

# Leave Ego Out of the Office: How Kindness Creates Success

**Culture** is everything when it comes to business. A toxic culture can destroy a law firm from within. Business leaders now understand how corporate culture affects the bottom line. Creativity and productivity blossom in an environment where people feel safe to express themselves. Employees thrive when they operate in environments that support them.

Culture is behavior, so if you want to create a culture of caring, you have to bring awareness to problems and foster a change in behavior. Quality talent will always prefer to operate in a healthy environment. Leaders of law firms must recognize that well-being improves collaboration, inspires integration and fosters innovation. Who wouldn't want to contribute to raising the tide when all the ships reside in a harbor of respect and kindness?

## Effective Communication, Diversity and Inclusion

Kids say, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me." Unfortunately, that's not true. Words do hurt, and they hurt adults just as much as children. In fact, hurtful words from childhood can resonate into adulthood.

Words have more weight than often given credit. Email and text messages can be hard to interpret and may cause pain to others without senders realizing that what we said had a hurtful impact. In the day-to-day hustle and grind, sometimes we find ourselves responding in short statements that can easily create confusion and even make recipients feel like they're being snapped at or belittled.

As communicators, creators and marketers, we must have a built-in PC or sensitivity filter, reminding us to always be positive, always be honest and always be sure that we are not putting others down. We must consider whether any messages denigrate genders, cultures, social groups or issues before we hit send or post.

Unfortunately, not everyone has such a filter. That's why it's so important to have **diverse voices** and inclusive teams so your messages are appropriate and will not cause harm.

It's not just the marketing messages that concern me. It's the way we communicate, respond, and give directions and feedback within our teams and at our offices (in person or virtually).

## Taking the Road of Respect and Kindness

No one is always in a good mood. We can't like everyone. And yes, we all make mistakes.



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We can't control how people interpret things, either. But we can control our own actions. Regardless of any frustration, personal situation, time constraint or stress affecting you in the moment, always communicate to others with respect and kindness. You'll maintain a positive work environment and everyone around you will be happier – especially if you're the leader. Before you write or speak to someone, pause and think about your words and how they might be received. We can't control how others react, but we can control being cruel, snarky, condescending or downright nasty. Nobody deserves that.

## Nothing Wrecks Progress Like a Nasty Gram

Too often, most of us have been on the receiving end of a nasty gram. Perhaps it wrecked your day, busted your creative bubble or made you feel worthless. Creating that reaction is a perfect way to shut down collaboration, trust and enthusiasm. Sometimes we think that we are using acceptable terms because they have become common in a certain sector, but even a common use can make others feel invalid, inferior or not respected. For example, why use the term "non-lawyer" to describe all the business professionals helping you succeed? Why dismiss your external support team as "vendors" when they are a critical part of your team and should be respected as consultant?

## Stop and Think Before You Hit Send

Word choice matters. Think about how your message will be received before you send it. Be direct, but not cruel or hostile. Think about whether your message will educate, inspire, redirect, provide clarity or move everyone closer to success.

How do you make people feel useless, invalid or disrespected? Use statements like, "I don't have time for this," "I have no clue what you are saying," "This makes no sense to me" or "What were you thinking?" As a bonus, these phrases will reduce the confidence that people have in you, and kill their desire to succeed for you. The ego might want to flex, but when we use aggressive terms, we are sabotaging ourselves and our professional relationships.

## How to Handle Disappointment and Disagreement in the Office

Things don't always turn out the way we want them to. We don't agree with (or like) everyone. How we respond to disappointment and disagreement can make or break a working relationship. We only hurt ourselves by making others feel dismissed, or that their ideas are stupid, or that their time doesn't matter. If you ignore the ideas of others and dictate what you want to happen, you are likely to squash the opportunity to explore new – and maybe better – solutions. Instead, recognize the work that's been done, and then suggest improvements or ask if we could do more. That creates an opening to collaborate.

## Ego is the Enemy

In most cases, the organizational structure at a law firm will be well known. You don't

have to get on that high horse and beat your chest for people to recognize your position and role. There's no need to hurt others because of your insecurities or need to be more important than others. You will miss out on so many great ideas and relationship opportunities by making people feel less than you. Making your team feel worthless, or scolding people as if they're children, is the fastest way to create reactive working situations, as opposed to proactive ones that offer greater and greater opportunities.

Compassion is a great antidote to ego. Put yourself in another person's shoes. Think about the time they put into projects or cases. Check your aggression. There's no need for harsh and foul language to accentuate your point or feelings.

On the other hand, if you are the one feeling hurt by someone's words and actions, tell them. I have found that in many cases, making someone aware of having used aggressive or hurtful words and tone means they might feel remorseful – and be willing to change. Awareness is the first step to change. But don't meet ego with ego, toxicity with toxicity. Stand up for yourself, but with compassion and respect.

Creating a safe work environment, respecting others, being kind and collaborating as equals will undoubtedly increase revenue and employee retention while attracting even more talent to the firm.

If you have questions about how to implement an awareness campaign, reach out to me, Terry M. Isner, at [tisner@jaffepr.com](mailto:tisner@jaffepr.com).