

## A Kinder, Gentler Workplace

### *Nurturing habits that can Transform a Company*

**H**ow “kind” are the workplaces at some of your corporate clients? Are employees stressed to the max, overly competitive, and habitually secretive? Or are people open, helpful, and friendly? According to Susan Mangiero, too many workplaces are missing the kindness factor, and it’s more damaging than they might realize. Why? Because kindness is integral to employee engagement – and cultures of engagement are integral to high-performance organizations.

“Doing business revolves around relationships,” says Mangiero, author of *The Big Squeeze: Hugs & Inspirations for Every Grown-Up Who Loves Teddy Bears* (\$14.95, Happy Days Press, [www.ipaintwithwords.com](http://www.ipaintwithwords.com).) “Without strong, positive relationships, people can’t work productively. They can’t communicate well. They can’t innovate. And positive relationships *cannot* flourish in the absence of kindness.”

#### When Kindness is Not Present ...

When kindness is not present, everyone in the organization detaches, stops communicating, and loses trust. An unkind workplace also means that:

- Teamwork suffers;
- Morale drops;
- Productivity falls;
- Absenteeism and turnover rates increase; and
- Customer satisfaction plummets – and eventually, customers leave.

In today’s high-stakes, fast-paced business climate, it’s easy to focus on survival at all costs (one of those costs being positive relationships). But Mangiero says the most hard-driven workers need to remember to infuse kindness into their daily interactions, not only with clients but also with each other. She says kindness

is the element that makes organizations great places to work – and it’s also the “secret sauce” that helps companies thrive.

#### Making Genuine Kindness a Habit

The following are Mangiero’s recommendations for making genuine kindness a habit in *your* workplace.

❖ **Practice being kind to yourself.** If you don’t know how to nurture yourself, it’s difficult to nurture co-workers and clients. Mangiero says practicing self-care is the best way to learn kindness and establish that you deserve kindness, too. She suggests doing something kind for yourself (enjoy a cup of tea, take a short break, etc.) *every day*. And periodically get a massage, treat yourself to some nice clothes, or enjoy a hot bath and a good book.

“Finally, stop being so hard on yourself – forgiving yourself is an important component of kindness,” Mangiero states. “Whether you fail to impress on a work project, underperform on an evaluation, or otherwise disappoint yourself, ease up on the punishing self-talk.”



❖ **Make time to play or commit time to a new hobby to balance out the hard work you are doing.** You may be working hard for a promotion, or simply grinding away at an endless list of work projects, according to Mangiero. Either way, don't let your life be all work and no play. Whether you enjoy hiking, art, community theatre, or sports, make time for it.

"When your life is all about work, it's impossible to stay balanced," she says. "Trust me, you can't do your best when you don't find ways to bring joy into your life. Playfulness is vital for the creative energy you need to excel professionally and personally. It's all part of being kind to yourself."

❖ **Volunteer for a good cause.** Finding a way to help others gets you in touch with your humanity and keeps you humble and kind. Every city has multiple opportunities to volunteer, so find a cause that resonates with you. Your employer may sponsor activities that you can do with your colleagues. Whether you're tutoring underprivileged kids, working with the elderly, walking shelter dogs, or collecting food for the homeless, you'll be working on your connection and kindness skills. As a bonus, volunteering looks great on a resume.

❖ **Stay in touch with friends and family.** Don't get so wrapped up in the rat race that you forget about your "tribe," Mangiero warns. Stay close to cherished family members and make time for your friends. Visit favorite people regularly. Meet for coffee or dinner to catch up. If your job has taken you far away, schedule regular video chats to keep in touch. Sometimes sending a quick text can make you feel closer to those in your support network.

"You have to nurture these established relationships to get the most from them, the same way you would nurture *new* relationships," Mangiero adds.

❖ **Celebrate the "wow!" in the lives of friends and co-workers.** Nurturing oth-

ers means showing that you care when good things happen in their lives and resisting the urge to be jealous. Take a moment to applaud and praise others' accomplishments instead of breezing right past them. "Congratulate your colleague on her promotion even if you're working thanklessly at your job," Mangiero notes. "One day you'll appreciate it when someone makes a big deal out of *your* accomplishments. The same goes for friends. Be genuinely happy for their good news, be it a personal win or a business milestone such as getting a new customer."

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“Kind employees are engaged companies — and engaged employees make for a more enjoyable, productive, and successful culture. Whether you’re a leader or not, you can change your workplace for the better.”

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❖ **Practice your manners.** Small niceties like hello, please, and thank you; holding doors for people; and asking how others are doing really do matter and shouldn't vanish when tensions are high. In the hard-charging corporate world, however, manners can take a back seat when deals and deadlines are involved. Keep your work in perspective and remember that rude behavior makes a stronger impression than kindness, but not in a good way! Remember to be courteous to individuals in different jobs and at different levels, not just the boss.



❖ **Go out of your way to make shy, left-out, or misunderstood people feel comfortable.** In life and at work, there's going to be an in-crowd and those who don't quite belong – just like in school.

“Make it your duty to be kind and welcoming to those in your office who may feel excluded from the group,” Mangiero explains. “Outsiders feel hurt when they are not readily accepted, and it even happens in the workplace. So be sure to reach out and be friendly to those who need a little help socially. You will be doing what is right, setting a good example, and maybe even making a new friend.”

