

## Compassionate Workplaces Deepen Employee Commitment, Teamwork, and Overall Customer Satisfaction

by Orlando J. Gonzalez, MEd, LMHC, CEAP

It may seem antithetical to think of work as a place where people experience emotional healing. Haven't we been taught, after all, to leave our feelings at home? The reality is we cannot escape the fact, emotional concerns (work-related or not) impact every facet of our lives. The responses we receive from those witnessing our pain send very powerful messages about the environment in which we live and work. Not acknowledging, caring, or expressing concern for others we witness experiencing emotional pain fosters a brand of negative, contagious and costly care referred to as neglect. Savvy workplaces understand the cost of this corrosive behavior and work diligently to afford their employees vehicles for attending to their emotional lives.

When consulting with clients, I commonly ask them to think back to the quality of responses they have received from co-workers, or supervisors, that they deem were demonstrative of compassionate care. People usually smile as they recall the times when a supervisor offered flexibility during a family crisis, or when a co-worker offered support after noticing she/he was having a bad day. The compassionate acts they cite were not costly in and of themselves, but they sent a very powerful message (i.e., I am paying attention, care for you, value you as a fellow human being and sincerely wish to help in some way).

Wikipedia defines compassion as, "the response to the suffering of others that motivates a desire to help." The website [www.compassionlab.org](http://www.compassionlab.org) defines compassion as, "an innate part of human response to suffering, which is comprised of a three-part experience of noticing another's pain, feeling with another, and responding in some way."

Research and writings on compassion in organizations are revealing it as a positive and very powerful force. Businesses interested in retaining productive and healthy workforces appreciate the value of fostering caring work environments where employees feel it is safe to be themselves, safe to express their feelings, safe to innovate and be creative, safe to receive support, and safe to feel connected to co-workers. Sigal Barsade, a Wharton management professor, conducts research on the value of caring workplace cultures. She emphasizes the importance of co-workers sharing, what she refers to as, "companionate love." Companionate love is shown, "when colleagues who are together day in and day out, ask and care about each other's work and even non-work issues." Employees are careful of each other's feelings, show compassion when things don't go well, show affection and caring, or just listen when a co-worker needs to talk. Barsade's research proved that a culture of companionate love reduced employee withdrawal from work, contributing to lower levels of absenteeism and employee burnout. Cultures of companionate love are also positively correlated with job satisfaction, commitment to the company and accountability for performance. Her studies have also determined that such cultures of companionate love ripple out from staff to influence their client/customer care as well as their staff's families. She concludes, the strong message to managers in all industries: "tenderness, compassion, affection, and caring matter at work."

There are many roads to building compassionate workplaces and some prefer to see it as a, "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Others, see it as an opportunity to role-reverse, or "walk a mile in someone else's shoes." Whatever our approach, like it or not, we each contribute to the culture we have (through our actions or inactions). We have the power to change it, one act of compassion at a time.

That said, showing compassion and caring for one another at work is everyone's responsibility. These behaviors are in fact contagious and each of us has the capacity to sow seeds of compassion to foster a culture of care and compassion that instills safety, renews spirit, inspires creativity and cultivates loyalty among its recipients.

Professor Jane Dutton from the University of Michigan offers the following, simple yet powerful, tips for raising the levels of compassion at work:

- 1** Notice when there is pain in the room and create a safe place for people to be able to express their pain when needed.
- 2** Don't judge (criticize) or try to make sense of someone's behavior. Simply listen to what they need to share.
- 3** Don't worry about acting perfectly. Just be present and let them know they've been heard.

# MENTAL HEALTH

## EAT BREAKFAST

Those who eat a healthy breakfast tend to have more energy than those who skip it. Making sure you eat in the AM can help with concentration and performance. It can also lead to healthy decisions throughout the day. If time seems to be an issue in the morning, make sure you stock up on some "grab and go" items like granola bars or fruit!

## LET'S TALK ABOUT OMEGA-3S

Higher intakes of Omega-3s, a fatty acid, have been linked to improved mood and memory. Omega-3s are most commonly known to be found in fatty fish like salmon and mackerel. Other great sources include beans, nuts, seeds, spinach and broccoli. Think about adding a handful of nuts to your yogurt or oatmeal! Also consider adding some broccoli in with your pasta or chicken.



## CARBS ARE NOT THE ENEMY

Many people believe that carbohydrates are bad, but the truth is, our bodies need carbs! Eating carbohydrates helps our bodies to produce serotonin which is a chemical in the brain that helps put us in a relaxed and happy mood. So don't pass on the carbs. Keep it healthy with complex carbs like fiber and whole grains.



## DRINK ENOUGH WATER

Some studies have linked dehydration to crankiness. Not drinking enough water can also make us feel tired and sluggish. Invest in a water bottle if you don't already have one, and bring it with you throughout the day.

Screening for Mental Health

# FOOD & MOOD

Source: <https://mentalhealthscreening.org/>

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## FEATURED LUNCHTIME SEMINAR

Sowing the  
Seeds of  
**COMPASSION**  
at Work

This free seminar offers participants with an opportunity to evaluate and discuss the value of compassion in the workplace. Research and writings on compassion in organizations are revealing it as a positive and very powerful force; where compassionate workplace cultures have been positively correlated with job satisfaction, commitment to the company and accountability for performance. Join us to explore this important topic and discover how we may become positive agents for sowing this contagious, delicate and precious commodity.

**Coral Gables campus** | Tuesday, August 4, 12-1:00 p.m., McKnight Building, Room 201AB  
**MSOM campus** | Wednesday, August 5, 12-1:00 p.m., Dominion Parking Garage, Room 155  
**RSMAS campus** | Thursday, August 6, 12-1:00 p.m., Library, Media Room

Upcoming seminars: *Wellness at Work, Mindful Living, Understanding your Property Taxes, Sowing the Seeds of Compassion*

 Visit the FSAP website to register.



“Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.”

- Leo Buscaglia

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