

IN CELEBRATION OF WORLD  
KINDNESS DAY

**#PRACTICE  
KINDNESS**

[www.PracticeKindness.world](http://www.PracticeKindness.world)



Search Inside Yourself  
Leadership Institute



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# Why Practice Kindness?

by Rich Fernandez

I recently had a powerful experience in Mumbai, India. I was teaching the Search Inside Yourself program at the Bombay Stock Exchange and guided participants through a “Just Like Me” practice, where pairs sit facing each other and are asked to recognize their similarities and wish each other well. One man had tears in his eyes at the end and shared a realization he’d had during this exercise: He was Indian, and the person he had been sitting across from was Pakistani and Muslim. The man shared that he’d been raised to hate people of his partner’s faith and nationality. When seeing through to what they had in common—that they were both people with bodies and minds, hopes and disappointments—he could no longer understand why or how he could hate the person across from him or anyone just because of their faith.

This is a profound example of the potential impact of practicing kindness and seeing our similarities, but not a unique one. There are many scientific studies that show the benefits of establishing deeper connections with others and offering kindness.

We frequently hear from participants that this practice is moving and quite powerful. We also know from research that, like mindfulness or empathy, kindness and compassion are human capacities that we can grow and develop through *practice*.

So, we we’d like to come together as a global community, create an intentional pause to connect with our common humanity and #PracticeKindness in celebration of World Kindness Day. When we take a moment to cultivate kindness, we can build connection, even bridging divides that have a long-standing history of othering.

Of course the realization of this one man in our Mumbai SIY program alone will not solve a decades-long dispute, but we believe this shift in belief is a necessary underpinning. We humans are naturally a social species, hardwired for connection. Kindness and helping behavior comes naturally. And yet, we also evolved to live in small social groups and to care more about people similar to us. According to research, we are naturally more empathetic to and more likely to take action to help people who are like us, who are in our in-group.



“When we take a moment to cultivate kindness, we can build connection, even bridging divides that have a long-standing history of othering.”

At a time of unprecedented global connection and worldwide crises, a time of 24/7 business demands and increasingly diverse workforces, we need to be able to bring all of humanity into our in-group, to see the similarities with our colleagues and neighbors who might practice different traditions or have diverse working styles, *while* we celebrate what makes us unique and our own personal experiences.

We know that this is not at all sufficient to solve global crises and structural challenges—we also need new policies, new ways of working, new systems—but we believe that our ability to see similarities and act with kindness is an essential ingredient for both our willingness to act and our ability to come up with the right solutions.

At SIYLI, we are inspired by a future where everyone feels connected to other beings and wants to contribute toward a more peaceful and compassionate world.

We hope this e-book and the #PracticeKindess movement are an invitation for many people around the world to come together and build these foundational tools for a better world through practice, discussion and celebration of our common humanity.

Please join us!

Onward and deeper, together.



# SELF-KINDNESS

At SIYLI, we believe that developing kindness starts by focusing on our own selves first with mindfulness as a foundation.

In the two-day Search Inside Yourself program, we talk about the importance of self-compassion and reference the work of Dr. Kristin Neff when presenting its three components:

## 1) Mindfulness

Being open to the reality of the present moment, with curiosity and kindness, and acknowledging that we're suffering. Taking a balanced approach to one's negative emotions so that feelings are neither suppressed nor exaggerated.

## 2) Self-kindness

Demonstrating that we care about ourselves just as we care about a good friend. Being warm towards oneself when encountering pain and personal shortcomings, rather than ignoring them or hurting oneself with self-criticism.

## 3) Common humanity

Recognizing that suffering and personal failure is part of the shared human experience.

One practice that has been used to help in the development of self-kindness and compassion is called "Metta."

Metta meditation is "kindness meditation." It's any kind of meditation that encourages and develops compassion. Most traditional types of Metta meditation focus on developing compassion towards others. However, this same meditation can actually be turned inward—and be directed at your own inner voice.





## LET'S #PRACTICEKINDNESS

- Start by doing one to two minutes of breathing meditation. Let yourself settle into the present moment.
- Now, picture someone you know and care about—someone for whom it's easy to feel love and compassion.
- Focus on that feeling of love and compassion. Look at this person in your mind and tell him or her: **"I want you to be happy. May you be well. May you be safe. May you be at peace."**
- Repeat this for three to four minutes. Feel free to replace these specific well wishes with whatever works best for you. Let yourself fully embrace the experience of wishing the best for this person.
- Now switch from imagining someone else to imagining yourself. Again, focus on your sense of love and compassion. See yourself in your mind and repeat the same wishes: **"I want you to be happy. May you be well. May you be safe. May you be at peace."**
- Repeat for three to four minutes. Let yourself fully embrace the experience of wishing yourself the best.
- Finish with one minute of breathing meditation.

