Employment Law Alliance reports that a total of at least 44% of Americans feel they have experienced abuse in the workplace.² In response to the grave toll that a lack of kindness

takes on company performance, more and more leaders today are encouraging this soft skill as a key corporate cultural value.

Kindness is not weak

There is a difference between being "unconditionally nice," which leads to what the authors of *Leading with Kindness* call "cults of yes" that are not conducive to learning, and kindness, which, because it is honest and pushes others to do better, "isn't always nice." A kind leader would not allow staff to persist in error or maintain false ideas about their level of performance; a kind leader is direct, open, and sometimes even there to give a "push" as needed. In other words, kindness is not for the "faint of heart." "The purpose of kind leadership isn't to protect or

shelter employees from hard decisions, troublesome issues or setbacks but to inspire trial, perseverance, and personal growth." So where does the kindness come in? A kind leader does not push employees just for the sake of the organization; they are genuinely concerned with the personal development of the individual. "In a way, kind leaders are selfish since they revel and find satisfaction in the successes of others. They realize that the successful leader helps others to become successful."

Are leaders today tougher than previous generations?

As president of E.Leclerc, a French super-market chain, Michel-Edouard Leclerc

What is kindness?

Kindness:

- ✓ Encourages resilience and self confidence in others
- ✓ Enables people to think big and believe in what they are capable of accomplishing
- ✓ Makes others stronger; paternalism weakens

Kindness is NOT:

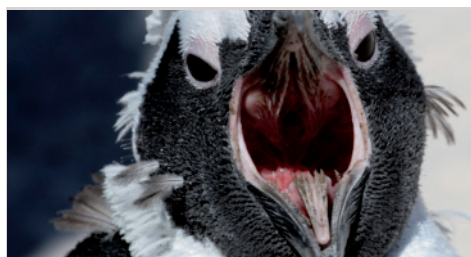
- ✗ A personality type
- ✗ Indulgent and naïve
- ✗ The same as likeability (kindness does not disqualify the expression of "difficult" emotions, such as displeasure, nor does it mean being excessively friendly or agreeable)

“Reciprocity is hardwired into human DNA: kindness is contagious!”

understands toughness: his chain of stores is number one in France, beating out its closest competitor, Carrefour, with 16.4% share of the market and 37.4 billion in sales in 2010. So what does Leclerc have to say about kindness? “Do not confuse kindness with naivety.” Assertive? Yes. Malicious? No. “I make myself accessible, I listen, I try to arbitrate, I take into account the points of view of others rather than just my own,” says Leclerc. “I am like this in private, with my colleagues, and with store partners.” Do other Leclerc managers share his views on the importance of kindness? Traders and shop owners have to carve out a place among tough competition, often resulting in what he describes as belligerent or bloodthirsty attitudes — something Leclerc notes has affected overall company culture in the past. “This culture of winning and success was historically perpetuated in the internal management of the stores. But it is changing ... the next generation suffers less from this complex. Originally paternalistic, management styles are becoming more rational, more methodical, and participatory. For example, I think I am kinder — but also less charismatic — than my father.”

Why is it hard to remain kind in a crisis?

Most (if not all) people and companies would say they value kindness. “But, in difficult times, we often stop being kind to others,” notes author Juliette Tournand, “because we tend to view kindness as a form of self-denial.” In other words, when



“Horrible Bosses” ?

A recent study suggests that leaders still have a lot further to go in terms of demonstrating adequately benevolent attitudes to their employees:

- **42%** of employees report their boss is more concerned with saving his or her own job than with developing and assisting employees to be productive
- **29%** feel their boss would “throw them under the bus” if it meant saving the boss’s own job
- **34%** feel their boss is “two-faced,” as in he or she is nice in person but speaks negatively about them behind their backs
- **32%** say they work for a “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde”
- **24%** caught their supervisor in a direct lie but never received an apology or explanation

Based on a survey of more than 400 mid-level employees from a variety of industries, conducted by Dr. Wayne Hochwarter, as published in “You want to talk ‘Horrible Bosses’? One Florida State professor is the expert” (*Florida State University News*, July 2011).

people are under stress, they often become less kind because they believe, perhaps subconsciously, that being kind is another demand on them versus a way of easing their own difficulties. What many people seem not to realize is that kindness actually stands to benefit both givers and receivers more during times of crisis than periods of calm, because it facilitates many of the processes most essential to solving prob- ...

