

“Leading With Heart: The Timely and Welcomed Rise of Compassionate Leadership”

I know what some of you might be thinking – compassionate leadership? – isn’t there something of an obligation in every leader to be compassionate, thoughtful, mindful, respectful, and sensitive to the needs and interests of those they lead?

With the challenges of a global pandemic, an increasingly diverse and younger workforce, and combined at a time when many employees are reflecting on just how important our work-life plays a role in our personal and family lives, it is an opportunity to examine the benefits of compassion driven leadership and how it could greatly augment our ability to lead others.

Everyone who has the privilege of leadership has developed a leadership style or approach that they have come to count on and utilize daily. We’ve learned how to lead from various sources – from what we learned in our formal education, from what we’ve learned from past managers and higher-ups, through professional development and education, and even through an adventurous process of “trial and error” – learning what works best and doesn’t...and then learning and adapting new ways to lead.

Being a leader today often means being agile and able to change with both the times and the ever-changing workplace landscape. Add to that, the ever-changing and challenging world of a global pandemic and the transformative generational changes and shifts in today’s workplace. Organizations are having to re-examine how we do work, from where we work, and how work will change and evolve going forward. This has leaders rethinking how they lead and what the future challenges will demand of them. With a more inter-generational, diverse, and younger workplace happening, leaders are reflecting on how they need to connect, inspire, and support new and emerging employee needs.

As we know, leadership has always been a rather organic and continuously evolving human endeavour and there has been increased discussion of the latest emerging trend in leadership, one that sees leaders examining what it means **to be more compassionate** in their approach to managing and directing their people. That means that today’s most effective and progressive leaders are achieving the results they expect and need by combining tried and true leadership methodologies with a softer, more empathetic, responsive, supportive, more patient, and kinder approach to managing. In other words, leading from the heart!

As an example, during the height of COVID-19, many workplaces moved to have staff work from home and others in essential roles having to adapt to the challenges that health and safety requirements placed on them especially if they had to work in in-person environments or directly with the public. For so many, it was a dramatic and emotionally challenging experience that placed new pressures and obligations on them. Leaders so discovered that they needed to be far more supportive and empathetic so their teams could function better and as required under difficult circumstances. Those leaders who always practiced a more compassionate

leadership style also discovered that their compassionate leadership approach, which had worked in the past, was now working well for them now as their teams knew that no matter what happens, their supervisor, manager, or director would **be there** for them in the way and manner that would support them best.

So, what is compassionate leadership and how would you adopt its principles into your leadership approach? First, it is important to be clear, that compassionate leadership isn't designed to **replace** how you lead, as many have found remarkable success in being consistent and confident in, the way they lead. Adopting a compassionate view to leading means augmenting or adding new ways to connect and lead. In short, it adds a new dimension to how you lead...and how you will be viewed by those you lead. Compassionate leadership can be distilled down to acting on positive intention – leading from a place in which the leader's words and actions show a genuine sense of care, concern, and connection for their employees and that their decisions and interactions with their employees, stem from that.

Compassionate leaders enjoy closer and more authentic bonds with their employees, a greater sense of loyalty, better interpersonal connections, and more open, honest, and transparent communication. Furthermore, compassionate leaders because of their leadership style generate higher levels of mutual trust and that often leads to employees reciprocating with a greater commitment and dedication to their work and a higher level of engagement as a result.

Another benefit of compassionate leadership is that employees are more inclined to be patient, tolerant, helpful, and supportive of each other. The most noticeable benefit of compassionate leadership is that there is less conflict, tension, and competitiveness in a team and more support, collaboration, and selflessness. This environment is the antithesis of workplace toxicity, a workplace based on respect and tolerance.

Being compassionate means being employee-centric. It is important to note that also pre-supposes that you bring to your role a high level of leadership competence. Compassion without solid leadership experience and competence is likely doomed to failure as it lacks the essential skills to make leaders truly effective. Therefore, leaders are wise to add a compassionate approach to their leadership responsibilities.

One could learn to think that much of leadership is formative and based on knowledge, experience, and wisdom – the *intellectual (head) side* of experience whereas compassionate leadership speaks to and from the (*heart*) – kindness, respect, patience, and empathy. When a leader puts the head and the heart **together** in a balanced way, they so discover they become far better and more complete leaders – with a greater depth and capacity to connect, inspire and achieve even greater results and outcomes.

Five Tips to Becoming More Compassionate as A Leader

Kindness and compassion for others begin with you.

The general consensus on everything that has ever been written or said about compassionate leadership over the years is that for a leader to care about others, they first have to care about **themselves**. For you to care about the mental, emotional, and physical wellness of those you lead, you have to take a long look at how you look after yourself and the choices you are making. People who cherish themselves cherish others.

