How kindness culture can elevate your business

Successful companies all share a commitment to three principles: abundance, long-term relationships and regard for others. How well does your company encourage the growth and development of its employees, and then celebrate their accomplishments?

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In Germany they have a word for everything. A longing for someplace faraway is *Fernweh*. The feeling *Geborgenheit* is the perfect blend of warmth, comfort and safety. Have you ever thought of a retort too late, or something that seemed like a good idea at the time turns out to be a bad joke in retrospect? The Germans call that *Treppenwitz*. But one of my favorites is *vergönnen*. It literally means "not to begrudge" someone of something. In other words, it's taking satisfaction in the achievements of others. There are few pleasures as rich and rewarding as the delight we feel when someone close to us succeeds.

The pace and demands of the modern workplace can prevent employees from celebrating their colleagues' growth and accomplishments. This is a shame. While there is a place for healthy competition, collaboration is where the real opportunity for innovation lies, and nothing encourages collaboration like *vergönnen*.

Creating such a culture at work is no easy feat, though. It's not simply about making employees happy. It's about cultivating a sense of security, shared responsibility and mutual respect. I've studied hundreds of companies over the course of my career, some of which are featured in my new book — *Organizations for People*, co-authored with industrial psychologist Michael O'Malley — in which we argue that cultivating an organizational culture of kindness is beneficial in creating a contented workplace and even a positive bottom line.

I've found that companies characterized by *vergönnen* all share a commitment to three principles: abundance, long-term relationships and regard for others. If a company can focus on these, they can build a workforce that finds inspiration in the success of every employee. With a culture like that, there's no upper bound to what a business can achieve.

Abundance

The abundance principle is best understood in terms of its opposite: scarcity. In a workplace dominated by a scarcity mindset — whether we're talking about jobs, projects or face time with a manager — employees can feel like they're trapped in a zero-sum game, which breeds an unhealthy sense of competition. With an abundance mindset, however, employees don't feel threatened by their colleagues' success. This, in turn, makes the workplace more collaborative and productive.

It's true that resources are finite. But this doesn't mean people need fear uncertainty, or that they won't have access to what they need. The key is to actively prepare employees for the next opportunity, whether it be the next big account or a promotion.

One way to do this is to invest heavily in employee development. Companies that empower employees to upskill, not only on their traditional career track but in departments other than their own, expand a sense of what's possible. When people feel empowered by new skills, they're not only more useful to any company with changing needs, they're also less prone to fear-driven relationships with their colleagues. And the more knowledge that flows through an organization, the greater the sense of abundance.