

BIG IDEA, IN BRIEF

Caring leadership in 2022: The importance of leader self-care

3-MINUTE
READ

“ **Should the cabin lose pressure, oxygen masks will drop from the overhead area. Please place the mask over your own mouth and nose before assisting others.** ”

We've heard this announcement so many times that we seldom pay attention. But a new study underscores the importance of ensuring leaders first care for themselves so that they can then better care for their team, especially when faced with the stresses and challenges of today's workplace.

In the study, the experimental group of leaders were sent daily morning nudges for three weeks asking them to briefly “recall a time when you were understanding and patient toward yourself when experiencing challenges at work because of your role as a leader.” Leaders in the control condition of this field experiment received nudges unrelated to showing self-compassion. At the end of each day, a set of stakeholders who were connected to each leader (in both the experimental and the control groups) was sent a brief pulse survey asking them to rate the degree to which their leader had been helpful that day with personal and work-related problems, demonstrating caring leadership.

Taking **a minute or two to reflect on prior experiences of self-compassion** has been shown

to promote people taking a kinder, **more supportive** and nonjudgmental **sense of themselves**. But this study showed that **heightened self-compassion also translates into more caring for others**. Stakeholders of those leaders who had been nudged to start the day with recollections that prompted self-compassion described those leaders as **more frequently helpful to them in addressing personal problems** later in the day and, as a consequence, generally acting with more care. However, there was **no difference** between getting self-care or neutral nudges **in the degree to which stakeholders saw the leader as helpful with work-related problems**; presumably all leaders as a function of their managerial roles are expected to provide performance-related support.

This is a simple intervention, but one that vividly illustrates the power of self-care in developing and promoting compassionate and caring leadership. Reminding leaders to reflect on their own experiences in kinder, more compassionate ways makes it more likely they will in turn act toward their team with greater kindness and compassion.

by **Seymour Adler, Ph.D.**

Managing Director
Leadership Assessment & Development
Global Practice Leader
seymour.adler@kincentric.com



Source: Lanaj, K., Jennings, R. E., Ashford, S. J., & Krishnan, S. (2021). When leader self-care begets other care: Leader role self-compassion and helping at work. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000957>

If you have any questions, please feel free to [contact us](#). To receive communication and content from us in the future, please [subscribe to our mailing list](#).