



Glain Roberts-McCabe sat down with Roundtable Member, **Steffi Black**, Career/Life Coach and Spread the Kindness Advocate, who shares her perspective on the importance of kindness in the workplace.

Mentoring **MATTERS**

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*Why do you think **kindness** is important in business today, and what can leaders do to encourage more of it?*

I think Kindness is incredibly important and that good leaders recognize how this character trait does amazing things for a company's culture. Kindness used to be thought about as something that was relevant to schools and religious centers. Today, we also see this as being highly relevant in the workplace. Truly great leaders make kindness a priority in their culture, as they know that people who feel cared for want to return that kindness by working hard. It's a proven fact that companies with warm and compassionate environments have higher employee engagement and productivity. It's a win-win for both the shareholders and those in the workplace.

Yes, it's true that employees do enjoy perks such as time off, flexibility, and bonuses. But, did you know that engagement with a warm and caring workplace can be one of the biggest predictors of happiness?

I initially began '**Spread the Kindness**' to encourage more kindness in our schools, but I soon came to realize that the adult playground needs kindness just as much as the children's. For that reason I began to introduce "Spread the Kindness" to organizations, helping workplace cultures to cultivate more caring and compassion in their hallways. It has been wonderful to see the progressive, leading companies that are willing to take small steps towards incorporating this powerful trait.

How do organizations do this? It can be as simple as creating a Vision and Core Values statement that reflect these traits followed by an actionable plan to incorporate the actions that reflect those stated values. It is so important to 'walk the talk'; to be authentic. And companies that have a higher sense of purpose are not just good places to work; they want to make their environment and their broader communities a better place in which to live. According to the authors of 'Leading with Kindness', there are some key attributes of leadership that incorporate a higher standard:

Be honorable

Great leaders go above and beyond what is necessary.

Solicit ideas from everyone

Google considers ideas one of its greatest assets, second only to employees.

Be an idealist

Companies that have a sense of higher purpose attract and retain passionate employees.

Connect with your people

Take the time to learn about the skills, family life and passions of your employees.

In Canada, companies are jumping on board to 'spread the kindness'. Recently, the Niagara Falls Public Library engaged in kindness work in their organization, and intends to put their focus there again in 2017. In the words of Ashleigh Dronyk, the Library's Information Resources & Connections Manager: "The Kindness presentation truly made a big impact on our organization and the way we treat one another." Norex Web, a company that already possessed an impressive culture, are also participating in kind acts for 'SpreadTheKindness' during International Random Acts of Kindness Week (RAK). Senior partner, Julia Rivard, who is now also CMO & Co-Founder of Squiggle Park, had this to say about their participation in RAK: "We pride ourselves at Norex on having a great culture in general but the RAK week really helped us all place an emphasis on what we could do to 'make the day' of the people around us a little bit better".

In our hectic, stressed, industrialized world, we often don't take the time to truly connect with one another. We rush to meetings and nod at people around us; we knock someone's shoulder and mumble a quick hello; we avoid eye contact with people in hallways. Some of us don't even know the name of the janitor who has worked in the building for decades or the cleaning

people who come each week. Kindness reminds us to slow down, listen, and pay attention to those around us a little bit more. It's one of our most important tools in forging connections – something as simple as a warm smile can set the tone for a positive relationship exchange.

According to the work of David R. Hamilton, here's what scientifically happens to people when they display kindness to others:

Kindness makes us happier

When we're doing something kind for someone else, we feel good. And, the action causes elevated levels of dopamine in the brain, so we get a natural high, often referred to as a "Helper's High".

Kindness makes for better relationships

How? It increases the emotional warmth between two people so we feel more 'bonded'. And it's actually a genetic thing – we are wired for kindness.

Kindness is contagious

When we are kind, we inspire others to be kind and it actually creates a ripple effect that spreads outwards to others.

In summary, let me remind those in business who may think of kindness as only something gentle and soft and sweet, that it can be that, but it's also a powerful transformational change agent – it's a warrior for warmth, inclusivity, caring, and, yes, even accountability. Good leaders call people on mean or bully-like behavior and salute those who empower and engage their teams.

I leave you with the wise words of English writer and philosopher, Aldous Huxley, who studied human nature for decades: "People often ask me what is the most effective technique for transforming their life. It is a little embarrassing that after years and years of research and experimentation, I have to say the best answer is – just be a little kinder."



Steffi Black is a Life/Career Coach, a Kindness Advocate for schools and corporations, and the Founder of Connection Corner, a women's virtual networking group. Her dharma is to help empower women in transition and young people at a crossroads, and also to spread kindness through schools and corporations. Through her #spreadthekindness message she creates kindness workshops and monthly curriculum plans for schools. She also delivers keynote presentations for organizations on Why Kindness Matters Today: How planning to incorporate kindness in the workplace creates powerful and positive change.



Steffi aims to create **#spreadthekindness** workplaces in Canada and abroad. She is a featured Author in Amazon best seller, 'Ready, Aim, Thrive!: Discover How To Flourish and Prosper TODAY from Top Experts' and in 'My Creative Thoughts'.



Glain Roberts-McCabe is passionate about the art of leadership and supporting ambitious mid-career leaders. She created **The Roundtable** to provide emerging leaders with the navigational skills, tools and savvy needed to manage increases in scope, pressure and leadership complexity.