Excellent leadership is linked to kindness

Being a leader means fulfilling three main roles: framer, interpreter, and enabler. What do these roles have in common? They all involve the care of others.

- 1. Framers** provide a framework for what people can and cannot do; what is expected and what is not. They establish clear boundaries, standards of conduct, and challenging goals that everyone must strive for.
- 2. Interpreters** help others make sense of their efforts and understand how and why things have gone right or wrong.
- 3. Enablers** develop the potential in others and inspire them to action that will result in ongoing improvement.

“We prize particular qualities in those entrusted with the care of others,” point out Baker and O’Malley. “These are qualities that can bring out the very best in others by helping them to recognize their unique talents, hone their skills, deliver exceptional — perhaps at times surprising — performance, and remain engaged in the life of the community.” Charisma is great (especially if you work in television or politics), but, say the authors, given its insignificance to a leader’s ability to bring out the best in those around them, it is not “the signature characteristic of a great leader... Kindness is.”

... lems, such as open, honest communication, collaboration, and creativity. Meanwhile, many leaders only know one method of dealing with crisis: turning up the pressure. "From the top of the hierarchy to the base, where it crushes them in the field," says Tournand. When the chain of command devolves into senseless domination and submission, performance suffers. But if leaders work beforehand to foster a heightened awareness of the importance of kindness as a corporate value and a business strategy, people are more likely to continue working together constructively when crisis hits.

Creating a culture of kindness: leaders are role models

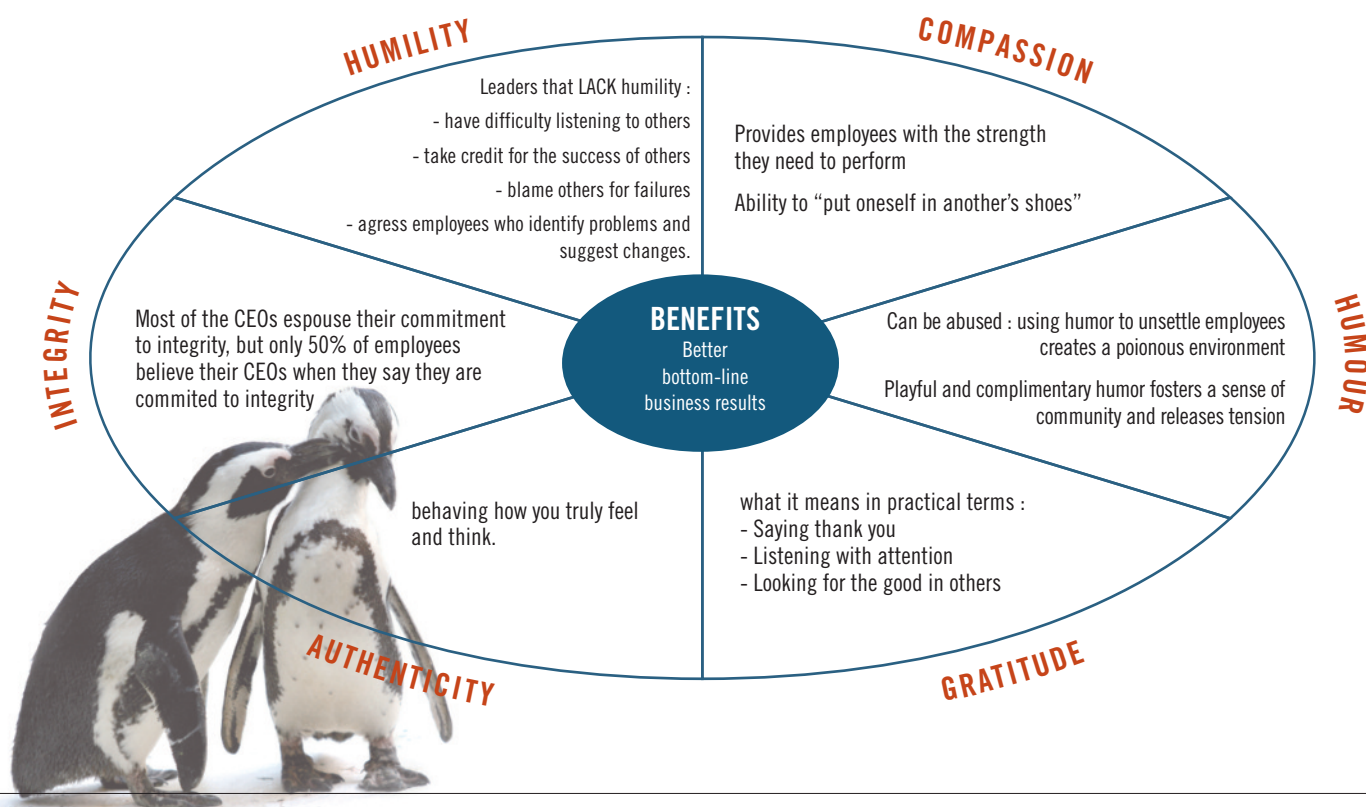
Reciprocity is hardwired into human DNA; consequently, the way we treat others is most likely how they will end up treating us. Kindness is thus something that can catch on (or not!) within an organization: the choice is up to company leaders. In an article "Building the civilized workplace" for the McKinsey Quarterly, author Robert Sutton emphasizes the contagious nature of kindness and, even more so, unkindness. Sutton interviews Lars Dalgaard, the CEO and cofounder of Success Factors, a multinational software company that provides cloud-based HCM solutions and prides itself on maintaining "jerk-free" workplaces, about how to foster a respectful and kind corporate culture. Dalgaard supports his company's core value of "employing no jerks" by personally modeling the proper behaviors. The rare times that he "blows it" at meetings, losing his temper and acting unkindly, Dalgaard apologizes not