Begin the path to being a compassionate leader, by seeing yourself as employee “number one” – and that you will examine and reflect on the importance of self-care, living a life where personal wellness is a priority, and to treat yourself and others with kindness and consideration. All too often, leaders work hard and long hours, are often too hard on themselves and their decisions, push themselves and others and forget that they are human and breakable. Compassion for others begins with an understating of what compassion is for oneself.

Empathy and “The Golden Rule”

The old plumber axiom comes to mind “measure twice and cut once.” That proactive and considered approach means slowing down and thinking before we speak and being mindful in how we approach any situation. Empathy is a big part of compassion, and it really means to try to see and feel the world of the employee through their eyes and their feelings. Are they stressed? Have they had a difficult day at work? Might they be facing personal challenges or troubles outside of work?

To lead with heart, it helps immensely to think about others, put yourself in their shoes, and what they are facing in the daily world of work. Compassion asks us to create meaningful connections and communicate purposely so they know that our team understands that we care about them, and they see you as a supportive, helpful, and kind leader.

Compassionate leaders also inevitably practice a form of the “golden rule” – treating others in the manner and style that they would wish to be treated. So, before you pick up the phone, enter or lead a meeting, write and send an email, sit down with an employee, take some time to think and reflect about what you hope to achieve and in the way that you want to achieve it. More importantly, consider in advance what you want to say and HOW you want to say it. Remember always, **words once said cannot be unsaid** and compassionate leaders are renowned for saying the right things in the right way and at the right time.

Connect On a Personal Level

Compassionate leaders discover the numerous benefits of connecting and “touching base” with their teams, often sitting in on meetings, conference calls, or professional development. Being people-focused means being people connected and compassionate leaders make the genuine effort to **“be there”**. That takes a personal commitment to make the time.

But to deepen your compassionate leadership approach, it is also a very good idea to view the individual as a person as someone you like to connect with on regular basis. That can mean being available such as stopping to briefly talk or chat casually at their desk, in the hall, or lunchroom. Even catching them at the beginning or the end of the day so as to have a short conversation and to see how they are doing. So, my advice, start making it a habit for making a little time for everyone on your team -either daily or through the week. It can make an enormous difference in shaping how your team will see you as it creates greater engagement and better relationships.

It reminds me of the old saying *“people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.”*

Celebrate Victory, Embrace Defeat.

When things are going well at work, it is much easier to be a leader but as we know leadership also has its share of some very difficult challenges, life-changing decisions, and the ability to manifest and implement vision. Compassionate leaders are often rewarded with teams that collectively met if not exceed expectations. By where does it come into play when there are disappointing revelations, missed expectations, and poor outcomes?

Compassionate leadership is not about assigning blame, seeking excuses, or deflecting responsibility but knowing and feeling that when results are disappointing...they see the opportunity to step up and lead their teams from a position and manner that attracts them to feel comfortable to address challenges willingly and know that they are going to find support.

As easy as it would be to express anger and disappointment in someone or your team, compassionate leadership places far more of an emphasis on learning from failure, leading recovery, inspiring resilience, and teaching that anger and frustration doesn’t help. At the end of the day and during tough times, compassionate leaders can also expect to enjoy a higher level of trust with themselves and their teams...and that trust can be strong enough to weather any storm.

How Can I Help...?

Finally, at the heart of truly compassionate leadership is seeing yourself as someone who has a genuine obligation to find a way to be instrumental in developing and strengthening every person on your team. To invest in the individual is a means to invest in the team. Our objective should be to see them become better in what they do and to be a better version of themselves.

Great leaders focus on developing the people they lead, by instilling and supporting both confidence in themselves and competence in their abilities. To be the compassionate leader you want to be, begin with four simple words *“how can I help?”* The answer to this question not only will begin a better road ahead for an employee who may be struggling or overwhelmed but more importantly it sends a message that *“your welfare is my concern”* and *“I want you to succeed”* because I care about you.

In conclusion, leaders that see the benefits of being conscientious and sensitive in how they lead, what they say, how they say it, how they act, and what they write will begin to embrace the beneficial nature and personal rewards of compassionate leadership. In these changing and challenging times and especially with an increasingly diverse and changing workplace, leaders are choosing to win and earn the hearts and minds of those they lead.

They by choosing to be more compassionate, kind, patient, and empathetic not only to the varied needs of their teams or department but also to be mindful, supportive, and helpful to the individual team member too.

Finally, one last argument for compassionate leadership. Leaders when they retire and who throughout their career led with kindness and compassion leave a positive and lasting legacy that quite often imprints on those they led and those who would follow.

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