



MAKE KINDNESS CONTAGIOUS!



A DOZEN RECOMMENDATIONS ABOUT KINDNESS AT WORK

Workers' Health
Sustainable Development and Health Equity Special Program/SDE

2014

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1. INTRODUCTION

PAHO's Wellness Week began in 2011 as an initiative to exemplify the power of local action to combat *Non-Communicable Diseases* (NCDs).¹ This activity was built on the experience of "Wellness Day in the Caribbean" which occurred alongside the United Nations High-Level Meeting on NCDs. More than 192 heads of state and world leaders attended and discussed at the United Nations headquarters in New York City, which actions should be taken to prevent the NCDs pandemic.

Since then, Wellness Week is an initiative that mobilizes multiple stakeholders including local authorities, the private sector, civil society organizations, and the general public. At the same time, it allows to raise awareness about the importance of enabling opportunities for healthy living and to remind everyone that each person plays a key role in preventing NCDs¹. Thus, an urgent need persists for allowing Wellness Week to continue influencing in the development of initiatives that address and emphasize the importance of health promotion, and encourage the creation of healthy work environments.

The world of work is in constant change, and even though work is supposed to be a productive, rewarding and progressive experience, it entails many hazardous situations that jeopardize individual and collective workers' health. One key issue is the change of musculoskeletal work toward the mental-intellectual work that prevails in office environments. This type of work often creates communication and performance barriers, creating a rarefied work environment that can have consequences on individual's physical, mental and emotional health. Stress, burnout, work harassment, depression, hypertension, etc., are some of the manifestations of unsupportive work environments on workers' health, that can also magnify NCDs.

Therefore, this strategy intends to create awareness about work, considered to be a satisfactory, motivating and happy experience within our organization; and how we can contribute to enjoy it as our work allows it. To achieve this, the following four key elements were identified to bring about these changes:

1. Create respectful and supportive environments
2. Acknowledge and empower staff
3. Promote active participation of all staff
4. Combine different approaches of effective communication

Human values are the principles, standards, convictions and beliefs that people adopt as their guidelines in daily activities². As such, they mark our daily life at work. *Kindness* is a very important human value, which goes beyond age, race, sex, religion, culture and/or politics. In fact, kindness is recognized to be a value for some philosophers; as a virtue in some religions; and as a human behavior by sociologists, in which the individual has a pleasant disposition and concern for others². It is also marked by ethical characteristics, given the innate capacity of love of human beings for having compassion, and their ability to be kind to one another.

¹ About Wellness Week [Internet]. Pan American Health Organization | Organización Panamericana de la Salud. 2013 [cited 2014 Oct 19]. Available from: http://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=3828&Itemid=39571&lang=en

² Gonda, J. (Ed.). (1977), A History of Indian Literature: Epics and Sanskrit religious literature, Medieval religious literature in Sanskrit (Vol. 2), Otto Harrassowitz Verlag; see page 62 and note 43

Kindness in our workplace is not just about being “nice” to those we agree with or get along with. It goes much deeper allowing us to acknowledge that each one of us has strengths, weaknesses, good days, bad days, talents, circumstances and etc... Kindness has the ability to naturally lead itself to cooperation, support, and team-work that brings individuals together as a unified whole. As kindness increases, individual health, wellbeing and the labor climate improves, and the organization will function better as- a-whole.

“*Make Kindness Contagious*”, is a health-awareness initiative developed and promoted by the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization PAHO/WHO. The initiative entails a long term commitment to stimulate and enhance kindness and respect in our daily life at work; and at the same time, aims to improving the working climate in our offices. Twelve (12) recommendations were created to raise awareness among our staff to make a conscious effort to extend kindness to others. These dozen recommendations were based from the Decalogue of Kindness, which was implemented to improve the work environment at public institutions in Chile. The benefits of these recommendations extend to the giver, the receiver and even to those who observe the act of kindness, but most important is that helps initiate the path of change of the organization’s labor climate as a whole.

