

Try a Little... Kindness



By Melanie Lockwood Herman

Executive Director

Resource Type: Risk eNews

Topic: HR Risk and Employment Practices

Last week I wrote about the connection between managing risk and a happy workforce. Yesterday I had the opportunity to hear Dr. Christine Carter speak about “Raising Happiness at Camp” at the opening keynote session at the [American Camp Association](#) annual conference in Atlanta. Dr. Carter is a sociologist at UC Berkeley’s Greater Good Science Center and is the author of the book, [Raising Happiness](#).

During her keynote address Dr. Carter noted the increasing “emphasis on achievement” for 21st Century kids, explaining that “achievement” in the eyes of many parents means excellent grades and repeated “wins” on the athletic field. She contrasted the drive for achievement with a growing recognition of the importance of “fostering a compassionate imagination” in young people. Dr. Carter explained to her audience that “what happens when you pressure children to achieve is that you cut them off from their sources of inspiration... and hinder their ability to be happy.”

ACA’s opening keynote speaker focused on three keys to raising happy children. The third key in Dr. Carter’s prescription was “creating a culture of kindness.” She explained that kindness is an “instant happiness booster,” adding that “we fail to recognize how closely tied our happiness is to how kind we are,” and that “when we are kind our health tends to increase dramatically and we tend to live longer.” She cited a recent study which found that active volunteers were 44% less likely to die during a 12 year period than those who *didn’t* volunteer, and that volunteering has a stronger positive effect on physical health than exercising four times per week or quitting smoking. Kindness... according to new research, can *undo* the negative effects of stress.

Perhaps we should add “be kind” to the risk management process for common workplace and constituent relation risks. With employee grievances and client discontent consuming valuable time that might otherwise be spent on mission advancement, resolving to be kind to the people we serve and serve with is sound risk management. According to researchers Jeannie Trudel (Indiana Wesleyan University) and Thomas G. Reio Jr. (Florida International University), incivility—often materializing in the form of rude or discourteous behavior to co-workers or customers—has a serious impact on the bottom line*. Since the “bottom line” in a nonprofit organization is serving people and communities, the toll that incivility takes in the nonprofit sector is arguably more significant than lost profits. In addition to teaching our children to be kind to one another, perhaps we should coach our staff and volunteers to be kind to one another and those we serve, each and every day, and agree to hold one another accountable for kind behavior. “Try a Little Kindness...” is more than a new twist on an old song, it is a simple but important antidote to costly incivility that creates stress in the workplace and

dampens enthusiasm for a community-serving mission.

Melanie Lockwood Herman is Executive Director of the Nonprofit Risk Management Center. She welcomes your ideas about any risk management topic, feedback on this article and questions about the Center's resources at Melanie@nonprofrisk.org or 703.777.3504. The Center provides risk management tools and resources at www.nonprofrisk.org/ and offers [consulting assistance](#) to organizations unwilling to leave their missions to chance.

*An interview with Jeannie Trudel titled "Incivility Rising," is featured in the February 2012 edition of *HR Magazine*, the monthly publication of the [Society for Human Resource Management](#).