

Mindful Work

Kindness and compassion

All of us suffer. We fall ill, get old, pay taxes, and die. Or we just get grumpy and depressed (not me of course!). As we've explored already, we suffer when we can't get the thing we want, or we get the thing we didn't want. We can all get bad days, bad moods, and bad coffee. As a result we may be horrid to those around us.

Kindness, or compassion, means **being with someone** in their suffering, walking alongside them without judgement as they work through their issues. It means **putting our ego down** while we focus on the other person's problems, which may be causing unpleasant behaviours. It is a state of **selfless attention** to others, with an intention to help them through their suffering.

In fact **we are hardwired to be compassionate**, due to what are called mirror neurons. These neurons fire in sympathy with another person; so if we see someone in pain, the pain area of our own brain lights up, even if we don't feel the physical pain (ref Tania Singer et al).

Like any habit, being kind, or simply wishing others well, may seem clunky at first, but as those neural pathways develop it becomes more natural. These are good habits to develop; not only is this behaviour likely to benefit others, but there's every chance that you become a nicer person to work with, live with, or do business with, so you'll get on better. **Being kind is a win-win situation!**

Matthieu Ricard, a French meditation teacher and monk, was wired up for neuroscientific experiments. The researchers found that when meditating, his high-amplitude gamma synchrony (an indication of happiness) went off the scale, and he has been dubbed the 'happiest man on earth'. When asked what mind state is the happiest, he replied 'compassion'.

Daniel Goleman, author of *Primal Leadership: Unleashing the Power of Emotional Intelligence*, says this type of meditation can impact our mind and our outlook "right from the get go." Goleman explains:

"It turns out that the brain areas that help us or that make us want to help someone that we care about also connect with the circuitry for feeling good. So it feels good to be kind and all of that shows up very early in just a few hours really of total practice of loving-kindness or compassion meditation."

Exercise 1: small acts of kindness

First, think right now of something you can do for yourself, today. Maybe it's to take a walk in the park, spend more time to cook a nice meal, listen to music, paint, juggle, read a novel, or just feed yourself. Do not make any excuses, just do it.

Secondly, think of one thing you could do to be kind to someone else, today. It doesn't need to involve money. It could be as simple as smiling at someone, complimenting or thanking them, taking a few more minutes to listen fully, or to make that call that you've been thinking about. Do something that will make someone else feel good (and notice its effect on you, when this happens).

Exercise 2: Kindness while walking

I love this simple, profound exercise and it amuses and amazes me every time.

Here's what to do:

*Go for a walk, or just do this on your daily journey to work. First, notice all kinds of **things** around you, and simply radiate intense kindness to each and every thing: a paving slab, and slug, a blackbird, the gutter, someone's car sticker....*

Now, having radiated kindness for say 5 minutes to all those objects and animals, you start with humans. As you pass someone, you radiate intense feelings of kindness to them. You could catch their eye and smile if it feels ok to do that, but if it doesn't feel right, just radiate the kindness anyway. Don't choose some and leave out others, do it for everyone.

*See how this makes you feel.
Where else could you try this out?*