GROWING COMPASSION AT WORK: A GOOD BUSINESS AND PERSONAL DECISION

Neil B. McGillicuddy, Ph.D.
Employee Assistance Program
University of Buffalo

OBJECTIVES

1. Define compassion
2. Discuss the role of compassion in the workplace
3. Review good reasons to create compassionate work environments
4. Offer tips for creating and adding to compassionate workplaces
5. Answer Your Questions

COMPASSION…

- is the response to the suffering of others that motivates a desire to help.

- is more involved than simple empathy, and commonly <u>gives rise to an active desire to alleviate another's suffering</u>.

IS THERE ROOM FOR COMPASSION IN THE WORKPLACE?

A COMPASSIONATE WORKPLACE…

Is a workplace in which people <u>purposely</u> and <u>commonly</u> go out of their way to help others, be there for others and attend to the needs of others.

A COMPASSIONATE WORKPLACE…

Occurs when workers have the kind of positive regard for their coworkers usually reserved for close friends and family.

IN A COMPASSIONATE WORKPLACE...

People feel valued

People feel supported

People are encouraged to develop their skills and reach their full potential.

A COMPASSIONATE WORKPLACE…

Research shows that the employees in businesses where compassion is emphasized are:

- less stressed
- more satisfied with their jobs
- more engaged
- less burned out
- more loyal to the workplace
- more team-oriented
- less likely to be absent from work

