

# Mindful Work

## Empathy

Empathy does not necessarily mean that we agree with someone else or condone their actions, but it does mean that **we can see if they're in a bad place** (just like me at times). Tomorrow the roles could be reversed. If we can establish **respect and trust** for those around us, even when they behave badly, it will pay us back before long and make everyone's life easier along the way.

**Through the regular practice of mindfulness, we naturally become kinder** and more compassionate to others. This seems to be an inevitable and delightful corollary of the practice.

However, it can be useful to strengthen and build the habit of kindness and empathy, through visualisation exercises.

It's always useful to **start with yourself**. We're probably harder to ourselves than to any one else, and may be disproportionately self-critical of our weaknesses, vulnerabilities and behaviours. If we can learn to be kind to ourselves first, it's easier to be compassionate towards others.

Once again, being kind turns out to be a win-win situation. As we practice empathy and kindness to others, we find (from many research studies) that we get happier too (and it doesn't cost a dime!). Simple!

### Exercise: Loving kindness meditation

*Begin as usual with centring and grounding, following the breath to help keep you in the present moment. Spend 5 minutes or so on this, to build tranquillity before continuing. If tranquillity doesn't come, try other practices such as slow walking to help settle you and lessen the distraction of thoughts.*

*This meditation proceeds in stages and is done with the eyes closed.*

*First, let the energy of the breath fill you with wellness. Wish for yourself that every cell in your body will be well, happy and free from suffering. You might imagine the loving feeling spreading like light, warmth or sound, into the bones, organs, muscles, skin and every cell, including your hosted bacteria and the 'other' 90% of our body's cells. Let that loving feeling fill your whole body.*

*There is an infinite resource of this loving kindness. When you have confidence in this, you are ready to allow this feeling to radiate from you out, like light, to others. Now bring to your mind's eye a person who you respect, love or trust deeply. Imagine them smiling at you with love. You radiate loving thoughts and feelings to them – let the floodgates open. Surround them with this loving kindness, smile at them and wish that they be well, happy and free from suffering.*

*Now do the same with someone neutral; perhaps someone you pass by on the way to work and know nothing about.*

*Now you choose someone with whom you have a difficult relationship. With no holding back, practice in the same way, smiling at them and wishing that they be well, happy and free from suffering.*

If you practise this often enough, you will find that the person you chose as the 'difficult one' stops being difficult. You then need to find another difficult person. Many people find they that after some time, there's no one left who feels difficult. So then just radiate your loving kindness to all beings, the good, the bad and the ugly.