

Catch Somebody Doing Something Right

By Tym Sotnikow

The world of corporate business is changing. The industrial age fostered a certain approach to business based on the simplistic belief that a good bottom line meant a healthy company and equated to a good and happy workplace. The problem is that somewhere in the journey, this relentless pursuit of a healthy bottom line has lead many organizations to leave consideration of the "people factor" out of the mix.

It is now widely recognized that the effects of omitting the people factor -- turnover, absenteeism, increasing disability costs, and even violence in the workplace -- are wreaking havoc on the bottom line. Rather than a healthy bottom line creating a healthy workplace, organizations are waking up to see that perhaps the reverse is true.

At the 2002 Health, Work & Wellness Conference in Lake Louise, Kyosei Consulting co-founder Olivia McIvor brought her 20 years of experience in tough corporate markets to deliver a new paradigm based on this concept that looking after the people factor in organizations is the starting point for a healthy bottom line. Kyosei, a Japanese word for "living and working together for

the common good", represents the mandate for their business and is the foundation of all their programs, including an innovative wellness initiative called the Kindness to Colleagues™ program.

Initially driven by the appalling number of incidents of violence in the workplace McIvor has dedicated her life to using hard facts, well-researched statistics and her own vast experience to create a sound format for bringing harmony into corporate environments with the Kindness to Colleagues program.

The model, designed to sustain employees over the long-term and reduce inefficiencies caused by organizational "silos" is based on the idea that the simple, adaptable, and actionable concept of kindness will create the solid social foundations in organizations and communities that current research is proving to be the cornerstone of healthy organizations that can sustain long-term profitability.

This program, designed to enhance all aspects of the business, is structured around three main principles:

1. Kindness to Oneself
2. Kindness to Colleagues

3. Kindness in the Community

Though kindness may seem a bit soft to some, this program and others like it have helped achieve proven bottom line results in the six areas identified by the Wellness Council of America as prime benefits to organizations who deliver safe and effective wellness programs to their employees.

These are:

- Improved Morale
- Reduced Turnover
- Increased Recruitment Potential
- Reduced Absenteeism
- Health Care Cost Containment
- Improved Employee Health Status

McIvor's approach to kindness, however, is far from soft. Most incidents of abuse in the workplace are harassment and bullying, which she stated are "no different from the playground to the boardroom". This low grade abuse is statistically the kind which, over time, leads to the front page worthy stories of people "going postal", and raises the question of what companies are doing to create these scenarios. Successful organizations are no longer abstaining from their responsibility to get to the root of these problems from within and

create proactive solutions.

The program differs from others in its proactive focus and wide-ranging application that stems from the universal understanding of the concept of kindness. This simple concept addresses the shifting expectations and values of the workplace.

The up-and-coming era of Generation X'ers will no longer stand idly by and blindly accept hierarchical workplace environments developed by well-intentioned Baby Boomers. Being used up until there is nothing left is no longer an option for Gen X'ers, and they will use this to their advantage when seeking an employer. Baby Boomers are also fed up with the corporate legacy that was left to them, and are seeking the opportunities the Gen X'ers are demanding.

If employers want the loyalty, commitment, and full intellectual or physical capacity of people to be brought to work, "[they] can no longer (allow employees to) only bring a part of [themselves] to work"; said McIvor. She emphasized that the program's other strength is in its ability to build self-esteem. "If you don't have your self-esteem to drive the skills being taught, there will be no reward and no efficacy."

By bringing kindness into the workplace, responsible organizations are sending the message to themselves, their competitors and the globe that their people truly are their most valuable assets. The end result is a better bottom-line that doesn't leave the "people factor" in the dust.