



The Kindness Connection

An excerpt from *The Navigator's Compass, 101 Steps Toward Leadership Excellence*

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As a passionate student of leadership, I have had the good fortune of being able to learn from many leaders over the years. While experience continues to be a trusted teacher, my countless conversations with leaders at all levels have proven to be an invaluable source of knowledge and inspiration. A common thread woven through every conversation is the exploration of how leadership has evolved *and* what separates great leaders from all of the rest.

To be sure, timeless factors such as integrity, trust, respect, consistency and transparency continue to serve as the foundational building blocks of leadership excellence. Although these factors remain at the core of leadership effectiveness, today's complex work climate coupled with the accelerating pace of global change demand more from us as leaders. Central to this demand by my estimation and by the estimation of many leaders I've spoken with in recent months is the need for

a higher level of kindness not just at work but outside of work too. One executive I spoke with recently summed it up quite well when she said, "Today's kindness deficit has resulted in countless people and organizations being emotionally bankrupt. People are hungry for kindness and as leaders we must honor our responsibility as role models".

As a beginning point, kindness is a part of what great leaders do not just occasionally, but consistently. Highly effective leaders know that kindness reduces the emotional distance between two people and as a result, creates a human connection. At another significant level, kindness allows us to forge deeper human bonds which not surprisingly are key to collaboration and a sense of belonging. When we are kind to each other, new relationships are formed and existing relationships are strengthened.

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Much has been written about the positive impact of kindness and while many studies point to related health benefits, the greater motivation for today’s successful leader is that kindness is contagious. Few people are immune to the emotional impact of kindness and as a result, are often inspired to “pay it forward”. Imagine for a moment the last time that someone was kind to you. Was it possible that you extended an act of kindness to someone else? More than likely you did and the resulting impact not only created a human connection but also made you feel good too.

I remember a dear mentor friend of mine who summed-up his motivation for being kind as simply, “it just feels nice to be kind”. When we are kind to others it is nearly impossible not to feel the emotional warmth that kindness produces in ourselves and in others.

Being kind goes well beyond a new demand of leadership. It is by my estimation one of the great opportunities afforded to all leaders regardless of job title or number of direct reports. Not surprisingly, it is an opportunity afforded to everyone not just at work but outside of work too.

As we make our way through the ever increasing demands of our busy lives, let us be mindful of the countless opportunities we are given to discover the kindness connection.

10 Things You Can Do Today:

1. Give the gift of non-judgmental listening to one person.
2. Choose to be fully present when speaking with a member of your team or family.
3. Say thank you two more times today than you did yesterday.
4. Tell someone that they are important to you.
5. Offer an honest compliment to a stranger, a friend or member of your team.
6. Send a thank you note to one person who has been kind to you.
7. Write a positive, affirming email to a member of your team or other co-worker.
8. Allow another driver the right of way at a stop sign or stop light on your way home.
9. Offer to help a friend in need – even a few minutes of your time can make a difference.
10. Acknowledge a complete stranger with a smile.

About David A. O’Brien

David is President of CT based WorkChoice Solutions, a trusted provider of leadership and team effectiveness consulting services that was founded in 2000. He works with a wide range of corporate and nonprofit clients to help bring about sustainable improvements in organizational effectiveness. He is also an in-demand keynote speaker on the topic of leadership excellence. His first book, *The Navigator’s Handbook, 101 Leadership Lessons for Work & Life* is available on-line and in bookstores nationwide. Additionally, his many articles have appeared in a variety of local, regional and national publications. To learn more, please visit WorkChoice Solutions online at www.workchoicesolutions.com or contact him directly at 860.242.1070.

