

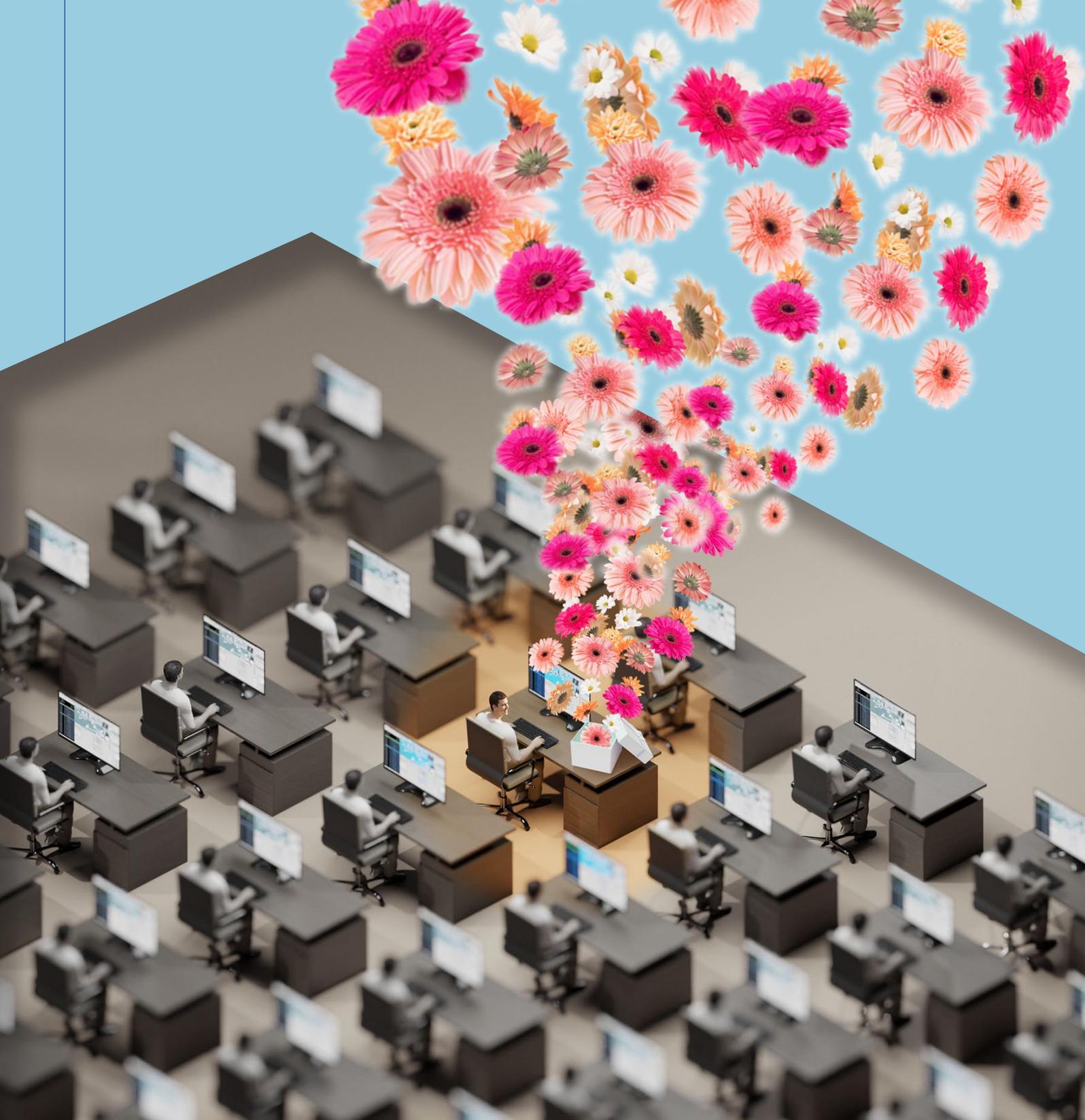
CSA Journal

Everyday Humanity: The Kindness Advantage for Retention, Relationships, and ROI

Why kindness matters more than ever.

