

MAKING THE CASE FOR COMPASSIONATE LEADERSHIP

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In today's fast-paced and highly competitive global arena encompassing all sectors and industries, there is a growing recognition of the profound importance of compassion in effective leadership. In this article, I will present my latest research findings on the journey of the compassionate leader, shedding a light on the seven levels of the compassionate leadership pyramid. Through this exploration, I hope to convey to leaders and organizations the importance of adopting compassionate leadership practices in organizations around the world.

The Compassionate Leadership Model

The need for compassionate leadership arises from the profound impact it can have on individuals, organizations, and societies. This concept of leadership

is a practical approach grounded in the belief that empathy, kindness, understanding, and compassion are essential qualities for effective leadership in today's convoluted world.

My design of the compassionate leadership framework, pyramid, and model has been shaped by extensive research and insights from various sources, including studies on leadership, psychology, and organizational behavior. Additionally, it draws inspiration from the wisdom of many renowned leadership scholars, great religions, and practitioners who have advocated for the importance of empathy and compassion in leadership. To lead by compassion as a concept is not a new phenomenon. What makes it an emerging trend is the framework that will serve as a guide for leaders to follow, adopt, implement, and practice.

I envision compassionate leadership as a multifaceted journey that encompasses self-awareness, mindfulness,

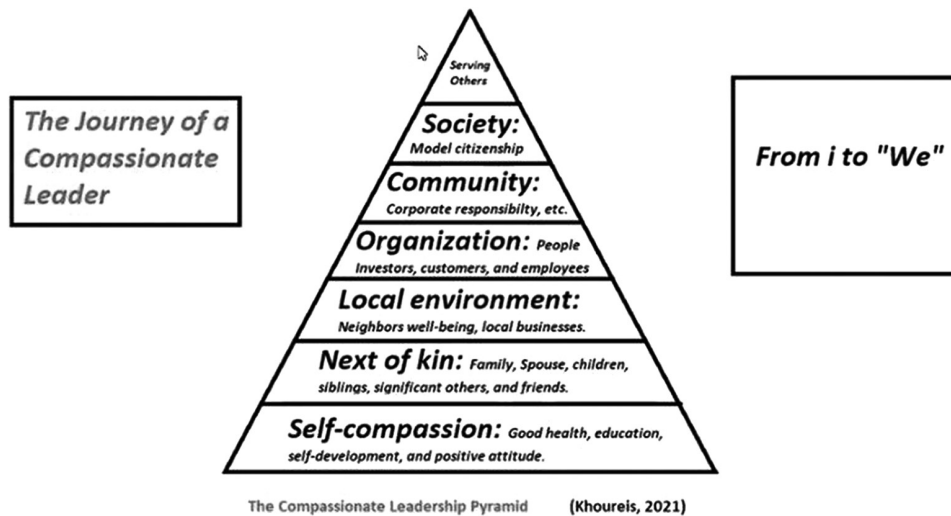


FIGURE 1. THE COMPASSIONATE LEADERSHIP PYRAMID

empathy, and a genuine commitment to the well-being of those being led. It is not limited to a single quality or action but is a comprehensive guide for leaders to develop a compassionate mindset and create a positive impact on their teams and organizations.

Moreover, the presented compassionate leadership model underscores the practical application of compassionate leadership in real-world scenarios. I believe that compassionate leadership is not merely an abstract idea but a set of actionable principles that leaders can implement to cultivate a culture of kindness, trust, and collaboration within their organizations.

It is crucial to establish that this approach to compassionate leadership is both research-backed and practical. By adopting this approach, leaders can unlock the transformative potential of compassion, creating workplaces and societies that prioritize the well-being and success of all individuals.

Levels of the Compassionate Leadership Pyramid

The compassionate leadership pyramid, as shown in Figure 1, serves as a comprehensive framework that guides leaders and interested individuals on a transformative journey of self-awareness and mindfulness. This journey is intended to shift from

self-centered affection to a collective appreciation of the broader community. Within this pyramid, compassionate leadership is delineated into seven distinct levels, each providing actionable guidance for leaders to adopt, enabling them to nurture compassion and evolve into truly authentic, innate, and genuinely compassionate leaders.

Self-Compassion: The first level of the pyramid centers on self-compassion, emphasizing the critical importance of personal growth and development. Leaders at this level prioritize their own well-being, focusing on self-improvement, continuous learning, and maintaining good physical and mental health. By nurturing self-compassion, leaders cultivate the inner strength and resilience necessary to effectively serve

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and support others. At this level, the individual leader improves self for a higher purpose of serving others.

