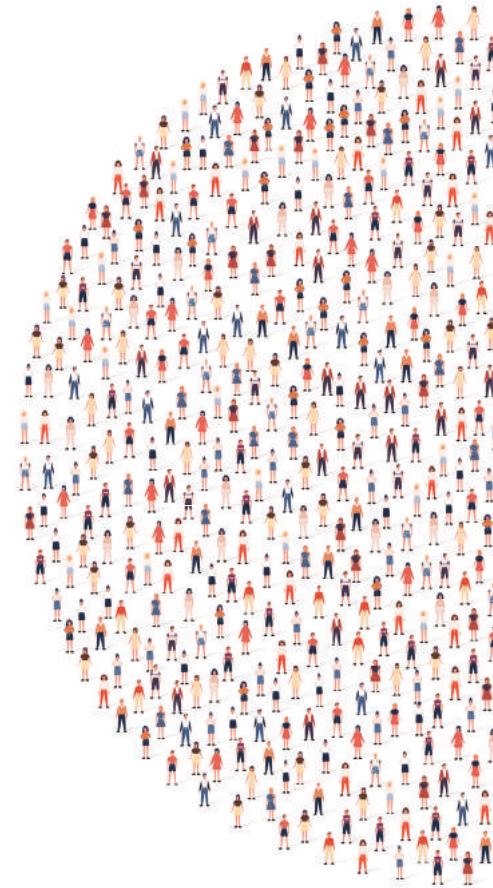


Beyond Empathy, Harnessing Humility



Develop your **Compassionate Leadership**

Challenged by the after effects of a global pandemic and ongoing PESTLE influences, organisations continue to change rapidly. As the World Uncertainty Index, calculated by the number of times the word “uncertain” appears in the Economist Intelligence Unit of country reports, continues to climb, businesses are even more conscious of the need for truly effective leadership and critical talent engagement.

But what is effective leadership? Research conducted by Rasmus Hougaard and Jacqueline Carter of the Potential Project, suggests that compassionate leadership results in the most desirable outcomes. Compassion is defined as feeling or showing sympathy and genuine

concern for others. But does emotion have a place in the world of work? Their evidence suggests it does. Compassion in the workplace improves collaboration, humility, trust and loyalty. Leaders who display compassion are more likely to have and to hold, engaged, committed and motivated employees.

During challenging times, employees can often avoid taking risks at work or rocking the boat. This can result in employees being hesitant to report errors, voice concerns, suggest new ideas, or share feedback, so the organisation loses. Demonstrating compassion as a leader fosters a workplace environment conducive to emotional well-being, making employees feel safe to speak up.



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Compassionate leadership can benefit the leader as much as those they lead. Extensive data shows a strong link between the demonstration of compassion and career advancement. Compassionate leaders enjoy greater life satisfaction and self-esteem. They are viewed as stronger and more capable by their employees. By taking care of those around you, you are also acting in your own interests.

However, compassion alone is not enough. For leadership to be effective, it must co-exist with good judgement. Kindness cannot come at the expense of competence. The leaders who achieve the best outcomes are those who understand what motivates their employees and how to manage them towards desired outcomes. Leadership is hard, it necessitates pushing agendas, sharing critical feedback, knowing when to say no. Practicing compassion as a leader does not imply the absence of these responsibilities, but carrying them out while conscious of people's feelings. As Hougaard and Carter put it, "wise compassionate leadership is the ability to do hard things in a human way."

Striking a balance between compassion and efficiency requires an understanding of the difference between compassion and empathy. Some leaders may worry that by demonstrating compassion they will be shouldering the burden of all their employees' emotional troubles. They may also be concerned that practicing compassion will cause them to be viewed as weak or easily manipulated. The distinction between compassion and empathy lays these concerns to rest.

While Empathy is defined as the ability to feel what others feel, compassion involves understanding what others are feeling and acting accordingly. Put simply, empathy is an emotion, while

compassion is an intention. A certain degree of empathy is a prerequisite for compassion, but leaders who successfully prioritise compassion are less prone to personal distress and burnout. While you may demonstrate compassion towards a particular employee in the short term, you will also be thinking about how similar scenarios might be pre-emptively dealt with going forward.

The concept of compassionate leadership is not new. A recent study showed that 91% of over 1,000 surveyed leaders see compassion as a vital aspect of leadership. 80% indicated that they wanted to increase their compassion but did not know how. Compassion is not an inherent characteristic, it can be developed. Here we set out steps you can take to incorporate more compassion into your leadership style.

Tips for Developing Compassion in Leadership:

- **Have more compassion for yourself:** Taking care of others means minding you. If you are overburdened and burnt out, you won't be able to help anyone else. Self-compassion requires getting enough sleep, taking short breaks throughout the day, and setting aside time for yourself away from work. It also means not being too hard on yourself, better to recognise your mistakes, reframe setbacks as learning experiences, and move forward with confidence.
- **Be aware of your intention:** Learn to manage your intention before you speak to others. Get to know each member of your team, to understand what drives them and makes them feel valued.
- **Advocate for change:** Compassion can become integral in an organisation. As a leader, think about

policies that may be put in place to support employee well-being. This is beneficial to your employees and can lessen the onus on you over time.

If you have a well-developed sense of compassion but feel it hinders your ability to lead, consider the following:

Tips for Balancing Compassion with Efficiency:

- **Be honest and transparent:** As a leader, it is your job to offer guidance, even when it may be difficult for an employee to hear. If someone is falling short in their duties or seeking direction, be frank and constructively tell them what they need to improve on. If you step around the issue in an attempt to be kind or avoid upsetting them, you risk failing to convey your expectations, and the employee will neither understand nor benefit from your help.
- **Remember the distinction between empathy and compassion:** If you find yourself taking on the emotional burdens of your employees, take a step back and remember that you will be most helpful to them through action. Use your feelings of empathy as a catalyst for compassion, and take practical steps to exercise it.
- **Keep the bigger picture in mind:** You may feel more comfortable demonstrating compassion in excess because you feel it leads to less confrontational interactions. However, it is important to remember that avoiding an issue is not going to resolve it. Effective compassionate leadership propels organisational success. A compassionate outlook enhances a leader's skills, resulting in more

productive and motivated employees. Empowerment through compassion enables leaders and their teams to achieve their utmost potential, ensuring the organisation's future success.

Sources:

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