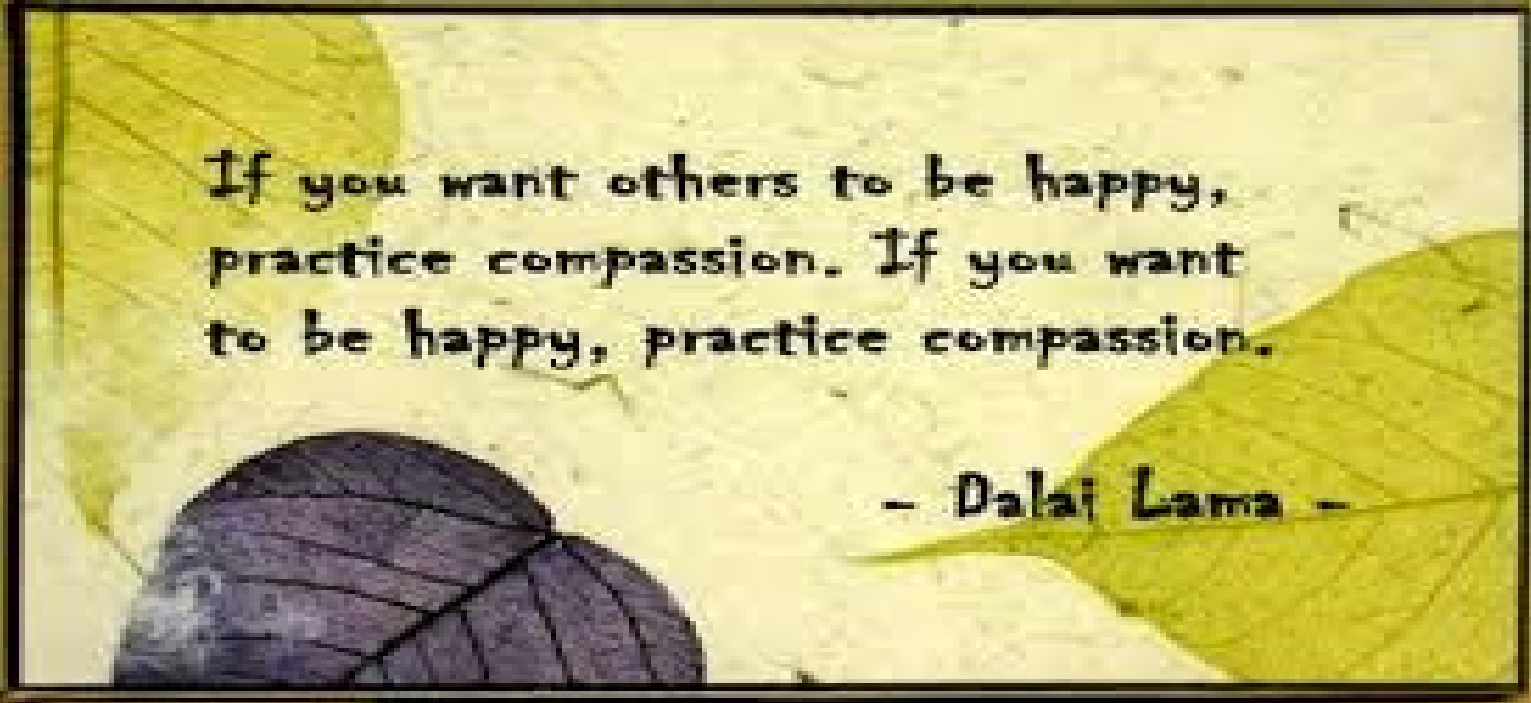# COMPASSIONATE WORKPLACE EXAMPLES

- Colleagues ask and care about each other's work AND non-work issues.

- Colleagues care and ask about each other's feelings, are kind when things don't go well, and show warmth (i.e., bring an extra cup of coffee for a colleague when you get your own, listen when a co-worker needs to talk, etc.).

DEEPER IMPACTS OF COMPASSION IN THE WORKPLACE

- This kind of culture also has ripple effects on people in the vicinity (e.g., vendors, hospital patients, students, etc).
- And these people could also become more compassionate.

- Research points to a strong message to managers, supervisors, everyone – kindness, compassion, and caring matter at work.

- This could have a large impact in a setting such as a University.
- And it can start one department at a time!

COMPASSION

If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.

— Dalai Lama —

6 GOOD REASONS TO CREATE A COMPASSIONATE WORKPLACE

1) Compassion reduces stress.

- Some stress is healthy, and work inherently comes with stress. But when bosses are aggressive, demand the impossible, and lack compassion, employees compete rather than collaborate, and fear failure rather than being motivated to succeed.

- Bad stress makes employees develop more stress-related illness (migraines, acid stomach, etc)

- Workplaces pay the price with more sick days, lower productivity, and higher turnover.

6 GOOD REASONS TO CREATE A COMPASSIONATE WORKPLACE

2) Compassion boosts the bottom line

- 40 "Best Places to Work" were studied. These companies averaged 4X as much profit as S&P 500 companies not on the list.

- The success of these companies was attributed to the compassionate manner in which they treated their employees.

- These same companies bounced back more quickly from the 2008 global economic meltdown.

- This is not a coincidence.

3) Givers come out on top!

Three Types of Colleagues

· **Takers** – want as much as possible and do not give anything back

· **Matchers** – give but ask for or expect something in return. Their life is based on reciprocity

· **Givers** – enjoy helping others and do so with no strings attached

6 GOOD REASONS TO CREATE A COMPASSIONATE WORKPLACE

- The highest proportion of those who make it to the top are givers.

- Secret of their success --- Being compassionate without losing sight of their own goals, AND without allowing their time and goodwill to be exploited by takers.

6 GOOD REASONS TO CREATE A COMPASSIONATE WORKPLACE

4) Compassion makes us happier and healthier

Science shows that kindness has an amazing range of benefits.
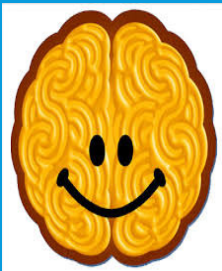
- It activates the pleasure centers of the brain (for the people being kind, the people receiving the kindness, and even people witnessing the kindness!)

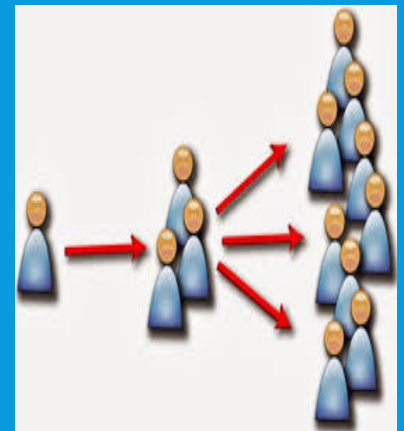- Kind, caring people also develop less chronic disease

6 GOOD REASONS TO CREATE A COMPASSIONATE WORKPLACE

5) Kindness is contagious

- When we see people doing something good for others, we're inspired to emulate them.

