

# Compassion Culture

**A Quick Guide to build a compassion  
culture within your organization**

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# Introduction

When you create a culture of compassion and respect, you can better understand each employee's unique qualities and how they can benefit the team and the company.

To begin, leaders must first learn and practice the skills. It's through our attitudes and actions that we can begin to set the foundation for a Compassion Culture.

**"Compassion is the radicalism of our time. Only the development of compassion and understanding for others can bring us the tranquility and happiness we all seek."**

**- Dali Lama**



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What does it  
take to be a

# Compassionate Leader



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## What Does it Take to be a Compassionate Leader?

To be a compassionate leader, you must be knowledgeable. Knowledgeable about yourself and knowledgeable about others.

Once you become confident in yourself, you can instill that same confidence in others through the lens of accomplishment and growth. By adapting to people's learning styles, actively listening to their needs, and routinely asking the right questions, leaders can leverage compassionate approaches to retain and re-energize staff.

An excellent first step to becoming a more compassionate leader is to build team morale. Remember, being a compassionate leader does not happen overnight, and your work at it is never done.

2

The  
importance of

# MORALE

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# Why is MORALE Important?

According to Merriam-webster.com, morale carries the following definitions:

**1: moral principles, teachings, or conduct**

**2 (a): the mental and emotional condition (as of enthusiasm, confidence, or loyalty) of an individual or group about the function or tasks at hand**

**(b): a sense of common purpose concerning a group**

**3: the level of individual psychological well-being based on such factors as a sense of purpose and confidence in the future**

In the aging services industry, a lot, if not everything, depends on the work of a team.

No person on the team is more important than the other and a team functions best when each person understands and feels their importance is connected to the group's goal.

It's the job of leaders to keep that understanding and feeling - the team's morale - intact.

## **6 Strategies to Keep MORALE Intact**

Here are 6 strategies to help you keep MORALE in mind as you lead and engage with your team.

- **Mindfulness**
- **Open Communication**
- **Recognition**
- **Accountability**
- **Leading By Example**
- **Empowerment**



## 6 Strategies to Keep MORALE Intact

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# Mindfulness: Being Present and Aware

How you engage in each interaction and react to stressful situations sets the tone for your leadership style and sets the bar for your team to perform.

There are many ways to channel mindfulness, and many of us need daily practice to make being present and aware a sustainable habit. In the context of being a compassionate leader, mindfulness involves pushing aside past happenings with the person or situation at hand, pushing away other people or projects on your mind, and pushing away personal feelings to be present at the moment.

Once we become present, we can be more aware of what the other person is experiencing and feeling, otherwise known as empathy. When we enter into an empathetic space, we can reframe our thoughts to prepare ourselves better to act and lead with compassion.

A big part of mindfulness in preparation for practicing compassionate leadership is self-compassion. Are you feeling a sense of burnout as a leader? Perhaps your team is feeling this too.



# Open Communication: Kind vs. Nice

Are being kind and being nice the same? Not according to these definitions.

**Niceness** centers on pleasing others and being polite so as not to offend.

**Kindness** is taking concrete action to help others, addressing a person's needs, regardless of tone, and permitting success and failure. Aiming for niceness creates a culture of artificial harmony where the surface seems fine, while the current underneath can be deadly. Kindness creates a culture of authenticity where vulnerability is rewarded to help.

**Here's an example** – someone complains that they are cold. Niceness says, "I'm so sorry you're cold," in a caring tone. Kindness is saying, "You've said that five times. Here is a sweater." By being kind, you're opening the door with an offer to do something about a person's situation.

Now, being a kind leader is refining your approach to extend kindness while also being compassionate. While being kind addresses a person's needs, regardless of tone, as a leader, our tone does matter.

That's where compassion comes in and the ability to harness empathy, reframe situations and turn it into guidance for action. Having direct and timely conversations is essential to being a kind and compassionate leader. It's also important to be clear and transparent when communicating with others. Sugarcoating feedback or delaying a conversation because it will be difficult for you to have or unpleasant to the person is never kind. Giving a person the opportunity to share their perspective while uncovering facts and a direction forward is a better approach. We are here to help people navigate towards success, even through failure.

**Here's another example:** a team member is constantly late for work. Being nice is listening to their reasons and displaying empathy for their situation, saying, "I'm so sorry that happened to you. Try to be on time next time, please." Being kind is listening to their reason and displaying compassion, saying, "I understand why you were late today. When you are late, your colleagues have to take on extra work. What next step can we take to help you arrive to work on time?"

# Recognition: One Size Does Not Fit All

When we think about recognition or praise, we often default to the way we like to be recognized or rewarded.

To build deeper connections with your team, recognition must be personalized. What's important to one person might not be necessary to another.

An excellent way to know how each person appreciates recognition is to ask them. A good question might be, "When is the last time you felt appreciated?" This will give you much more insight! And the more you engage in conversation with your team, the more ideas you will generate for ways to make each person feel uniquely valued. And don't forget that sometimes a little goes a long way.



# Accountability: Partners vs. Parents

No one wants to be micromanaged. Research is endless on the adverse effects of micromanagement on productivity and healthy work culture. Instead, focus your attention on holding your team accountable through creating partnerships.