By Linda Cohen





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BY LINDA COHEN

People sometimes dismiss kindness as soft or sentimental. But what's the alternative?

An unkind workplace can be felt in a visceral way even when people don't realize they are participating in it. That lack of kindness seeps into culture, morale, and even performance.

Kindness, on the other hand, is love in action. It's how employees, clients, and communities know that they matter. And right now, when so many feel lonely, disconnected, and worried about the future, it is exactly what's needed. This is especially true in the aging industry where so many of the clients are impacted by this reality.

Kindness isn't weakness. It's a strength. In fact, it's

a competitive advantage. Especially in industries built on service, trust, and care, kindness shows up in measurable ways: employee retention, client loyalty, and even bottom-line growth.

Anyone can spot the difference between a professional who loves their work and one who is just going through the motions. When human beings feel valued and appreciated, you can see the difference in their energy. That's kindness in action.

The Ripple Effect of Everyday Actions

Every action has a ripple effect. Whether you're leading a team, running a business or serving clients, leading with kindness impacts the people you serve

including their families and sometimes even their communities.

For organizations, this means employees who feel valued. For business owners and solopreneurs, it means clients who feel cared for, partnerships that deepen, and organizations that people recommend.

Happy employees equal happier people. Work that feels fulfilling and inspired gives people resilience to face the hard things happening in the world.

This is especially true for professionals serving seniors. From the outside, the work can be misunderstood or minimized. But those who live it every day know it's sacred. It's the work of honoring people with dignity and respect. It's helping older adults write their final chapters with compassion and love.

What the Research Tells Us

For anyone who still thinks kindness is “just nice,” the research says otherwise. Dr. Sonja Lyubomirsky, a psychology professor at UC Riverside, found that 50% of our internal happiness comes from genetics, 10% from circumstances, and a full 40% of our internal happiness comes from our intentional actions, from what we choose to do in any given situation. That last part, our choices in daily situations, that's where kindness comes in. Choosing kindness helps improve our internal feelings of happiness.

Harvard Business School has shown that acts of kindness increase serotonin (the feel-good hormone), boost energy, and even lengthen lifespan. At the same time, kindness decreases stress, anxiety, and depression.

The science confirms what caregivers and professionals serving seniors have known all along: kindness heals.

Retention: The Business Case for Kindness

Retention is one of the biggest challenges organizations face. People leave for many reasons: relocation, career growth, higher pay. But one reason no leader should accept is this: *“I left because it wasn't a kind place to work.”*

Replacing employees is expensive, not just in recruitment costs but also in lost culture and morale for other employees. When someone walks out the door, the organization doesn't just lose a worker. It loses knowledge, relationships, and momentum.

Kindness helps keep people. Recognition, gratitude, and small daily gestures tell employees: *you matter here*. When employees feel seen, they stay.

It's worth checking in with questions like:

- Are employees' talents being used well?
- Do they feel appreciated?
- Do they feel empowered?

- Does the culture value kindness and respect?

When the answers are “yes,” the payoff is huge. Employees say things like, *“I've worked a lot of places, but this one feels like family. This could be my forever job.”*

In aging services, kindness matters for more than just employees. Family caregivers, volunteers, community partners, and even solo providers all play a role in supporting older adults. When everyone feels respected and included, everything works better.

Recognition and the Joy of “Surprise and Delight”

Recognition doesn't always need to be big or expensive. A handwritten note. A quiet thank-you in the hallway. A call after hours to say, “I noticed what you did, and it mattered.”

What matters most is that recognition is specific, timely, and delivered in the way that person wants to receive it. Some employees love public praise; others shrink from it. Some want to be thanked with words, others with time off or flexibility. The key is to know your people well enough to recognize them in the way that resonates.

