Creating a compassionate workplace

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Who am I?

- Ph.D., University of Illinois
- Worked at Aon for 23 years
- Past President of NIEAPA
- EACC Commission
- Positive Psychology
- Currently
  - EAP counselor at Gottlieb Hospital
  - USC Instructor

Virtual Academic Center
University of Southern California
Social Work In Business
What I will present today

I. Why Compassion?
II. What is Compassion?
   A. What do Buddhists say about this?
   B. How is this similar to Positive Psychology?
III. How does one become more compassionate?
IV. How do we sell this idea in the workplace?
V. How does a workplace become more compassionate?
VI. What I hope you will take away.

“I learned compassion from being discriminated against.
Everything bad that’s ever happened to me has taught me compassion.”

Ellen DeGeneres,
Comedian, TV host and producer

We are not perfect people.
We don’t operate in a perfect world.
Why a program on Compassion?

What does this have to do with the workplace & EAPs?

How I became interested/Professional

- Intriguing article
  - Emphasis on Mindfulness
  - Buddhist Parallels to Positive Psychology
    - Fredrickson – Positive emotion
    - Emmons - Gratitude

How I became interested/Personal

- Western Religion
  - I am not a Buddhist

- Retirement
  - There is no corporate ladder any more
  - Identity/Narcissism
    - How are people judging me?

- What is really motivating about this work?
  - Connections with individual
    - Creating a more positive workplace
How does this relate to EAPs?

- We are compassionate people
- We witness suffering
- Our clients often live in hostile worlds
- Many managers want to be better leaders
- Engagement & Compassion
- What about our own workplaces?

What is Compassion?

Origins of Compassion
Happiness:
“People Matter”

Compassion is a key component of well-being

Christopher Peterson

A Buddhist Perspective

“Avalokitesvara”

Less suffering

Thich Nhat Hanh
Buddhist Monk

A Buddhist Story

Avalokitesvara
Western Saints of Compassion
Saint Francis of Assisi

These are discussion to have with managers, employees, & ourselves

Cultivating Compassion
P.E.R.M.A. (Seligman)

- Positive emotion - affect
- Engagement – opportunity for flow
- Relationships
- Meaning – sense of life purpose
- Accomplishment - mastery

Four Considerations

1. We all suffer
2. Desire is the cause of suffering
3. The cessation of suffering is letting go of craving
4. The path to achieving that cessation is awareness and living “right”

How does one move toward insight or enlightenment?

A few suggestions for thought experiments based on the Four Considerations
Impermanence

Impermanence: Thought Experiments

- Imagine yourself at a different age in life – progressing through the lifecycle
- Imagine your own time of death – just choose one method of dying, then think of other ways
- Imagining the loss of smaller things and work up to larger – loss of car, house, eyesight, hearing
- Watch a clock and contemplate the time ticking by
- Be aware of waking up in the morning

What about my son? My wife? People I know?
Even mindedness or equanimity

Seeing through projections

Parataxic distortions:

Question your current projections.

- Does everyone see the person as you do?
- Do other see qualities in them that you don't?
- Regarding your friend, are there people who don't like them and see something else in them?
- If you know the other person, by empathizing with their perspective, would your view change?

Harry Stack Sullivan
In considering projections with managers

• Do you experience strong feeling about that person that I can’t explain?
• Do you often feel excited, inflated, upset, anxious, angry or obsessive about the relationship?
• So could there be a projection?

Right Speech:

• Being viewed as possessing wisdom
  – Introspection: about your own thoughts and feelings
  – Empathy: A sense of caring for the other
  – Careful choice of word: an essential component

Focus on positive emotions,
Positive Emotions

1. Joy  
2. Gratitude  
3. Serenity  
4. Interest  
5. Hope  
6. Pride  
7. Amusement  
8. Inspiration  
9. Awe  
10. Love

Thought Exercise

- Feel the emotion

  - May I be free from suffering
  - May others be free of suffering
  - May my children be free from suffering
  - May my spouse be free from suffering
  - May all I whom see be free from suffering
Gratitude

Gratitude Exercises

- Seligman/Emmons
  - Three Good Things
  - Gratitude letter
- Compassion related
  - Feel thankfulness for what we have today
  - Thank people who have helped us
  - Ask for help when we need it
  - Reflecting on kindness from the past
  - Thanking our parents

What really makes humans happy?

People count
Compassion vs Narcissism

Scrooge was confronted about his own narcissism

Narcissism: What is really important?