just to those that were present in the meeting but also publicly to the entire company, sending a clear message that unkind behaviors are unacceptable. A study conducted by the Center for Creative Leadership supports Dalgaard's sense that it is important for him to lead by example, identifying a direct correlation between the soft skills of leaders and the corporate culture; what is more, the strength of this correlation was found to increase with the level of the executive.³ Media psychologist, keynoter, and workplace consultant Dr. Judith Sills similarly concludes that the behaviors of top leaders heavily determine to what extent kindness becomes a shared cultural value: "For better or worse, the CEO sets the emotional tone."⁴

Ultimately, what distinguishes a leader is their ability to bring out the best in the people around them — their skill in encouraging others to push themselves, learn new skills, and take on new responsibilities. To inspire others — "no matter how tentative" — to test unfamiliar waters requires kindness, because it communicates to others that those waters are safe. ■

1. Source: INRS as quoted in "Sachez fixer des limites à un patron abusif", *Management*, December 2011, p.51.
2. "Do You Know a Bully at Work? How to Handle the Office Bully and Abuse: Financial, Verbal, Emotional, and Physical," by Patty English (Hubpages).
3. Survey cited in "Why Leaders Need Soft Skills During Tough Economic Times," Ray B. Williams (Success.bz).
4. Source quoted by Judith Sills in her article "Kindness and Corporation" (*Psychology Today*, April 2009).

Six qualities of kind managers





Quarterly results or respect for consumers? Dividends for shareholders or employee well-being? Such binary choices no longer have a future! Being both effective AND visionary, over time, requires companies to be managed in a balanced way, combining profitability and social progress. The challenge for leaders is raising their level of ambition.

How to reconcile economic and social values

Based on *Higher Ambition: How Great Leaders Create Economic and Social Value* by Michael BEER, Flemming Norrgren et al., Harvard Business Press, September 2011.

KEY IDEAS

- **Take care to define your strategy:** Leverage all employees to determine strategic vision and manage it with conviction and agility.
- ● **Create a culture of excellence and accountability:** Be the ambassador first in line to engage all employees in the same direction.
- ● ● **Take advantage of diversity:** Value group work involving multiple areas of expertise, while taking care to empower individuals.