Recognition is not just acknowledgement, it's encouragement. As described in *The Economy of Kindness Book*: *“One person may want a gift card for a restaurant while another would prefer one to the grocery store. The role of the leader is to know their people well enough to deliver the type of recognition they would value.”*

Surprise & Delight is one of the most fun and underused tools leaders have for recognition. It can be something simple and unplanned like bringing in treats, surprising the team with coffee, or sending a thoughtful package to folks working remotely. One hospital created a “package of sunshine” and sent it to every employee. Everything inside was yellow, pineapple gum, ChapStick, a yellow book about building a happiness mindset, even sunshine-colored hand sanitizer. It cost less than \$5 per person, but it brought smiles and surprise to the recipients.

One story from a home care franchise owner shared that after 120 days of remote work, he told his team they could keep working from home on Fridays indefinitely. His employees cheered. One said, *“It was like I'd given them an early Christmas present.”* That one decision showed faith in their abilities and created joy and loyalty that no paycheck or line item could buy.

Kindness Under Pressure

Of course, the real test is how kindness shows up when things are hard. The last several years have been filled with additional protocols, health concerns, technology

issues, and a world that might feel overwhelming in a myriad of ways.

Sometimes kindness under pressure looks like reminding staff or ourselves that it's okay to step away for a real break. One professional working with seniors invites her staff to practice simple acts of self-care, such as:

- **Taking a walk outside** — Even a few minutes of fresh air can clear the mind and bring someone back into the present moment.
 - **Learning Breathing Techniques** — So many simple techniques can calm the nervous system and reset stress in just a couple of minutes.
 - **Practicing gratitude** — Finding ways to do this collectively can build more positive connections.
 - **Speaking kindly to yourself** — Catching negative self-talk and reframing it with compassion can be just as important as the kindness shown to others.
- These aren't luxuries. In any environment when the stakes are high and the needs are ongoing, service providers need to care for themselves first. These are necessary practices that keep people from burning out. Kindness here is permission to pause, to breathe, to take care of yourself. When leaders give permission for self-care, it signals that employees are valued as people, not just as workers.

Self-kindness fuels the ability to extend kindness to others. Kindness under pressure doesn't always mean solving everything. Sometimes it just means acknowledging the weight people are carrying and saying, *"You don't have to carry it alone."*

Practical Ways to Build a Culture of Kindness

Here are some easy, tangible ways to be intentional about kindness:

For organizations:

1. Start a kindness box where employees or clients can acknowledge each other.
2. Share client or family compliments about staff.
3. Share both good and bad news openly; this builds trust.
4. Recognize employees in newsletters, bulletin boards, and staff meetings.
5. Encourage staff to nominate colleagues for "caught being kind" moments.

For solopreneurs:

1. Save thank you notes or create a file to save all your kudos.
2. Take a lunch break.
3. Meet a friend for a walk.
4. Make business hours and stick to them.

5. Curate a playlist that immediately makes you happy.

The Grey Areas: Where Kindness Lives

Life is not black and white; there is so much grey in the world. And it's in those grey places where kindness can make the biggest impact.

When an employee is caregiving at home, when someone is grieving, or when they're just quietly struggling, the HR handbook may not give you the answer. Kindness will.

Allowing space, thinking outside the box, asking for input from employees, clients, and families, those are the places where any professional can offer real support. That's what people remember, and it will always be well received.

Closing Thought

Kindness isn't a feel-good extra. It is a strategic business advantage. It helps employees stay. It builds trust with clients. It creates workplaces where people want to be. Most of all, kindness is the everyday humanity that changes our lives, both for those who receive it and for those who give it. •CSA



Linda Cohen, also known as the kindness catalyst, is a professional keynote speaker, consultant, and author of two books on kindness. She speaks internationally to senior living organizations, hospice and healthcare teams, and financial services professionals about the ROI of Kindness in leadership and client services. Linda offers a variety of programs for Executives, Emerging Leaders and all staff.

For more information visit: www.lindacohenconsulting.com

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