  Again, this is with people who experience the kindness/compassion, AND people who witness it!

  This is like the "Pay It Forward"

6 GOOD REASONS TO CREATE A COMPASSIONATE WORKPLACE

6) Everyone wins

- The University
- Departments
- Employees
- Everybody

ACTIVITY

1) Think of a co-worker, boss, or supervisee who did something nice for you. This could be anyone, having done anything.

2) If you have the capability, send them a text or an email right now, thanking them for what they did, reminding them of what they did, and why it was significant for you.

3) If you can't send a text or email to that person right now, please draft, using your own handwriting, a text or an email that you WILL send to one of your colleagues as soon as you have an opportunity later today or tomorrow.

THANK YOU

ACTIVITY

1) How did it feel to "offer" thanks to the co-worker who helped you?

2) How many of you received a response back from your co-worker?

3) How do you think it will feel to receive a response back from the person you gave thanks to?

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

When was the last time I offered compassion to someone at work?

Do I want to be more compassionate at work? If the answer is "yes", what can I do?

Hopefully you can start implementing one or more of these tips into your daily work.

11 WAYS TO CREATE A COMPASSIONATE WORKPLACE

1) Start small

- Five-minute favors go a long way

Just Some Ideas:
- Share knowledge.
- Offer guidance to a co-worker.
- Help someone facing a deadline.
- Notice when someone can use some support; just listen, offering sympathy for a challenge that someone is facing.

11 WAYS TO CREATE A COMPASSIONATE WORKPLACE

2) Get to know your colleagues

Take the time to introduce yourself to someone in the workplace whom you may not know very well. Maybe that new person that eats lunch at her desk every day.

Ask questions about themselves, their family

Greet them regularly, by name.

11 WAYS TO CREATE A COMPASSIONATE WORKPLACE

3. Promote compassionate leaders

- Select and support leaders who are prepared to make changes and listen to, and care about all employees.

- Those leaders are good to work for, retain staff, and develop a good reputation for self, and the dept.

- These bosses stay, or move up, because as seen before, they are productive and foster productivity!
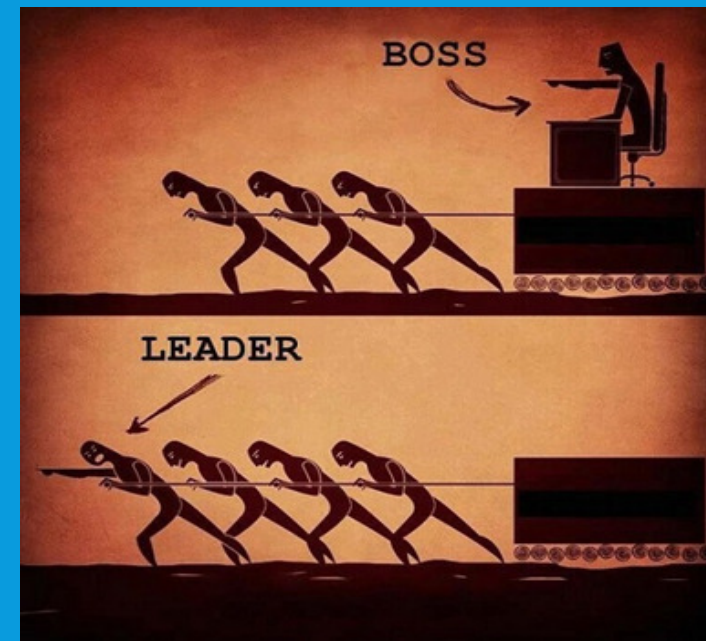
11 WAYS TO CREATE A COMPASSIONATE WORKPLACE

4) Lead by Example

Engage Brainstorms

Get Ideas from Everyone on the Team

· Be good role models

11 WAYS TO CREATE A COMPASSIONATE WORKPLACE

5. Acknowledge Employees' Strengths and Positive Qualities in Front of Others

Find ways to publically recognize and praise employees who go out of their way to help others or do good things
>   These behaviors again boost morale, and make for a happier workplace

Giving bonuses is nice, but by themselves aren't enough to increase morale.