You can also direct this meditation to specific parts of yourself or areas that need your attention. This meditation can be a powerful tool for helping transform your inner critic into your inner champion. Starting by feeling compassion toward others is a great way to transition into feeling compassion for yourself.



TRY A LOVING-KINDNESS MEDITATION. **LISTEN TO THIS 10-MINUTE GUIDED MEDITATION, WHICH ENCOURAGES YOU TO ALLOW YOURSELF TO RECEIVE COMPASSION FOR YOURSELF AND EXTEND IT TO OTHERS.**

**LINK: [BIT.DO/LOVING-KINDNESS](https://bit.do/loving-kindness)**



Kind hearts are the  
gardens,

Kind thoughts are  
the roots,

Kind words are the  
blossoms,

Kind deeds are the  
fruits.

ANONYMOUS



# OUR COMMON HUMANITY

By Carolina Lasso

Did you know that all human beings are 99.9 percent identical in their genetic makeup? In a world that so often emphasizes separation and highlights what makes us different, **we want to celebrate what makes us human, what unites us, what we have in common, while not forgetting about our diversity and what makes each one of us unique.**

If we pay attention to the basics of being human, our experiences are probably very similar: We all get hungry and thirsty. We all need sleep. We get baby teeth (and then lose them) at around the same age. We all go through puberty and experience similar changes during that period of time. At some point in our lives, we grow gray hair. We all know that, without exception, we will die one day.

At an emotional level, we're also very similar: We all experience suffering, in one way or another, in our lifetime. Funny stuff makes us laugh. If something really touches our heart, we may get goosebumps or a teary eye. We tend to look down and tighten our bodies when experiencing sadness or shame. Our bodies are likely to expand when we feel joyous, free or excited. We release oxytocin when get a good hug. Our hearts race faster when we kiss our crush.



In terms of what we look for in life, we all have similar goals as well: We want to be safe, happy and loved. We may respond to life's circumstances in different ways, but our goals are likely the same at a deep, deep level.

David Eagleman, a neuroscientist and adjunct professor at Stanford University, found that when a group of people would see someone else in pain, the **same neural networks** in the observants' brain would light up, just as if they were experiencing the pain themselves. Moreover, **when the observants considered the other person who was experiencing pain as similar to them, their response to their pain was stronger.** In other words, when we see similarities in others, we're more likely to respond to their pain and suffering with more empathy and sense of connection.

Something shifts in our bodies, minds and hearts whenever we are able to see another person as similar. We are more likely to understand them, put ourselves in their situation and offer a helping hand. By cultivating the ability to see that we are all part of one human family, we can more deeply create connection and decrease separation.

I personally use this "common humanity" practice before a big presentation at work. It not only calms me down, but it also helps me see people in my audience as similar, which decreases the worry that they're there to judge me.

Feel free to explore and practice seeing similarities in another person. Notice if anything shifts in your relationship. Below you will find a quick and easy practice that can help you see similarities and offer kindness to others.



"Something shifts in our bodies, minds and hearts whenever we are able to see another person as similar. We are more likely to understand them, put ourselves in their situation and offer a helping hand."





## LET'S #PRACTICEKINDNESS

To develop more empathy and compassion in our lives, we can start where it's easiest: with those who are closest to us, including our family members, loved ones, closest friends and work colleagues. Starting with these easy-to-love people, we can more easily learn how to see similarities and offer kindness. If we build this habit with the people in our inner circles, we can then extend the practice outward to those who may have different backgrounds, experiences and beliefs or even to where there's conflict in our lives or in the world.

Let's begin:

1. Take three deep breaths as you start bringing someone to your mind.

2. Repeat to yourself in silence:

**"This other person is a human being, just like me.**

**This person has a body and mind, emotions, fears and hopes, just like me.**

**This person has gone through difficult and through happy times, just like me."**

3. Notice what may shift in your body as you become aware of these and other similarities you may have with this person.

At this point, you may also offer positive thoughts or wishes, such as "I hope you have a nice day" or "safe travels." We suggest doing this practice anywhere you can. Try it this week with colleagues, quietly on your own, when you're stuck in traffic and especially anywhere in your life where conflict needs to be reduced or tensions addressed.