Next of Kin – Own Tribe: The second level expands the circle of compassion to include one's immediate family and tribe, including spouses, children, siblings, and neighbors. At this level, compassionate leaders extend their care and support to their loved ones, and their own tribe by creating a healthy and nurturing environment. By recognizing their role in fostering compassion within their closest relationships, leaders deepen their understanding of compassion's transformative power.

Local Environment: The third level prompts leaders to extend their compassion to the broader local community. Leaders actively engage in supporting local businesses, colleges, universities, and other learning institutions. By contributing to the success and well-being of their local community, compassionate leaders practice and reinforce the values of compassion, creating a positive impact beyond their immediate sphere of influence.

Organization: The fourth level places the focus on the organization itself. Compassionate leaders at this level prioritize the well-being and success of all stakeholders, including shareholders, the leadership team, employees, and customers. They strive to protect the interests of shareholders, ensure fair compensation and a supportive work environment for employees, and deliver value-added products or services that meet and exceed the needs of customers.

Community: The fifth level expands the influence and impact of leaders beyond their organization to the larger community. Compassionate leaders actively network with other leaders and engage in initiatives that contribute to the betterment of the community. By leveraging their position and influence, they use compassion as a driving force for positive change, fostering collaboration, and collective well-being.

Society: The sixth level challenges leaders to become responsible and impactful members of society at large. Compassionate leaders at this level embody grace, grit, and wit. They serve as role models for others to emulate. They strive to make a positive impact on

society, leveraging their compassion to address societal challenges and promote a more compassionate and inclusive world.

The Compassionate Leader: The pinnacle of the compassionate leadership pyramid is the seventh level, the peak of the pyramid. It is reserved for exceptional leaders who embody the essence of compassion. At this stage, leaders serve others selflessly, without expecting anything in return. They demonstrate authenticity, genuineness, and an unwavering commitment to the well-being of others. Compassionate leaders at this level inspire, enlighten, uplift, educate, and inform those around them, leaving a legacy of compassion and positive change.

Turning Data into Insights

To gain insights for this model, the study was conducted over an 18-month period, beginning in May 2021 and concluded in November 2022. The study engaged a diverse sample of participants from various industries and backgrounds. Data was collected through questionnaires, surveys, and observations to gauge the influence of compassionate leadership on individuals' attitudes and behaviors, specifically exploring the extent to which compassionate leaders inspired others to serve. The purpose of this study was to uncover how leadership practices, particularly compassionate leadership, impact individuals' willingness to serve others. Understanding the dynamics of compassionate leadership and its effects on followers' attitudes and behaviors is crucial in today's rapidly evolving and interconnected world. These findings can offer valuable direction to academics looking to enhance their understanding of leadership dynamics and to leaders aspiring to integrate compassionate leadership principles within their organizations.

Measurement of Compassionate Leadership

For this study, compassionate leadership was assessed using a multifaceted approach that combined both quantitative and qualitative methods. This strategy

allowed an evaluation of the perceived behaviors of leaders and their effects on individuals' attitudes and actions.

For quantitative measurement, a structured questionnaire containing items related to various compassionate leadership practices was administered. Participants rated the frequency and extent of these observed behaviors displayed by their supervisors on a five-point Likert scale. Additionally, qualitative insights were gathered through open-ended questions. This qualitative data collection offered in-depth information about participants' personal experiences with compassionate leadership.

Addressing the Potential Influence of Learned Practices

To mitigate the possibility that observed compassionate leadership practices were mere learned behaviors, several strategic approaches were implemented. First, inquiries within the questionnaire and survey protocols were incorporated to gauge participants' prior knowledge and training in leadership practices, including compassion. This step aimed to control for any pre-existing influences on their perceptions. Moreover, the study extended over an 18-month period, allowing the tracking of changes in participants' attitudes and behaviors over time. By comparing responses at different study points, an effort was made to distinguish between behaviors that might have been learned and those that genuinely resulted from compassionate leadership. Furthermore, triangulating data from various sources to validate the findings and gain a more comprehensive understanding of the effects of compassionate leadership. Further, statistical analyses were conducted to account for potential confounding variables, ultimately helping in determining the distinct impact of compassionate leadership practices on individuals' attitudes and actions. These methodological measures were diligently employed to minimize the potential influence of learned behaviors, ensuring a more accurate assessment of the unique impact of compassionate leadership practices in the workplace.

Statistical analyses were conducted to account for potential confounding variables.

Here is a breakdown of the study's main key points:

Culture and Compassionate Leadership: Seventy percent of individuals and leaders surveyed for this model indicate that the culture set by leaders significantly influences individuals' willingness to serve others. This underscores the role of leadership in shaping the values and behaviors of an organization.

Natural Compassionate Leaders: The 4% of individuals surveyed who naturally exhibit compassionate leadership qualities are crucial assets to their teams and organizations. Their innate ability to prioritize serving others can lead to positive outcomes for their colleagues and the entire organization.