11 WAYS TO CREATE A COMPASSIONATE WORKPLACE

6) Be kind to yourself

· Our biggest enemy is frequently ourselves.

· The kinder we are to ourselves, the more likely we are to be happy, optimistic and satisfied with life.

· And being happy makes it easier to practice kindness.

11 WAYS TO CREATE A COMPASSIONATE WORKPLACE

7. Practice Simple Communication

- Notice when there is pain in the room and create a safe place for people to express their pain.

- Don't judge (criticize) or try to make sense of someone's behavior. Simply listen.

- Don't worry about acting perfectly or saying the perfect thing. Be present and let them know that you care.

11 WAYS TO CREATE A COMPASSIONATE WORKPLACE

8) Organize Team Building Activities

- Celebrating staff birthdays, doing an escape room field trip, having a work softball or volleyball team, working together on the Day of Caring, participating in a Holiday party or charitable project, etc.

- Get Ideas from everybody

- *This cannot be the only activity of the 11 that occurs

9) Ignore the compassion myths

- We might worry that acting in a compassionate way will see us branded as a soft touch who can't get the job done (even though research suggests the opposite is true).

- NICE GUYS (& GALS) DON'T FINISH LAST

11 WAYS TO CREATE A COMPASSIONATE WORKPLACE

- 10) Design a Compassion Challenge
    - Inspire Daily Acts of Kindness

    - Like those step challenges, Make It a Fun Competition Where Behaviors are Logged

    - Maybe Have a Grand Prize for the person who scored the highest

# 11 WAYS TO CREATE A COMPASSIONATE WORKPLACE

11) Try compassion training

- Research in the last 10 years has demonstrated that we can deliberately cultivate empathy and compassion. It confirmed people do act more altruistically after compassion training.

  - Training available online

  - Our EAP department can also help

11 WAYS TO CREATE A COMPASSIONATE WORKPLACE

- Which of these tips will you implement into your work?
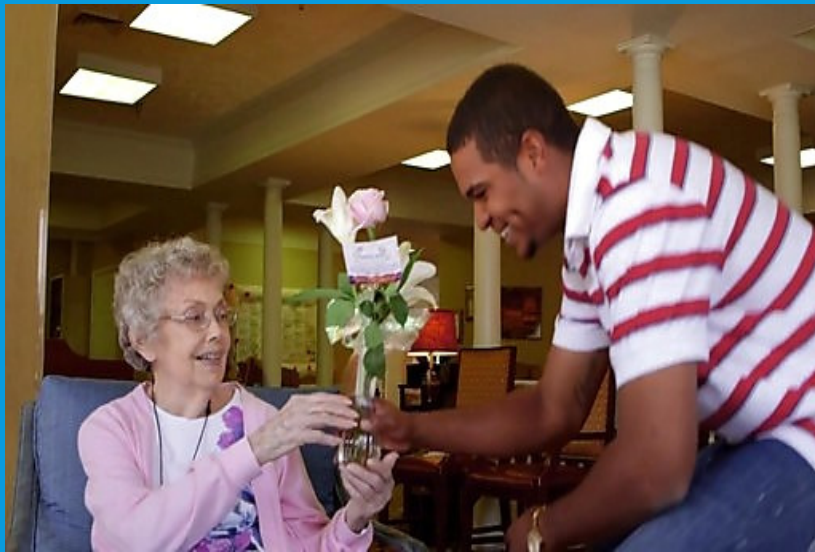
COMPASSIONATE WORKPLACE

- Questions?

Thank you!

Employee Assistance Program

University at Buffalo

716-645-4461

http://www.buffalo.edu/eap