May you see in others what helps you create more connection.



LISTEN TO ONE OF OUR TEACHERS AS SHE DOES THE FULL SEEING SIMILARITIES AND OFFERING KINDNESS PRACTICE FROM SEARCH INSIDE YOURSELF PROGRAM.

LINK: [BIT.DO/JUST-LIKE-ME](https://bit.ly/just-like-me)





**“Love is the power to  
see similarity in the  
dissimilar.”**

THEODOR W. ADORNO



# COMPASSION: KEY TO RESILIENCE



What if, just like strengthening a muscle or learning a new hobby, we could train ourselves to be more compassionate and calm in the face of others' suffering? This is the question that researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison posed in a recent study, titled “[Visual Attention to Suffering After Compassion Training Is Associated With Decreased Amygdala Responses](#).” And their findings suggest that as little as two weeks of compassion meditation training can alter the way people respond to the suffering of others.

Resilience—the ability to skillfully cope with adversity, challenge and crisis—is essential to our emotional well-being. It enables us to recover from trauma of any kind—small struggles or life-changing circumstances. It also helps us respond empathetically to others in need, as opposed to averting our gaze, panicking or losing hope.

In the study, 24 participants practiced either 30 minutes of compassion meditation or reappraisal training (reframing personally stressful events to diminish negative emotions) once a day for two weeks.

The compassion meditation group practiced what’s commonly called a loving-kindness meditation (see page 6), a simple meditation that involves directing well wishes and compassion toward other people (as well as ourselves). This powerful practice typically focuses inward with ourselves initially, then moves to loved ones and finally toward people we don’t know. This kind of loving-kindness meditation is a little like exercising a muscle, gradually increasing the “weight” in terms of the relationships as our compassion expands.



We often think of compassion as an innate trait. You're either compassionate, or you're not. But what if compassion was actually more like confidence, happiness or tranquility—all traits that we can develop with *practice*.

Before and after the two-week training, all of the participants received brain scans. In the scanner, they viewed both evocative images of people suffering and neutral images of people. Participants were told to apply their training, so those who had learned loving kindness directed compassion toward the individuals, such thoughts as "May this person be happy and free from suffering," while the reappraisal group remade the situation by thinking, "This person is an actor and isn't really suffering."

Results came via eye-tracking technology, which noted where people focused on an image, whether it was looking at the least emotionally charged areas of images or directly at the person suffering, and for how long. This time was compared to the time spent looking at the socially relevant areas (i.e. faces) in the neutral photos.

Because the group that practiced loving-kindness meditation tended to look more directly at the images with suffering and also showed less activity in the areas of the brain associated with emotional distress, results suggest that compassion training could help people be more compassionate and calm in the face of suffering.

Developing more kindness and compassion will help you improve your relationships with others, both personally and professionally. Have you ever met someone who was so warm and compassionate that you couldn't help but respond in kind? When others sense that you care about them, they'll naturally care about you in return.

Moreover, a compassionate life is simply more enjoyable to live than a self-centered one. It's counter-intuitive, but one of the best things you could do for your own well-being is develop your sense of care for others.

"We often think of compassion as an innate trait. You're either compassionate, or you're not. But what if compassion was actually more like confidence, happiness or tranquility—all traits that we can develop with practice."







“Kindness is like snow—  
it beautifies everything it covers.”

KAHLIL GIBRAN

# KINDER WHEN WE'RE ALL STUCK... IN TRAFFIC

by Steph Stern

Just the other day, I was crammed into a crowded train, jostled by other passengers. I immediately felt grouchy and worried about being able to get to the door to get off the train at my stop. I took a few breaths and thought about how we were all crowding that train, all eager to get to our destinations on time, all sharing these common resources.

We tend to think that everyone else is the crowd or the traffic, that everyone else is getting in our way. But really, we're all the traffic; we all share the same roads, buses and trains. We share the fears of running late to work, of being annoyed by being bumped or cut off. All of these feelings are universal parts of the frustration that we might face during our commute, making it a great place to practice compassion and integrate mindfulness into a daily habit.