Overcoming Negative Experiences: It's important to note that 12% of individuals surveyed have attempted to serve others but may have been discouraged by negative experiences. This finding highlights the need for organizations to create a supportive and nurturing work environment that can help these individuals overcome past setbacks and develop into compassionate leaders.

Lack of Concern for Others: Eight percent of individuals surveyed displayed a lack of concern for others and a reluctance to help, presenting a challenge for cultivating compassionate leadership. Organizations may need strategies to encourage or redirect their behavior towards more compassionate attitudes and actions.

Passive Approach: Lastly, 6% of individuals surveyed who exhibit a passive approach may require strategies to actively engage them in acts of compassion. This could involve providing opportunities for involvement and empowerment.

These insights collectively emphasize the importance of leadership and organizational culture in cultivating compassionate behavior. Organizations can use these findings to tailor their leadership development programs, create inclusive and supportive environments, and identify individuals with the potential to become compassionate leaders. These shared insights could serve as a foundation for further studies and practical applications in leadership development and organizational culture improvement, with the goal of creating more compassionate and empathetic leaders.

Consequences of Compassionate Leadership

Collaboration: Compassionate leaders foster a culture of collaboration and teamwork. By creating an environment where individuals feel valued, respected, and supported, they encourage open communication, trust, and cooperation. This leads to enhanced collaboration among team members, enabling them to work together more effectively toward shared goals. Instead of competing, individuals, teams, and groups collaborate to achieve objectives. Collaboration becomes a cornerstone of individual and organizational success.

Diversity of Thoughts and Ideas: Compassionate leaders embrace diversity and inclusion. Leaders recognize that different perspectives and ideas contribute to innovation and problem-solving. By creating an inclusive environment where individuals feel safe to express their opinions and unique viewpoints, compassionate leaders tap into the collective intelligence of their teams. This diversity of thoughts and ideas leads to more creative and effective solutions.

Free Expression of Thoughts: Compassionate leaders ensure that team members feel comfortable taking risks, expressing their thoughts, and sharing their concerns

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without fear of retribution or judgment. This builds a culture of trust, mental well-being, and authentic expression. When individuals feel safe while expressing their feedback, they bring their whole selves to work, resulting in higher levels of engagement, honest feedback, creativity, performance, and productivity.

Enhancing Workforce Involvement: Compassionate leaders inspire, enlighten, uplift, inform, and motivate their teams through genuine care and empathy. They create a sense of purpose and meaning in the workplace, allowing employees to connect with their work on a deeper level. Compassionate leaders recognize and appreciate the strengths and contributions of their team members, providing them with opportunities for growth and development. As a result, employee involvement, engagement, and loyalty increase, leading to higher productivity, job satisfaction, and retention.

Characteristics of Compassionate Leadership

Consideration is an important aspect. Leaders must exercise thoughtful behavior and avoid causing unnecessary discomfort or harm to their followers. By setting the standard of mutual respect and creating a working environment where such respect is practiced, leaders can earn the loyalty and trust of their followers. Utilizing their influence and authority, compassionate

leaders should strive to improve working conditions and foster a positive and supportive atmosphere.

Understanding is a vital quality that compassionate leaders possess. They compassionately perceive the behaviors of their followers, recognizing that conflicts can serve as opportunities for growth and innovation. Tolerance, awareness of followers' feelings, and forgiveness for their shortcomings are essential. When conflicts arise, leaders should actively seek open feedback and explanations to gain a comprehensive understanding of the situation and to resolve any misunderstandings.

Caring is at the core of compassionate leadership. Leaders must genuinely show care and kindness to their followers, complementing their consideration of them. Demonstrating acts of kindness and empathy can foster a sense of trust and support within the team.

Concern for the well-being of followers is another crucial characteristic of compassionate leaders. Making their followers' well-being a priority, leaders show kindhearted concern and actively work to help them improve, achieve, and grow. It is essential for leaders to communicate that their concern is genuine and meant to support the development and success of their followers.

The Ability to Collaborate is a key skill. They can effectively work with others while leading their followers, both within the organization and beyond. Internal collaboration involves working across functional and organizational boundaries, building teamwork and cooperation. External collaboration extends to competitors and other organizations for the betterment of society. Open communication, setting

clear organizational goals, and delegating authority and tasks as needed are critical components of the characteristics of compassionate leaders.

Self-Reflection and Self-Awareness. It begins by engaging in self-reflection and developing self-awareness. Leaders take the time to assess their strengths and weaknesses, identify areas for personal growth, and gain a deeper understanding of their values and purpose. They engage in practices such as mindfulness, meditation, religious prayers, chants, or supplication to enhance self-awareness and develop a deeper connection with their thoughts, spiritual selves, emotions, and behaviors.

