

The ABCs of Work: Kindness

Career Development



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Is there a formula for success at work? Are there simple rules that you can follow to increase your chances of getting what you want? Career Path columnist James Bellerjeau thinks the answer is yes. In this series of articles, *The ABCs of Work*, he shares the formula with you.

Greetings readers and congratulations! Simply by virtue of being here you are already on the path to increasing your odds of success. While luck plays a gigantic role in life, that does not mean you are helpless to control your fate. If you want to think of it this way, the tips we'll explore are ways to increase your odds that luck will find you.

Today's topic is all about practicing **Kindness** in your work.

Last time we talked about the importance of Joy, which comes from knowing and working towards

your inner purpose. Today, we explore the benefits of practicing kindness in an often ruthless world.

This doesn't sound very lawyerly

“Has James gone soft on us? First it was Happiness, then Joy, now Kindness? I thought we were talking about how to be successful at work. This sounds like a good path to get taken for a ride, not take charge of my career!”

I hear you and I haven’t forgotten the over-arching mission. You want to be successful in your career, and I want to help you get what you want. But I don’t want you to get something you *think you want* only to find out later it wasn’t what you thought.

This goes all the way back to an early article, Career Path: The Stoic Career. It behooves us to consider not only what success means to us but also the potentially varying paths that will take us there.

Here are some ways you can practice kindness at work:

Help others advance their careers.

Helping others is a good way to develop your career. We succeed in large part because our teams, our colleagues, and our companies succeed. Time spent helping others is thus never wasted — if you do it altruistically. Because you are happy to help others, your kindness still pays dividends.

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Help others accomplish their tasks.

This is the more mundane aspect. Practically, though, this is where you prove your kindness. You’re busy and a colleague needs help. Do you stop and help them in the moment? Small acts of kindness compound. You never know which person you took a few minutes to help will be instrumental in helping you later.

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Don't be quick to judge.

See Career Path: How Will You Be Remembered: “If you would not be judged by your worst moment, do not be quick to judge others for theirs.” The kindness here comes in both giving the benefit of the doubt, and in being forgiving when matters are not in doubt. By remembering your own mistakes and how others reacted, you can be the kind of person you would like to work with.

Be kind to yourself.

It’s probably not hard to remember your own mistakes, because you will make mistakes. The key is to learn from them, which require reflection, but not to overly beat yourself up.

Remember the human aspect.

You will work on tough topics, affecting people's lives and livelihoods. It is tempting to wall off your emotions to avoid bad feelings. We must never forget the people our decisions affect are individuals, just like us. They have hopes and dreams and reasonable expectations to live happy lives.

Can kindness backfire?

Yes, there is a risk. Unscrupulous colleagues will take advantage of you. Seeing your helpful nature, they will ask for your help more than they genuinely need. After all, if they can get someone to do some of their work, why not? If you're concerned about this, check out one remedy in Career Path: Can You Be Too Good At Your Job?

Others may think you weak, not realizing that it takes not just character but strength to be kind when you could be cruel.

Question, comment? Contact Career Path columnist James Bellerjeau.

Honorable mentions

Leveraging a single tip to drive work success is a heavy lift, even a tip as important as kindness. Our formula will necessarily be incomplete. But the formula has impact, and all the more so because we've kept things simple. Here, to finish, are some honorable mention tips to serve as food for thought:

- **Killer Instinct** — If this seems like the opposite of kindness, hold on. Sometimes you have to be tough. You will certainly be called upon to make hard decisions. Don't shy away. Your colleagues will appreciate when you step in to deal with unpleasant situations. But, being tough and decisive is not the same as being mean or ignoring your emotions. You should feel exactly the same empathy while being tough as when you're being kind.
- Kevlar — You fulfill a role as the lawyer, but *you* are not that role. You must develop imperviousness to people associating you with the topics you work on and the decisions you make. I use the mental image of putting on a cloak to represent my role. It's not me, it's just what I do for the company. So your Kevlar cloak protects you from the harsh external world.

Be well.

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Bellerjeau served for two decades as group general counsel for Mettler-Toledo International Inc., an S&P 500 company with its worldwide headquarters in Greifensee, Switzerland. He then led Mettler-Toledo's global Sustainability program for several years through June 2021.

Bellerjeau shares thoughts on how to live a good life at Klugne. You can also follow him on LinkedIn.