Here are three easy practices to consider to bring a bit more awareness and compassion to your regular commute:





# 1. WISH PEOPLE WELL

My experience on the train isn't unique. I try to make it a practice on my morning bus ride to work to take a moment to wish the other riders well for the day and thank them for sharing the bus with me. (I do this silently, in my own mind, just to be clear!) It never fails to lighten my spirits at least a bit. Sometimes I look around and think about wishes for individuals ("May he be happy, may she feel love today, may they appreciate each other today"), and sometimes I wish the whole bus well at once. If the bus is crowded and I feel jostled and annoyed, this practice becomes especially important. Instead of taking this so personally ("why are all of these people on my bus?!"), I remember that we're in this together, all sharing the same resources, each of us equally deserving.

This isn't just a sweet notion. A recent study from Iowa State University shows the benefit of this type of loving-kindness practice. Researchers had college students walk around a building for 12 minutes and practice one of the following strategies:

**Loving-kindness:** Thinking to themselves: "I wish for this person to be happy" for each person they saw.

**Interconnectedness:** Considering how they are connected to and share similarities with each person they saw.

**Downward social comparison:** Thinking how they may be better off than each person they encountered.

**Control Group:** Focusing on what they saw, such as people's clothing, colors, textures, makeup and accessories.

The study found that participants who practiced loving-kindness (or wishing others well) showed "lower anxiety, greater happiness, greater empathy, and higher feelings of caring and connectedness than those in a control condition." The interconnectedness group only showed benefits around empathy and connection, whereas the downward social comparison showed no benefit compared to the control. Douglas Gentile, a professor of psychology at Iowa State and author of the study, described: "Walking around and offering kindness to others in the world reduces anxiety and increases happiness and feelings of social connection. It's a simple strategy that doesn't take a lot of time that you can incorporate into your daily activities."



## 2. Assume the Best

If something negative happens—someone cuts us off in traffic, we’re jostled by a fellow commuter, we miss our train—we often assume that we did something wrong or we malign the other person. We often get angry or hurt, taking on more mental anguish than we need to.

Instead, why not attempt to assume the best? Instead of yelling aloud: “Ahhh, what a jerk!” if I’m cut off in traffic, I try to invent a story about why they are in such a hurry. “Maybe they are going to the hospital. It must be urgent!” This makes me feel better, even if it’s not true.

I’ll never know the truth about why they cut me off, but assuming the best transforms a frustrating situation that I have no control over into a moment of empathy. It helps me let go of the negative feelings. It’s not just about always making sure to see a silver lining in all situations, when denying the actual rain cloud. More often, it simply involves assuming that the people around us have the best intentions, even when our needs are competing.

## 3. Be Intentional

Recently, during a busy period at work, I realized that I just needed more time for mental empty space. For a few weeks, I stopped listening to anything or reading during my commute. I just sat and rested. Doing nothing was exactly the right thing to do. This was essential processing time during otherwise busy days. Now that things have slowed down a bit, I’ve been wanting more stimulation, and I’ve gone back to reading and podcasts.

It’s easy for commute time to be squandered—zoning out and listening to the radio, or scrolling through Twitter or cursing at traffic. I encourage you to try being intentional about how you use your commute time to be compassionate to yourself. We’re often tired during these times and don’t have a lot of energy to do much, and yet some of these activities can be more draining. Being intentional about this time means asking yourself what will really be best for you in the moment.

I hope these strategies help you transform your commute into time for yourself and time to feel connected to those around you.



LISTEN TO THIS GUIDED PRACTICE FOR WELL WISHING  
ON YOUR COMMUTE.

LINK: [BIT.DO/SIYLI-COMMUTE](https://bit.do/siqli-commute)





**“No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.”**

AESOP



# KINDER LEADERS

Compassion is a critical skill for leaders worldwide. While intuitively many would agree, there's also ample scientific evidence. Study after study has been conducted demonstrating just how crucial compassion is to strong leadership.

For example, researchers from the Australian School of Business conducted a leadership study with over 5,600 participants from 77 different organizations. They found that compassionate leaders consistently boosted employee productivity, employee morale and bottom-line profitability.

**"Compassionate leaders consistently boosted employee productivity, employee morale and bottom-line profitability."**

So how do you become a compassionate leader? A leader who inspires action and respect? According to Thupten Jinpa, a well-respected scholar and the Dalai Lama's longtime English translator, there are three core pillars:





### 1. Cognitive Understanding

In order to lead, you need to conceptually understand the problems, situations and decisions your peers and employees are facing. People around you want to know that you "get" their challenges. You know the facts. Without a solid cognitive understanding of what's going on, team members won't be able to connect with you around their projects and problems.

