



CENTER FOR
COMPASSIONATE
LEADERSHIP

EVERYDAY PRACTICES

EVERYDAY PRACTICES FROM COMPASSIONATE LEADERSHIP AND RESILIENCE TRAINING FOR GLOBAL HEALTH LEADERS – FALL 2020

Everyday practices are short and simple, and can easily be worked into your life on a regular basis. These familiar acts gain their power from your intention and attention to practice them frequently. As you incorporate them into your routine, they will support your development as a compassionate leader.

The beauty and simplicity of everyday practices mean that you don't need to "add" them to your schedule. They make themselves available in the regular flow of a day. Unlike other types of exercise, these everyday practices help strengthen your compassionate leadership muscles without having to set aside additional time to train.

Choose one practice at a time and set an intention to be aware of times when you can use that practice throughout your day. After doing this for a number of days in a row, the practice becomes a part of you, and you will find compassionate responses flowing from you more naturally and easefully.

The list of practices we include here are simply the eight of the many possibilities. We didn't include gratitude, for example, and it is perhaps one of the most popular of these practices. What additional everyday practices can you think of? There is no need to limit yourself to these eight.

Greeting

You can create significant change in yourself and in the people around you with small actions. How you greet people is one of those ways that you can have a big impact with a small action.

Our greeting is the first way that we set the tone when we encounter another person. What will we bring to that meeting? What will we bring to that connection to the other person? Will we bring warmth? Will we bring joy? Will we bring compassion? You get to choose what you bring.

One way to be intentional about your greeting is to start by thinking about how you want to be greeted. Consider the open hearted, unbounded joy of a young child greeting their parent or grandparent. Or the warm smile of someone who greets your gaze directly, and sincerely asks, "How are you today?"

The more deeply we connect to others, the more effective we will be able to become as compassionate leaders. Your greeting of another is your regular opportunity to strengthen your connection to others. It is a moment that will present itself multiple times a day. Don't let the moment pass by without embracing it.

Awe

To lead compassionately, we have to move outside of ourselves. We have to move beyond our own emotions and be able to recognize and understand the thoughts and feelings of another. Most of our emotions focus our attention inward. Even emotions that appear to be focused outwards, like anger or happiness for others are really focused on ourselves. It is actually our own anger or happiness that we project outward.

Awe, however, is different. Awe is one of the few emotions that focus our attention inward. Albert Einstein said, "One cannot help but be in awe when contemplating the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvelous structure of reality. It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this mystery each day."

Seek to comprehend just a tiny mysterious part of the structure of reality, of eternity, of life itself. And in doing that, it will help you connect outside of yourself in ways that will strengthen your compassion.

Kindness

Kindness is a wonderful, beautiful everyday practice. When you perform a kind act for someone else, it enhances them, it benefits them. When you perform a kind of a kind act for someone else, it also lifts you up. It's shown in both neurology and blood chemistry, that your kindness benefits you. And there's a third impact. Through the emotion of elevation, kindness benefits anyone who witnesses the kind act. Kindness is a win, win, win practice.

When we find ways to perform simple, kind acts, the compassion ripples outward from us, which creates a more compassionate team, organization, and world. Kindness is a consistent practice of compassionate leaders.

Curiosity

Curiosity is an important practice for compassionate leaders. It undergirds one's capacity for non-judgmental awareness. Curiosity helps you keep from jumping to a premature conclusion and keep an open mind and open heart to really understand what's going on.

Curiosity is critical for communication. Compassionate leaders ask good questions and good questions come from a place of curiosity. Compassionate leaders also listen deeply. To be able to do that, you need to be curious. You need to sincerely want to know what people are sharing with you.

Approach every situation with curiosity, and you will avoid the pitfalls of judgment, learn more than you can possibly imagine, and deepen your connection to everyone you meet. All three of these benefits of curiosity will strengthen your compassionate leadership.

Replenishment

Replenishment is a practice of self-compassion that rebuilds our energy – both physical and emotional – following its depletion from stress or trauma. In replenishing our own energy, we are positioning ourselves to be strong enough to go forth and be compassionate to others.

Replenishing our spirits can help combat burnout, and it can help us be more resilient and bounce back more quickly. Effective replenishment in everyday practice can vary widely. For some people, they find replenishment in alone time, whereas other people find it in connecting a friend or friends. Some people find it in movement and exercise. Others find it in stillness and reflection. You might even find it in other everyday practices such as kindness or awe.

Compassionate leaders can't offer what they don't have, so replenishment is a requirement, especially in periods of high stress and intensity. While it may seem hardest to practice replenishment during difficult periods, that is the time you need it most.

Shared Common Humanity

Compassionate leaders recognize the humanity of each individual, and respond to them in ways that promotes their flourishing and success. Pay attention to where you humanize and where you dehumanize others.

Can you be open to each and every person you encounter today? Can you, like Will Rogers, say, "I never met a person I didn't like." Neuroscience answers that question for us, and tells us it's very, very hard to meet everyone the same way, to have an open heart for everyone, to respond the same to everyone.

Every day, be aware of how you respond to different people. To whom do you respond openly and warmly? When do you find yourself drawn to someone? When do you recoil? Who do you find it hard to recognize and realize that just like you, this person wants to be happy.

When you focus your awareness on the times and places you struggle to connect your humanity to that of another, you are already on the path to leading compassionately through the full recognition of every individual's full humanity.

Focus

We can't do it all. There are many valuable and worthy situations that we are aware of that would benefit from our attention. How do we choose which ones get our energy and which ones don't? Do we choose or do we allow ourselves to be pulled back and forth among the many things vying for our attention?

Every choice is a renunciation. When we say yes to one thing, we are saying no to many, many others. Can we be mindful of where we want to place our attention, say yes to that, and then keep our attention in that direction.

Part of the beauty of cultivating a mindful presence is that we learn how much power we have when we focus our attention on very worthy things. We don't let the voices of fear or doubt distract our focus, nor do we let the latest shiny object capture us and lead us away from our heart's intention.

Pause

Pausing is a very powerful practice which can be utilized on its own, and with other everyday practices. When combined with other everyday practices, it strengthens them, and accelerates their internalization to becoming a regular part of your behavior. For example, when you pause, you deepen your ability to be aware. Pausing allows you the time to recognize judgment and bias and let it go.

We all appreciate the restorative nature of a longer pause. Pauses as short as five to ten seconds in response to upsetting stimulus allows the triggered stress hormones to fade, allowing you to move from instinctive reaction to intentional action.

The importance of pause has grown significantly with the growth in external stimuli created by our constantly beeping technology. A pause as short as a second or two can keep you from being distracted by the notification alerts emanating from our phones and computers. That brief pause will allow you to maintain your focus on the task in front of you and allow you to respond intentionally rather than reactively.