❖ **Send thank-you notes (the pen-and-paper kind).** It is good etiquette to send a thank-you note when anyone – a client, supervisor, or co-worker – goes above and beyond for you. Not only that, but you have plenty of opportunities ahead of you to say “thanks” when somebody does something nice for you outside of the office. So get into the habit of writing old-fashioned thank-you notes instead of firing off an email or sending a text. This is also a great practice for organizational leaders to embrace.

“In the professional world, a non-virtual thank-you note sets you apart from others,” Mangiero notes. “It's a nearly effortless and thoughtful gesture that goes a long way. You never know who might remember your politeness; a gracious thank-you could help you win a new client or advance to a higher position.”

❖ **Listen more than you talk.** No matter how successful you are, remember that you really don't know it all (and that's okay!). Be open to the wisdom of others. Mangiero points out that learning is a lifetime process and that listening to those in the know can freshen our perspectives and expand our horizons.

“When I commit to really hearing what others say, I learn a lot and feel so much more connected to them,” she says. “Others appreciate the courtesy of being given a chance to express themselves. It's a way of showing respect and empathy when we are willing to lend an ear to our colleagues and our loved ones. In business, it's also a way of distinguishing ourselves from

the competitors who *don't* embrace the importance of letting someone else talk. In a hurried world, the lost art of careful listening is a good skill to develop.”

❖ **Be a shoulder to cry on.** When someone in your life is hurting and needs comfort (or someone to vent to) and you think you can help, be willing to be engaging and supportive. It's true it can be uncomfortable and inconvenient to deal with another person's troubles on top of your own, but true kindness often requires this kind of sacrifice.

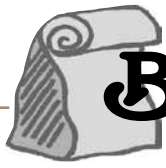
“Don't disconnect when a friend or work associate is upset and wants to talk about it with you,” Mangiero states. “Really taking the time to be present will make them feel heard and supported, which is crucial to building trust. If you simply *'there-there'* them and walk away, you may close the door to a potentially deeper relationship.”

## Summary

“Being appropriately kind is not the same as being a pushover. To the contrary, being kind is a show of strength. Genuine kindness is a state of being,” Mangiero concludes. “It's not something you do just to get what you want in the moment. Kindness is a gift that keeps on giving, and you'll find that you are happier and more successful when you make it a part of your work practices and personal life.

“Throughout your professional journey, commit to being kind to everyone you encounter along the way, and you will reap the many rewards that come from caring for and connecting with others. Kindness counts.” ■

*Dr. Susan Mangiero is the author of “The Big Squeeze: Hugs & Inspirations for Every Grown-Up Who Loves Teddy Bears,” (Happy Day Press, 2017, \$14.95, [www.ipaintwithwords.com](http://www.ipaintwithwords.com)). She coaches financial organizations on using trust, kindness, and empathy to develop relationship-building skills and grow their brand. Recognized as a thought leader in the areas of fiduciary best practices and trust-based business development, she has advised numerous companies, government organizations, and policy-making bodies. She is a business intelligence analyst, economist, and storyteller with experience in competitive strategy, client satisfaction, and risk management.*



## Making Kindness at Work a Way of Life

By Liz Jazwiec

It's crazy to think just how unkind we can be to our co-workers. After all, if you are all working in the same place, even if you might be in different departments, you are essentially on the same team. You are all working toward the same goals. The in-fighting and just general nastiness or indifference for one another that can pop up in workplaces affects everyone negatively. It breaks us down as individuals and as teams. It is impossible to think that our lack of kindness doesn't affect the work environment.

❖ **Lead by example.** If you are the leader at your organization, you need to heed the call. Tell your team that you are making kindness a focus. Give your permission for someone to call you on it when you forget your pledge! Note that if a lack of kindness has been a problem at your organization for a while, you might have to slowly introduce the practice. Try one kindness initiative at a time – for example, regularly saying thank you or offering to help a co-worker at least once a day.

❖ **Put an end to petty criticism.** We criticize just about everybody and everything. We scrutinize every little word and laugh at each other's mistakes. I think too many of us slip into negativity as a default behavior at work. We hear others being negative so we join in to stay out of the crossfire. We all need to remind ourselves to stay out of that negativity and instead be kind, nice, and thoughtful.

❖ **Welcome new employees with open arms.** Often it's the new guy who gets the most abuse at work. It's interesting that organizations can be short-staffed with everyone putting in extra time and effort, just praying the boss hires someone to lessen the burden, and then when the new guy does start, he is welcomed with less than open arms. Try to remember what it was like on your first day. Then extend a little kindness the new person's way. Ask him about himself, his family, background, etc. Try to find things that he has in common with other team members. Sharing common experiences is a great way to bring someone into the fold.

❖ **Recognize one another's strengths, not weaknesses.** In many workplaces, kindness goes out the door when younger and older employees must work together. Young employees get frustrated when their older colleagues can't use the latest technology quickly and efficiently. And older workers become frustrated with their younger counterparts' different work ethic. The problem is that the parties on both sides of the age gap are focusing on what they view as the other's weakness. Leaders should encourage all of their employees to value what their teammates bring to the table. Remind everyone that there is a reason each of them was hired. ■

*Liz Jazwiec, a nationally renowned speaker, strategist, and consultant, is the author of the book, "Eat That Cookie! Make Workplace Positivity Pay Off ... For Individuals, Teams and Organizations." For more information, visit [www.studergroup.com/EatThatCookie](http://www.studergroup.com/EatThatCookie).*