### 2. Affective (Emotional) Understanding

Yet facts alone aren't enough. The people you lead also want to know that you feel what they feel. That you understand them on an emotional level. Does your team feel stressed out? Are they excited about the projects they're working on? Do they feel like they're growing professionally, or are they feeling bored with their work?

Understanding how your team feels doesn't necessarily mean circumstances have to change. It's okay to be stressed temporarily if it's in service of a greater goal that everyone is committed to. Your team just wants to know that you understand.

### 3. Motivational Connection

Finally, the people on your team want to know that you want them to succeed. You've got their back. Their professional and personal development is part of your agenda. Knowing that you have their best interests at heart is a key motivating piece.

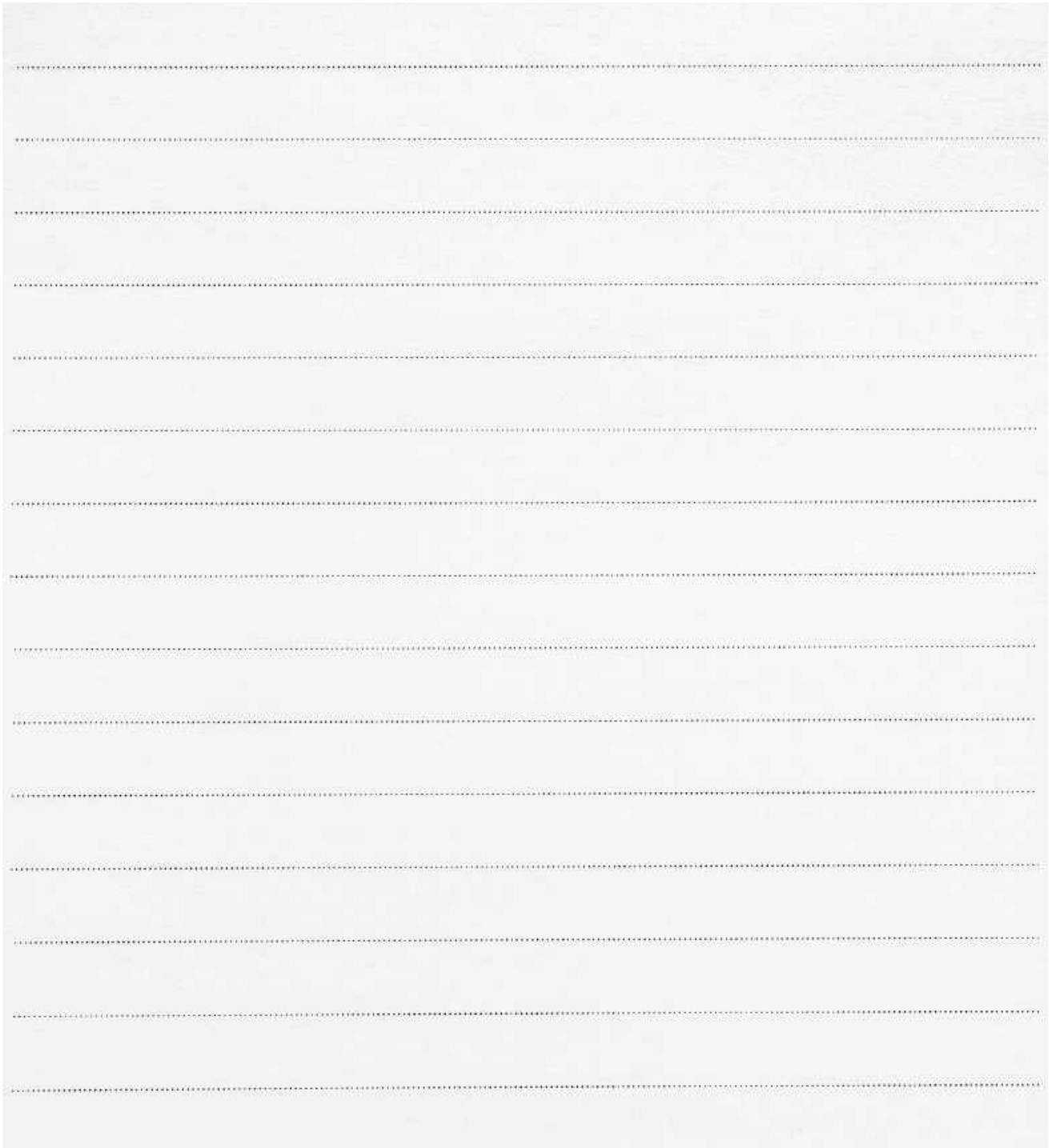
The main idea behind all three concepts is the switch in mindset from "me" to "we." It's no longer about the individual, but about the team as a whole. Embracing each of these three pillars will help your team create that sense of unity. Adopting these principles will help you bring people together to go further as a team than an individual can go on their own.