Wellness Week 2014 aimed to approach people’s well-being and allowed us to launch the twelve recommendations so that all staff knows them. To make sure everyone knew them, visuals were incorporated in order to effectively spread the message of “*Make Kindness Contagious*”. A series of tools were designed, distributed and well received by all staff members during the activities of Wellness Week and beyond.

2. OBJECTIVES

To create awareness about the needs and the importance of remembering and practicing kindness with and towards colleagues, fellow partners and collaborators; as a way towards promoting and creating respectful and kind working environments.

3. STRATEGIC APPROACH

The Ottawa Charter adopted in 1986, states that “*Health promotion generates living and working condition that are safe, stimulating, satisfying and enjoyable.*” In order to achieve this goal, a wide range of methods such as communication, empowerment and community development should be combined. For our overall initiative it was important to combination individual and collective communication strategies to influence and change attitudes and behaviors within working adults. The strategies aimed to improve the general well-being of PAHO’s staff by encouraging them to become agents of change through their own actions and efforts. This means that by using ***Information, Education and Communication (IEC)*** methods, tools and activities, we enabled our staff to play active roles in achieving respectful and kind working environments. We carried out the following activities:

1. **Sharing the big picture:** To have a greater impact, we needed to capture all staff's attention. Therefore, communication needed to be easily visible and accessible. For this purpose a creative and very appealing message was designed to attract staff.
2. **Having and communicating a plan:** A concise plan with goals and priorities needed to be planned, implemented and put into action during Wellness Week 2014. This plan aimed at changing and reinforcing health-related behaviors, concerning kindness practices in the target audience within a pre-defined period of time, with communication methods and strategies.
3. **Addressing a specific Issue:** Raise awareness about the needs and the importance of remembering and practicing kindness with and towards colleagues, fellow partners and collaborators; as a way towards promoting and creating respectful and kind working environments.
4. **Targeting a specific audience:** Our targeted audience was PAHO's overall staff.
5. **Having a clear goal:** Our goal was to change or reinforce a specific behavior: *"Kindness at the workplace."*
6. **Set a time-frame:** In the short-term: We expected results (change in behavior) to begin during Wellness Week 2014. In the long-term: methods to assure sustainability should follow.
7. **Engaging People:** In order to have effective interventions, the involvement and active participation of PAHO's staff were needed to put in practice methods that would be familiar to them. Thus, two types of communications were used:
 - A) **Interpersonal Communication:** Using face-to-face communications: We visited floor by floor distributing postcards with the *Twelve recommendations of kindness at work*, and motivating and empowering our staff to make decisions as "agents of change", in such a way that behaviors could be modified, as well as the working climate.
 - B) **Mass Communication:** Visuals messages through social media and an open contest were implemented as tools for mass communication. The purpose of these methods was to provide a clear and consistent message that would spur a change in staff's attitudes and that eventually can contribute to changes in behaviors and norms.

4. ACTIVITIES AND METHODS

4.1 The slogan

The general slogan of the initiative was: "MAKE KINDNESS CONTAGIOUS". A slogan is a powerful tool in any campaign and plays a very important role in deciding the outcome of it. We wanted a very catchy slogan that would be self-explanatory about what the initiative was, and what it stands for. Plus, we created something that would be appealing to the eye, to ensure visibility and recall.

4.2 The kindness word cloud & buttons

A “word cloud” was created using key words found on the “Dozen Recommendations about Kindness at Work.” Word clouds are an effective communication tool having more impact because they are easier to understand, and can be easily shared. The word cloud contained strategic words such as: smile, be happy, dialogue, listen, respect, apologize, kind work, etc... By highlighting these words the message was effectively delivered, adding more clarity to capture audience’s attention.