Recommendations for Developing Compassionate Leadership

Developing into a compassionate leader requires a deep understanding of the organizational environment and a commitment to personal growth and self-development. While there is ongoing debate about whether great leaders are born or made, I firmly believe that leadership is shaped by the environment in which one works and lives. Even individuals with innate leadership qualities must actively develop and cultivate these research-based characteristics and traits over time to become effective compassionate leaders.

In my understanding, "compassion" goes beyond mere sympathy or pity. Compassionate leaders genuinely strive to understand and share the feelings of their followers and act on it. To develop empathy and compassion, it is essential to genuinely attempt to comprehend others' perspectives and emotions. This can be achieved by putting oneself in their shoes, truly immersing oneself in their experiences, and using that understanding to make informed decisions that benefit the individuals involved. Whereas practicing empathy is the intention, practicing compassion is the action.

Empathy = Intention
Compassion = Action

Intention + Action = Empathetic Compassion

Intention – Action = Missed opportunity to serve others

*Caring is at the core of
compassionate leadership.*

Compassionate leaders are eager to learn and grow. They read, attend workshops, and seek mentors to get better at what they do. This helps them stay updated and become better leaders.

Great Listeners: Compassionate leaders seek to know how others feel and what they think. They pay close attention when people talk, look them in the eye, and show real interest in what they're saying. This makes people trust and connect with them because they feel like their thoughts and feelings matter.

Lead by Example: Compassionate leaders are mindful of the importance of their roles in their environment. Intentionally, they become a role model for compassionate leadership. They demonstrate kindness, fairness, and respect in their interactions with others. They treat all individuals with dignity and create an inclusive environment where everyone feels valued and respected. They show appreciation for the contributions of their team members and celebrate their successes. Leading by example sets the tone for compassionate behavior and creates a positive ripple effect throughout the organization.

Empowering Others: Compassionate leaders create a supportive work environment that prioritizes the well-being and growth of their team members. They prioritize work-life balance and employee well-being by supporting flexible work arrangements and implementing initiatives that promote physical and mental health. A supportive work environment nurtures compassionate leaders and empowers individuals to thrive.

Practice Serving Others: The compassionate leader's primary focus is on serving others. Adopt a mindset of service and a genuine desire to help others succeed. They take the time to understand the needs and aspirations of their team members and provide the necessary support and resources to help them achieve their goals. By putting the needs of others first, they cultivate a culture of compassion, trust, and collaboration.

Open Communication: Leaders who care about their team's well-being make sure that feedback is welcome and important. They often ask their team for their thoughts and really listen to what they have to say. They encourage open and truthful conversations,

making sure everyone feels okay sharing their ideas, worries, and suggestions. When they engage in this kind of honest two-way communication, it helps them build trust, strengthen relationships, and create an atmosphere where people can work together, develop, and come up with new ideas.

Recognize and Celebrate Compassionate Actions: Compassionate leaders acknowledge and celebrate acts of compassion within their organization. They recognize individuals who demonstrate compassionate leadership and highlight their positive impact on others. By shining a light on compassionate behaviors, they reinforce the importance of compassion and inspire others to follow suit. Celebrating compassion creates a culture that values and encourages compassionate actions throughout the organization.

Conclusion

Compassionate leadership is a powerful way to make positive changes in people, organizations, and societies. It helps individuals become better and inspires leaders to be positive role models. The compassionate leadership pyramid is a roadmap that guides people and leaders to be more caring and understanding. As they move up the pyramid, leaders learn to understand themselves better, be more self-aware, mindful, empathetic, and genuinely care about the people they lead.

Research shows that leaders have a big impact on creating a compassionate culture at work. When leaders show kindness and create a supportive environment, their teams become well too.

To be a compassionate leader, you need certain qualities, like being genuine and ethical. Developing these qualities can also make you a more thoughtful, mindful, purposeful, and honorable leader. Becoming a compassionate leader is an ongoing journey of growth, where you keep learning about yourself and caring for others.

Let's all strive to be compassionate leaders and make the world a kinder and better place for everyone.



Dr. Abraham Khoureis, a LinkedIn Leadership Top Voice, is known for his pioneering work in compassionate leadership and the creation of the Compassionate Leadership Model Pyramid. He also created the Disability Higher Education Learning Model, a factor-based learning model that when implemented properly may help disabled students in higher education complete their degrees. He serves as an adjunct professor at University of Redlands, in California. Outside of academia, Dr. Khoureis is a Screen Actors Guild (SAG-AFTRA) Franchised Hollywood Agent, Show Host, Author, and a Small Business Owner. He is the organizer and moderator of the Virtual Global Thought Leader Symposium.