- Seeing yourself through the eyes of compassion.
  - Self-inflated position toward ourselves.
  - Being a spiritual narcissist (holier than others).
- What is the image of myself I’m grasping?
  - Am I really empathizing with and feeling compassion for others?
  - Am I worried about my status or image?
- How might my efforts at protecting myself be causing me more suffering?
The path of compassion requires the fierce & brave heart of a warrior.

Compassion vs Compassion Fatigue

Self Compassion

Compassion at the workplace
Is the workplace compassionate?

• Most companies are not very compassionate.
  – People are often treated as objects.
• Many people don’t like their work.
  – Many dread work and often use alcohol & drugs to cope.
• There are no prisons at corporations,
  – but many hide suffering in their basements.

Sources of workplace suffering

• Suffering can come from external sources
  – Economic, Loss, Illness
• Downsizing, change, stress, etc.
• Workplace bullies
• Injustice
• Lack of trust
• Relationship issues

Selling the idea

Reasons for compassion at work

The business case
The personal case
Why cultivate compassion?
The business case
• Contributes to resilience,
• Profitability
• Higher customer retention
• Fuels collective capabilities such as learning and creativity
• Employee engagement

Gallup: Elements of quality management
1. I am doing something I am good at
2. I have all the things I need to do my job
3. I know what I should be doing
4. Every week someone notices something good about my work
5. People care about me at work
6. I have a mentor at work
7. People listen to my opinions
8. I understand how my job is related to the goals of the company
9. The people around me want to do a good job too.
10. I have a good friend at work
11. I get respectful feedback at work
12. There are opportunities to further my career.

Compassion at work: Other reasons
• Contributes to
  – innovation
  – service quality,
  – collaboration,
  – retaining talented people,
  – change.
Most managers want to do the right thing
The personal case

• Human Needs at work
  – Self interest
  – The need to care
  – The need for meaning

Feeling empty?
This is an opportunity to make you job a “calling.”

Awaking Compassion
1. Noticing
2. Interpreting
3. Feeling
4. Acting
1. Notice

- Curiosity
- People don’t express suffering due to shame.
- Most workplaces rely on punishment, which masks suffering;
- We notice the rule being broken rather than the person behind the rule.

2. Interpreting

- “Everything is Awesome!”
- We quickly blame individuals.
- “He does not deserve compassion,” often due to stereotypes
- How do we understand our own capacity to respond?
- If we feel we don’t have the skill or resources, we won’t

3. Feeling:

- Imbuing others with worth
- Cultivating presence
- Empathy for Suffering
  - Build perceptive engagement
  - Cultivate capacity for attunement,
  - Empathetic listening
  - Foster mindfulness
Psychology and Mindfulness

- Ellen Langer Ph.D.
  - Social psychologist
  - Harvard University

What if they are not doing their work?

Will employees who are given compassion take advantage of it?

4. Action/Acting
What do you actually do?
- Giving people time to cope with suffering
- Giving task flexibility and buffering
- Monitoring and listening
- Providing reassurance and safety
- Having rituals, memorials and mementos
- Generating resources
Awakening compassion in entire organizations

- Seeking Positive Deviance
- Building Compassion Competence
- Leading for Compassion Competence
- Creating a Culture of Compassion Competence
- Investing in Compassion Competence

Positive deviance

Compassion Competence

- Honoring compassionate acts
- Greater speed in addressing suffering
- Making resources available
  - May be material or emotional
- Building an infrastructure to respond
Compassion must be customized to the suffering
- Not rote & automatic

A Culture of Compassion
- Teaching people basic assumptions about human nature and relationships
  - when you live values that view humans as basically good
  - the positive default assumption
  - more generous interpretations of suffering and legitimate compassion
- Continually modeling positive values, goals & aspirations
- Retell stories of compassion in organizational history

The other side of culture
Leading for Compassion Competence

1. Leading with compassion
2. Leading for compassion

Obstacles to compassionate organizations

- Tolerance of incivility, disrespect or injustice
- Self-interest at the core of the culture with little emphasis on shared humanity.
- A system that focuses solely on protecting itself from risk
- Organizational leaders readily generate blame for errors
- Work overload characterizes the workplace
- An organization led by someone who models only self-interest,
- A system dominated by stories showing a lack of compassion
- Stories that spread self-interest or a punitive approach to suffering, even when the organization has a mission of compassion

What I hope you might take away
Resource

Charter for Compassion
https://www.charterforcompassion.org/

Twitter

I am, speaker, therapist and consultant addressing aspects of well-being.

@Taranowski
Thanks for listening

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