Color schemes were carefully chosen to enhance specific elements of the design and bring nuance to the message. For instance, -blue the color of health-, implies integrity, trust, honesty, loyalty, and devotion. It relates to one-to-one communications, enhancing self-expression and inspiring higher ideas.³ Orange radiates warmth and happiness, offering emotional strength to people. It is optimistic, uplifting and rejuvenates spirits⁴. Through the use of these different color schemes we wanted to create a sense of joy and happiness in people. The clouds became buttons that will be awarded to staff members that become agents of kindness.

Figure 1. CLOUDS



4.3 The postcards

Eight hundred postcards were created and designed: 400 English and 400 Spanish, in which the slogan, the cloud and the twelve recommendation of kindness were assembled.

Figure 2. Postcards in English and Spanish



³ Judy Scott-Kemmis. *Color Psychology to Empower and Inspire You*. <http://www.empower-yourself-with-color-psychology.com/color-blue.html> (accessed 28 October 2014)

⁴ Judy Scott-Kemmis. *Color Psychology to Empower and Inspire You*. <http://www.empower-yourself-with-color-psychology.com/color-blue.html> (accessed 28 October 2014)

4.4 The magnets

Four hundred magnets were created and designed: 200 in English and 200 in Spanish. Once again, color combinations were carefully chosen to enhance specific elements of the design and bring nuance to the message. In addition, key words were given a different font, written in all caps, and highlighted to call attention.

Figure 2. Magnets in both English and Spanish

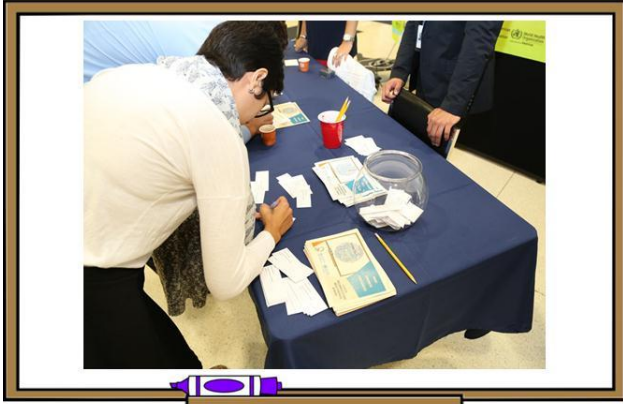


4.5 The contest

A contest called *“To be an influence of change I would...”* was implemented with the purpose of encouraging staff to become agents of change. Through this contest staff had the chance to share ideas and/or ways for influencing changes at work. The contest took place on Thursday September 18, 2014 and participants were asked to fill in the following information:

- Name:
- Email/Extension:
- Complete the following phrase:
 - TO BE AN INFLUENCE OF CHANGE I WOULD
- Messages were collected, deposited in an urn, and entered for paying in a raffle.

The winner was announced during the Director’s Staff Meeting on Friday September 19, 2014, in which Dr. Carissa F. Etienne herself granted the award to the message taken from the urn, as seen in the pictures that follow.



Participant's Registration



Dr. Carissa F. Etienne and contest winner

4.5 The collage with participants' phrases:

To be an Influence of change I would...



4.7 Social media



Social media were present as a collective force in promoting kindness and respect in our daily life at work.

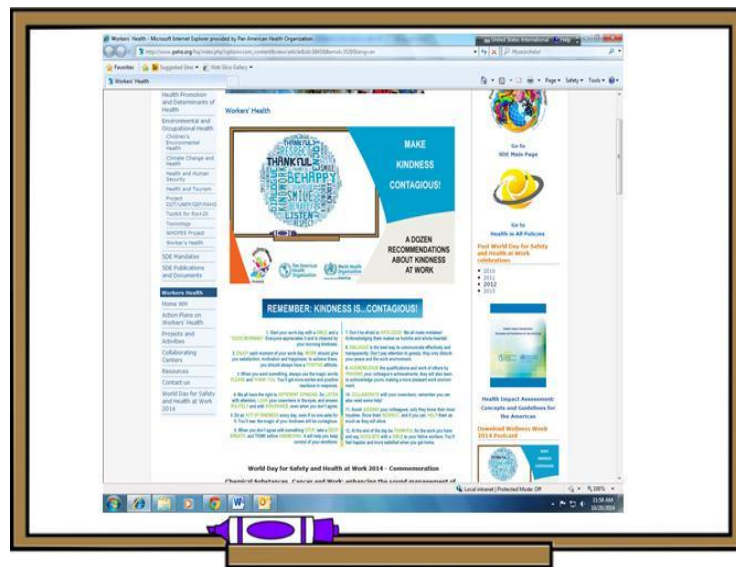
Through our @WorkersHealth1 Twitter account, we maintained information about the **Make Kindness Contagious** initiative, as shown in the picture.