# LET'S #PRACTICEKINDNESS

At SIYLI, we believe everyone is a leader. Whether you lead your own life, manage a team, direct a group in your community or take on a leadership role in your family, you're a leader!

What are some actions you can take to be an even kinder leader\*?

A large rectangular area with horizontal dashed lines, intended for writing responses to the question above.

**“WHEREVER  
THERE IS A  
HUMAN BEING,  
THERE IS AN  
OPPORTUNITY  
FOR A  
KINDNESS.”**

LUCIUS ANNAEUS SENECA





## LET'S #PRACTICEKINDNESS

Please join us by finding 10 minutes for a one-on-one conversation.

Here's how:

Each person talks for three minutes, answering one or all of the questions below. The aim is to share without self-critique.

The other person listens mindfully and without commenting. Don't plan, edit or overthink—stream of consciousness works best here.

End with three minutes of normal conversation to reflect on what emotions arose, what you said and how you said it. That's it!

### Dyad on being kinder at work:

What would it look like to apply more kindness into your work life, however you define “work”?

How might kindness impact the way you relate to your yourself, your work and the people with whom you work?

What is one specific kindness practice that you may want to try to integrate into your professional life?

# KINDNESS AS A CONTAGION

From the most basic exchanges to the deepest conversations, kindness is a contagion of emotion that spreads through social networks more rapidly than the flu. Its impact can vary from fleeting to life changing, and sociologist Nicholas Christakis of Yale University has studied this phenomenon in depth. For example, his research shows that people who become happier in life, increase the odds of a nearby friend also becoming happier by 25 percent.

In this scenario, a spouse's happiness potential increases by 8 percent, and the next-door neighbors will be lucky to see a 34 percent increase in odds.

"Everyday interactions we have with other people are definitely contagious, in terms of happiness," says Christakis in regard to [his findings](#), which were studied by mapping 5,000 people in one town for more than 20 years. Christakis explains, "We were able to show that as one person became happy or sad, it rippled through the network."

Similar, albeit less uplifting, research finds that [other emotions, such as sadness, are equally contagious](#).

## Contagion via Social Media

Direct interaction with a person is one thing, but do our moods affect larger social networks outside of in-person interactions as easily? In a nutshell, yes. A massive [experiment with 700,000 Facebook users](#) demonstrated that emotional states are quickly transferred to others without other people even realizing a change in their moods.

[Another study, with data from millions of Facebook users](#), followed how rainfall influenced the emotional content of social media posts and the contagious effect of those posts on others in areas not experiencing rainfall.

Why not spread kindness throughout your network and watch it ripple outward?

At SIYLI, we use a practice called the SBNRR for dealing with triggers, which is useful in situations where we encounter negative or distressing emotions. It is a mnemonic device to help remember each of the five steps:



# LET'S #PRACTICEKINDNESS

## STOP

Whenever you feel triggered, stop. Pausing at the onset of a trigger is a powerful and important skill. Do not react in any way for a moment. This moment is known as “the sacred pause,” and it could well be the most important part of every conversation you have.

## BREATHE

By focusing our mind on the breath, we strengthen the sacred pause. In addition, taking deep breaths calms the body and mind.

## NOTICE

Experience your emotion by bringing attention to your body. What does it feel like in the body? Try to analyze the emotion as simply a physiological phenomenon, not an existential phenomenon.

## REFLECT

Where is the emotion coming from? Is there history behind it? Is there a self-perceived inadequacy involved? Without judging it to be right or wrong, bring this perspective to the situation.

## RESPOND

Bring to mind ways you could respond to the situation that would have a positive outcome. Imagine the kindest, most positive response (perhaps it’s opposite of where you begin) and then decide how to proceed.