A partnership with you and a partnership with each other. This requires being open and transparent about your work as well as being clear about the expectations of not only each person but the team as a whole. Establishing a partnership of accountability transfers the responsibility of the person to succeed not just for you or for the sake of their job, but for the team out of respect.

By transferring this power to the whole team, everyone feels a greater sense of accountability to be transparent, ask for help and ultimately perform to their best ability. This approach goes hand in hand with creating empowered teams. Eventually, teams begin to rely on each other for solutions and create an atmosphere of true teamwork where everyone has each other's back. Everyone on the team may not be best friends, but there is an appreciation of contribution and a genuine display of respect.

This is not to say that you as a leader get out of the hot seat of holding people accountable! Your vision for the team and the success of the business is a key component of accountability for each person. The routine conversation is also key in accountability partnerships.

Holding someone accountable becomes more manageable with consistent, scheduled time to discuss how a person's job is going. Think coaching conversations vs. performance reviews. With ongoing communication, you create space for tweaks along the way to ensure a person is successful rather than being surprised at the end when the conversation becomes much more difficult.



## 6 Strategies to Keep MORALE Intact

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# Leading By Example

We can all think back to a past leader who "walked the walk" and set a good example for others. Be that leader. Do what you say you're going to do. Help the team not only when things are tough but also to show appreciation for others. Offer to take over someone's duties to give them a break.

Be intentional about spending time engaging in the work that your team is expected to accomplish. If you want your team to be vulnerable, own up to mistakes, and contribute to day-to-day solutions. You yourself have to be vulnerable, admit your mistakes, and coach instead of correct.

Give yourself permission to try without fear of failing in front of your team. This will create a feeling of psychological safety where everyone feels comfortable being themselves.

# Empowerment: Them, Not You

The definition of empowerment is authority or power given to someone to do something. That's exactly what we want to do as compassionate leaders; give others the authority to do something.

For people to truly feel empowered takes creating an environment of trust where there is comfort in being vulnerable with the ability to ask questions and own up to mistakes without fear of being reprimanded. It's also about asking the right questions instead of giving the right answers.

Asking the right questions requires going below the surface and transitioning to coaching questions, as opposed to questions aimed at gathering information. Coaching questions aim to get the other person to think about the situation with solutions in mind as opposed to telling you the details of the situation without intent for the next steps.



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Questions that  
lead to

# Coaching Vs. Counseling

# Coaching Vs. Counseling

For questions that lead to coaching vs. a counseling session, ask if the questions you're asking do the following:

## **Builds understanding with the intent to uncover what is important**

- What challenges are you facing?
- What matters to you right now?

## **Sets direction to shift focus from what's wrong to what's possible**

- What is the best possible outcome?
- What do you want to happen next?

## **Shapes options to foster self-directed thinking**

- What have you tried?
- What options do you have?
- Define next actions for a solution-oriented focus?
- What data or information do you need to make a decision?
- What support do you need? Where will you get it?
- How can I help?

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Compassion  
Culture

# Temperature Tool



# How to Use the Temperature Tool

Use this simple tool to gain the perspective of your team on the current temperature of compassion within your organization.

Start first with your leadership team. Ask each person to complete the tool and then discuss it as a group.

Following, ask each leader to repeat the exercise with members of their direct team.

Come back together as a leadership team to share collective feedback and identify top opportunities for improvement.

# Temperature Tool

Indicate on a scale of 1 (low) to 7 (high) how well your organization follows through on attitudes and actions of compassion.

1. The organization is mindful of the signs of burnout and provides outlets for conversation and options for readjustments

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6                      7

2. Leaders are slow to react in times of company or team member stress, taking time to explore a situation and collaborate to identify opportunities for change and growth.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6                      7

3. Team members are slow to react in times of client (resident, family members, etc.) stress, taking time to explore a situation and collaborate to identify opportunities for change and growth.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6                      7

4. Leaders or supervisors engage in routine conversation with team members to listen to concerns, provide feedback and brainstorm the best next steps.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6                      7

5. Leaders engage in routine conversation with clients (residents, family members, etc.) to listen to concerns, provide feedback and brainstorm the best next steps.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6                      7

6. All team members engage formally and informally in recognizing each other for jobs well-done or in other ways connected to each individual person.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6                      7

7. Team members understand their role within the company and how they contribute to overall organizational success.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6                      7

8. Team members engage in ongoing training and education connected to their role in order to contribute to client (resident, family member, etc.) satisfaction.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6                      7

9. Leaders or supervisors empower team members to accomplish tasks in their own ways, providing guard rails to work within connected to organization expectations.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6                      7

10. Leaders or supervisors are visible to all team members, routinely supporting others in their work and day-to-day tasks.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6                      7



## What do you think about the acronym MORALE?

## How can you begin to cultivate a culture of compassion for yourself and your organization?

As we practice compassion and see its impact on others, we become more compassionate in how we think, feel and act. It's a positive feedback loop. We become better at helping and serving others, and everyone benefits.

[More Here](#)



# Need More Insightful Compassion Culture Resources?

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