

Why Leaders Need To Be More Compassionate And Benevolent

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Organizations worldwide are shifting their cultures because the [pandemic](#) has accelerated and amplified trends already present, such as a need for purpose-driven leadership and an increasingly meaningful connection with consumers, which is, according to [Deloitte](#), noticeable with younger generations.

Given their proximity to Gen-Z, Universities, particularly those who promote an ethos of service, cater toward this growing desire for less material perspectives. Andrew Godley, director of Henley Business School's Centre for Entrepreneurship, is an expert on this matter, and is convinced that developing strong communities is vital. "Business schools that can articulate their values and build their learner communities around these values will thrive as they tap into the willingness among the young to commit to strong and purposeful cultures." The importance of this connection at some

business schools continues because, suggests Terence Mauri, Entrepreneur Mentor in Residence at MIT and London Business School, compassion is a fundamental virtue inherent in human existence rooted in a basic human need—the need to care.



Compassion is a fundamental virtue inherent in human existence rooted in a basic human need – the ... [+] GETTY

His perspective is shared by Selin Kudret, an assistant professor at Kingston Business School, who suggests that compassion entails the capacity to alleviate another’s suffering through noticing their need or pain, empathizing, and acting to alleviate their suffering. “Suffering may take many forms” she says. “The feelings of a mother leaving her sick child at home; losing a close friend to cancer; microaggressions at work; or the uncertain environment in the pandemic may all induce suffering that diminishes an individual’s potential to be their best self.”

Worryingly, **as employee wellbeing suffers, so do organizational productivity and performance.** Compassion, therefore, presents a unique opportunity to mitigate that suffering. In a bid to awaken compassion at work, Jane Dutton, distinguished professor emerita

at Michigan Ross, concludes that compassion can be a natural and inimitable organizational resource for a sustainable competitive advantage when systemically built into organizational structures and practices. Organizations have the power to amplify individuals' collective capacity for caring. Those which do so facilitate a psychologically safe, diverse, and creative culture that helps attract and retain talent and create greater stakeholder value.

Organizations are increasingly observing this link and the value it can create, too according to Tim Sellick, client director at King's Business School, who notices increased requests for programmes that address the weakening of the psychological contract between the organization and those they employ that has been influenced by the rise of the digital society.

David Weston, CEO of the Teacher Development Trust and lead author of a new [working paper](#) on this subject, suggests, "while some people think culture is nebulous, there is, in fact, a robust association between results and how effective leaders create the right cultures for their workforce. This is not just about wellbeing; this is about the bottom line, and all leaders need to take it seriously." Weston's perspective is shared by Dan Morrow, CEO of Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust, who suggests now is the time for wise compassion. Deriving from Hougard's matrix, he believes people can easily slip into a place of "caring avoidance" where they allow the sheer weight of shared negative experiences to allow empathy to, in fact, become a barrier to action. That's not to say that empathy isn't important; it is vital, according to Morrow. "Perhaps we have changed ourselves as leaders in this time- so we must refocus on our core principles, reinvest in wise compassion as not just the attitudes of our culture but in the norms and behaviors that manifest from it, and take our people with us back into hopeful hearts with robust and tangible outcomes." Claire Cuthbert, CEO of the Evolve Trust, agrees. "For senior leaders, leading, motivating,

and supporting staff can be a challenge at the best of times,” she says. “However, we are now seeing the impact of Covid that has exasperated this challenge. Educationalists are now coping with a wide range of issues and feelings, such as fear, anxiousness, and vulnerability. As leaders, we now need to be more empathetic than we ever have before and need to prioritize the emotional wellbeing of our staff, and specifically, the adoption of wellbeing-focused cultures.”

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One industry that has historically made headway towards building strong company cultures focused around wellbeing and care for others is [Hospitality](#). Companies that can embrace the same quality standards for their internal culture as for their customer service are set to gain in attractivity and performance. This is evidenced in the growing recruitment of hospitality specialists in other fields.

Niched in Switzerland, Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne (EHL), traditionally known as the best hospitality university globally, has been named one of the top 5 business schools in Switzerland according to [QS rankings](#), suggesting that business education is becoming grounded by principles of hospitality, namely, service—a notion supported by *Bloomsbury* author David Cobb. This is further evidenced by the fact that other industries typically recruit EHL graduates because of their service and customer experience: alumni hold management and leadership positions within financial institutions, luxury brands, travel and automobile, and many other service firms.

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Sententiously, EHL Group CEO Michel Rochat has named 2021 the Year of Benevolence, setting an expectation to care for others, the wider community, and the environment, thus providing an example to students, alumni, and industry partners. “Leaders must be role models, inspire and coach. Today’s students will need to incorporate kind and compassionate leadership models in tomorrow’s workplace, and we aim to be that example for our students.” This is achieved through a stated teaching philosophy of *savoir*, *savoir-faire* and *savoir-être*, which means knowledge, know-how, and behavior. As such, curricula are predicated on the belief that leaders require a healthy balance of IQ and EQ to

succeed, meaning motivation, empathy, creativity, teamwork, flexibility, and cultural awareness are integrated into the academic curriculum.

“I sometimes worry when business schools cover topics like EQ,” comments Steve Ludlow, leadership development expert. “It’s often perceived by learners as ‘here is another tool to help you, be a better leader.’ Ultimately, you cannot teach compassion—it can only come from learning experiences that challenge mindsets and engage emotions.”

He’s right.

And subsequently, learning experiences in and out of [the EHL classroom are immersive](#), with a holistic approach to the student experience. As a result, pedagogy actively cultivates a [virtues-based approach to leader development](#), which means teaching involves more than the transfer of knowledge. It encompasses campus behavior, interaction among students, staff, faculty, diversity among the community, participation in sustainability actions and committees. Here are some ways they’re doing that, that you can emulate.

- Alleviate situations of high stress: The student applications and selection process was identified as a period of potential anxiety for candidates and replaced with [motivation days](#) centered around the candidate’s wellbeing. That comprises relaxation and good vibes rooms, relaxing music playlists, podcast series with student testimonials, tips on video communication and business etiquette, chatroom, icebreaker games, and virtual dashboards for the team exercises.

- Implement a service culture: First-year students complete practical training across all campus operational departments, allowing them to develop a service approach with real customers.
- Provide students and staff with opportunities to become involved with sustainable and solidarity actions: Staff can, for example, volunteer up to 8 hours on work time during EHL's Solidarity Month initiatives.
- Implement training to improve overall wellbeing, such as mindfulness workshops and harassment prevention training for staff and students.

The approach of EHL is congruent with that of Cambridge University, the forefront of teaching excellence globally. Deputy director of the Cambridge Judge MBA, Thomas Roulet, concludes, “With the pandemic, we have realised even more the importance of empathy for leaders and managers to understand the contextual idiosyncrasies faced by employees affecting their headspace, health and approach to work.” As such, Roulet has “integrated these issues into teaching at the Judge, which in particular, is so crucial for MBAs. So too has Sunitha Narendran, director of Roehampton University's Business School, which produces graduates highly sought after by employers in both private and public sectors because of their benevolence.

Consequently, therefore, a more informed, values-driven workforce with new views on work-life balance has never been more open to change. With it, however, comes an up-and-coming generation of consumers and employees—born into an era of personalization and empowered amid this crisis to exercise their ability to elevate their brands. For example, DARE—the global transformation

consultancy—has seen a continued awareness from their clients of the importance of purpose, compassion, and connection.

Make no mistake: The pitfalls for organizations have never been more profound, but the opportunities to attract impassioned talent and be a force for good—beyond the products sold and services delivered are abundant: it's the difference that makes *the* difference.



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