



Kindness.

Uncovering kindness as a professional skill.

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“Kindness is a balancing act of mindfulness and empowerment”

In an annual performance review in one of my earliest professional roles, I remember being told that one of my biggest weaknesses was that I was ‘too nice’. At the time I didn’t think too much about it and for years to come I continued to work in the same way I had. I just figured I was naïve and inexperienced in the workforce.

I had forgotten about this until I was having a chat with a friend about professional progression, and she said to me “never stop being kind. It’s just who you are!”

This time, I felt like I had just been smacked in the face with a cast iron frypan. Kind? My mind exploded...I mean, how relevant was kindness in the business world? What good is that? You didn’t often hear of ‘kindness’ being amongst the list of strengths of top professionals. There didn’t seem to be any place in the professional space for kindness. Everyone was out to get ahead, and to be more successful. Top managers did what they needed to do for the business. They made those ‘tough’ decisions that got things done, with a focus on better systems, or processes, cutting out the inefficiencies that prohibited them from reaching their targets.

At the time I was quite resentful of the comment. In fact, for years I tried to brush it off. I didn’t want to be remembered as ‘kind’. I want to be remembered as ‘successful’.... As someone who was good at what she did. As someone who was called upon to make those big, powerful and final decisions. I want to be the one who had the power to make a difference. I don’t want to be buried and remembered as

someone who was ‘kind’. After all, don’t the nice guys finish last...?

But, against all my inhibitions, it was a statement that always resonated with me. Watching Cinderella on a plane recently, there is a line where Ella’s mother says to her young daughter “Have courage and be kind”. And it dawned on me. The reason that I could never be free of my friends comment was because she was right. Kindness, being kind, displaying kindness, being friendly, generous and considerate of others is part of my being. Some people are witty. Some people are humble. Some people are flamboyant. And some people are kind.

Recently, there is a lot of chatter on kindness in the workplace, and the importance of leaders harnessing emotional intelligence. Being adaptable to different environments and audiences to deliver tailored solutions suitable to the culture is a power skill that is being increasingly recognised as a powerful leadership tool. The ability to distinguish and tailor emotions and feelings to the audience and environment has the power to influence people’s attitudes, thinking and behaviours. And the key force underlining emotional intelligence is: Kindness.

There is a major focus these days in the workforce on the mental health of employees. It’s a huge epidemic in organisations. It’s great that there is no longer a stigma around mental health issues, and more and more so, employers are supporting their employees to overcome their issues. I have often wondered if there is a link between mental health issues and the acceptance of kindness displayed in the workplace.

When kindness starts to be strained, there is a chance that the person has internal anxieties. To be kind, or to display kindness can also be in eye of the

stakeholder. Someone may try to exhibit kindness, but if the receiver is not willing to accept it, or doesn't acknowledge the notion, then the perception of the act may in fact be skewed. Emotions play a major part in the giving and receiving of kindness. These internal anxieties, living up to perceived expectations with a constant fear of failing can affect external acts of kindness. The power of allowing kindness within ourselves to be displayed in the workplace is underestimated. Kindness after all, is contagious. A simple act of kindness will spark the warm and fuzzies, and who doesn't want to feel warm and fuzzy?

“Have courage and be kind.”

Kindness is a balancing act of mindfulness and empowerment. It is made up on a number of elements that when perfectly blended together creates a powerful energy. It has the ability to drive change. To influence and motivate people. To mediate situations and calm people. To deliver sustainable outcomes. To drive collaboration and cooperation. And to change other people's behaviours, emotions and mindsets.

We all exhibit kindness on a daily basis in our personal lives. It's not something that is terribly foreign to us. However in a professional realm, kindness relies on your ability to adapt to the environment and situation, and tailor the delivery accordingly. It relies on your ability to draw on the various elements that support kindness, and how to balance them accordingly. These elements play a vital role in a social capacity, however combined together in a professional realm create an extremely powerful skill.

Bundled up, these elements of kindness have the ability to motivate, to engage and to nurture unwilling staff through times of change. But let's be clear. Kindness should not be mistaken for weakness. It's not about being submissive. It's about getting the message across in a way that stimulates ownership and growth, and to do so with respect and grace to the audience. It's not about being a door-mat or

pushover. Often the kindest people are also the most unyielding.

“It takes guts to be gentle and kind.”

The following elements are key to maintaining kindness within the workplace:

- Leading by example by showing compassion and empathy towards others to manage emotions in a patient and progressive manner;
- Open and transparent communication at all times (it's ok not to know all the answers);
- Encouragement and having faith in the person, refocusing the pressure from someone's inability to their abilities;
- Withholding judgement to allow the possibility of new ideas, concepts and options be freely discovered;
- The ability to perceive the situation, and being adaptable and flexible to the environment, and tailoring the solution for suitable delivery.

Until recently, I really had never thought of kindness as 'skill'. And especially not in a professional realm. As a greater emphasis is placed on 'soft' skills being needed in the workplace, I have discovered that kindness isn't just part of my personality, but it's a skill. A skill that I no longer consider a weakness. It is a strength. Something I am proud to be remembered by. And as the Smith's sang in *I Know it's Over*, "...it takes strength to be gentle and kind. It takes guts to be gentle and kind..."

Be kind. It's free.

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About Alison Fox

Alison has worked across a diverse range of customer centric organisations, with a strong focus on customer engagement, organisational development and design. During her career, she has worked across a variety of creative and corporate organizational development assignments in both public and private

sectors, focusing on frontline management, business management and leadership.

Alison's background in design and public relations has enabled her to lead teams of researchers and designers to develop new customer engagement processes across a large government organisation, providing seamless customer interactions and staff processes to deliver concise information, based around customer and stakeholder communication strategies.

About Phacelift

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Author: *Rod Judkins*
Publisher: Sceptre. 2015

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Author: *Robert Zeigler*

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Title: Tenderness
Author: *Anonymous*
Source: *Qantas QBusiness; April 2016*
<http://www.qantas.com/infodetail/flying/inTheAir/inflightMagazine/qbusiness.pdf>

Song: I Know it's Over
Artist: *The Smiths*
Album: The Queen is Dead; Rough Trade Records. 1986

Title: Disney's Cinderella
Year: 2015
Director: Kenneth Branagh
Writer: Chris Weitz (screenplay)

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