4.8 E-material available

Something else worth noting is the presence of the PDF downloadable versions of all the materials of the initiative in the main page of the Workers' Health/SDE website.

This is as a more convenient way for information dissemination to our focal points and PAHO's offices throughout the Region.

With this option also allows general public to access this information that can be used as a strategic tool to implement similar initiatives and campaigns among other organizations.



The PDF version of the materials in English can be access through this link:

<http://www.paho.org/workershealth>

5. LESSONS LEARNED FOR THE FUTURE AND FOLLOWING STEPS

Wellness Week 2014 allowed us to launch the health-awareness initiative called: “Make Kindness Contagious”. Its purpose was to stimulate and enhance kindness and respect in our daily life at work; and at the same time, to improving the working climate in our offices. Twelve (12) simple recommendations of kindness that were lost in the turbulence of modern life in the XXI Century were remembered and disseminated. They aimed to raise awareness among our staff to make conscious efforts for extending kindness and respect to others. But the most important contribution was to help initiate that path of change for the organization’s labor climate as-a-whole.

In summary:

1. Through the introduction of our initiative “Make Kindness Contagious” as a healthy choice we provided a supportive environment for staff. It’s known that the choices people make are shaped by the choices they have. Therefore, our main goal was to provide the choice of kindness by raising awareness and disseminating the message amongst staff and throughout the whole organization.
2. Information, education and communication (IEC) strategies, promoted and strengthened the creation of supportive environments and collective actions. Our staff was empowered and actively involved during kindness activities, thanks to which a very successful result was obtained.

3. Several members of the staff praised the face-to-face communication as a way to disseminate the message of the initiative. One staff member stated “she felt engaged and part of this initiative because someone took the time to personally go to her office and tell her about the message of kindness.” Another person mentioned how great it felt “When people are seen as human beings and not just as numbers of an organization, then one feels capable of becoming an agent of change for creating a kindness culture in the workplace.”
4. Another lesson learned, was that the combination of two different forms of communication yield better results. Interpersonal and mass communication achieved their target having different and complementary roles. For example, using mass communication through social media introduced the idea of “creating and promoting respectful and kind working environments;” and interpersonal communication reinforced this message, providing staff members the opportunity to engage as “agents of change.”
5. The results of this initiative emphasized the importance of putting in practice key cultural simple and elements needed to bring about changes at work. We all contributed to improve working environments, and promote active participation of each worker since everyone has a bit to give.

STEPS THAT FOLLOW...

Based on this summary, some activities to follow-up and make this initiative valid and sustainable can be planned. Some recommendations are:

- a) Designing a survey to measure the level of awareness and the impact on labor climate achieved by the initiative.
- b) Assess the messages and the activities carried out to determine changes or modifications, and the frequency of use in the future.
- c) Promote activities and periodic impact assessment of labor climate on collective health.
- d) Support policies, action plans and other institutional stages established under the framework of PAHO’s Workers’ Health, Safety and Wellbeing policies and actions plans.

Should all staff commit, participate and engage in the practice of kindness, we can all transform our labor climate and have highly successful working experiences.

This is why we recommend pursuing on this initiative.

However, for achieving respectful, kind, cordial, happy and friendly work environments the participation of each and all of us is required... Together we can make it happen!

REMEMBER: KINDNESS IS CONTAGIOUS!