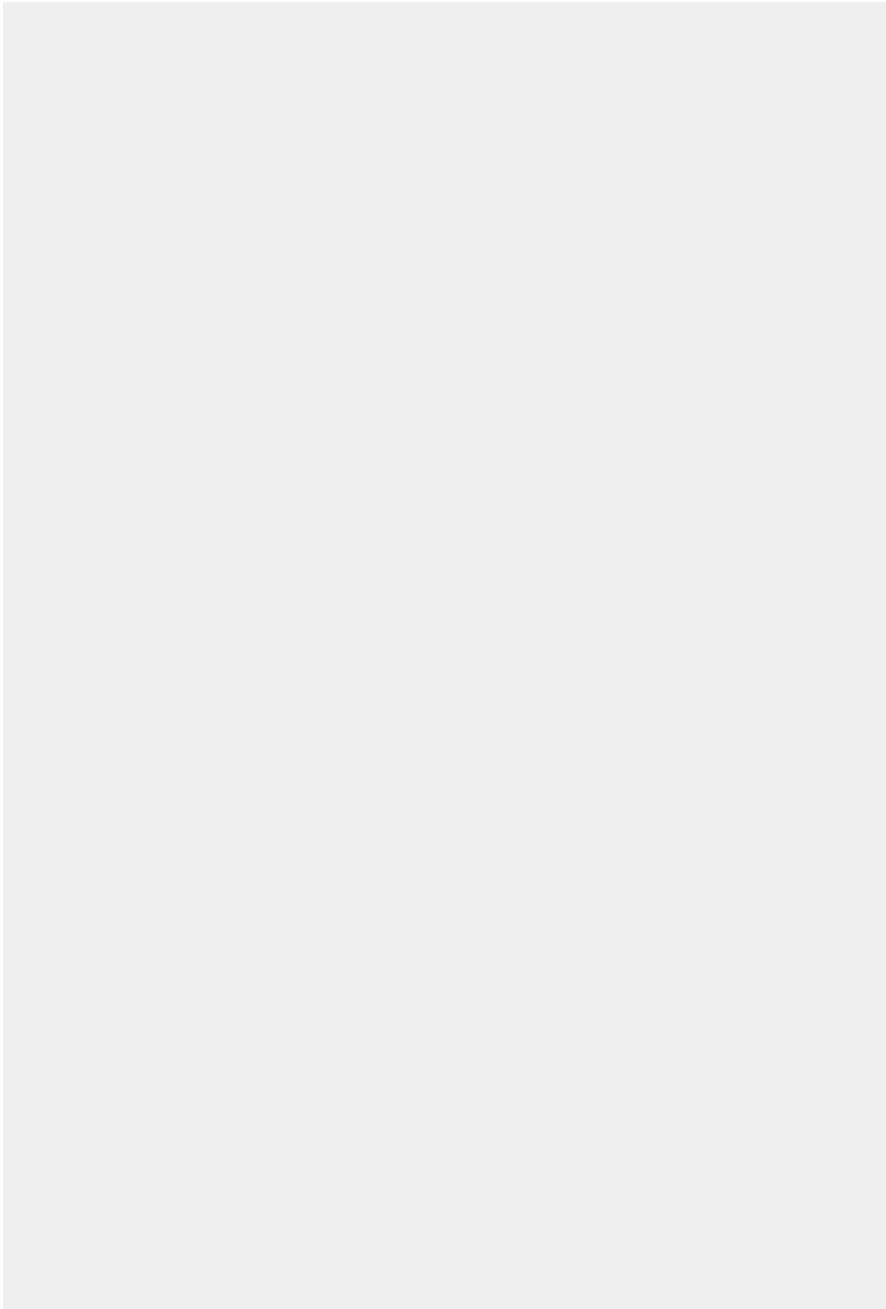



**“DO THINGS FOR  
PEOPLE NOT  
BECAUSE OF WHO  
THEY ARE OR  
WHAT THEY DO IN  
RETURN, BUT  
BECAUSE OF WHO  
YOU ARE.”**

**HAROLD S. KUSHNER**

## LET'S #PRACTICEKINDNESS

Write ONE way you'd like introduce more kindness into your life:





**“A single act of kindness  
throws out roots in all  
directions, and the roots spring  
up and make new trees.”**

**AMELIA EARHART**



May you be well.  
May you be happy.  
May you be at ease.  
May you #PracticeKindness.





# NOTES ON KINDNESS

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# NOTES ON KINDNESS

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# **PRACTICE KINDNESS**

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