

Grace in Business

A few weeks ago, inspired by a friend, I wrote a short paper about grace in the work place. We were talking about the fact that in his company some people speak negatively about others behind their backs. My friend said that he would not do that, as he believes there is a place for grace in business.

What a wonderful principle!

As I often mention in my writings, business is about relationships. Well, isn't all of life about relationships! Relationships developed and maintained through genuine care, honesty and trust, with no hidden agenda— these are what sustain us in business and in life. This is grace in action.

Grace certainly means respect. And grace is in our soft skills, being a loving person, treating others with dignity, being encouraging and helpful, and being a source of positive energy that lifts the spirits of our co-workers, our team members, all of them!

I think grace is helping others to feel good about themselves. What a difference that makes! A positive attitude is everything.

I think of two former colleagues who had that serenity and embraced grace. I consider Bill Dunn, a very senior leader at Johnson & Higgins, to be my mentor, as he was for many. Bill was always composed, and he was always ready to quietly help others succeed, always with a soft smile. He was also a doer. Outside of J&H, he was mayor of his village, a member of the vestry of his church, and actively helped numerous charitable organizations. We had a happy and proud team at J&H, thanks to Bill's servant leadership.

Another role model, Colette Kleitz, my colleague at the Damon Runyon Cancer Research Foundation, where I worked after J&H, very ably headed development for the foundation. Colette was an ideal teammate – responsible, she could always be counted on, quietly cheerful, quick to celebrate the good work of others, and she helped others to feel good about the themselves. Colette radiated positive energy at all times. She raised our spirits with her grace.

I have discussed grace with Sarah Hay, a key professional in Georgetown's Career Services. She is very involved in Georgetown's award winning webinar series, widely considered best in field. I admire Sarah as she serves alums throughout the country and world with a genuine desire to help them, and she works with a smile and enthusiasm and competence. Isn't that grace!

In Sarah's case, her colleagues, Bridget Homes and Bill Reynolds very definitely also possess these same qualities.

The dictionary definition of grace is elegance, and yet to me, in business, it is a combination of many qualities – valuing people, being gracious and respectful, having gratitude and quiet confidence.

A leader with grace engages everyone on a team with a flow of positive energy. I love the story of JFK visiting Cape Canaveral Space Center in the early 60s. He was touring the facility, and while in the basement, he stopped to speak with a janitor. He introduced himself and asked the janitor to tell him about his work. The man thought for a moment, and then said that his job was helping to put a man on the moon.

This simple story says so much.

While it may be a challenge in our hyper busy world to embody grace in business, we can learn to do this by being mindful, by valuing others and listening patiently. Grace is humility coupled with quiet confidence, knowing and acknowledging to others that you know you can improve certain skills, and asking them for feedback. Allowing ourselves to be vulnerable with others opens doors to trust and solid relationships.

I have always believed in hiring good people and under-managing, letting them do great work without bureaucratic control. When leaders show appreciation and value, their people work hard to live up to their expectations. They strive to do their very best because they feel appreciated, valued and heard, a true team. This is the result of grace in business.

I love this phrase, grace in business. I will continue to think about it, and ask that you, as you read and reflect on it, please email me, john@johnkeysercoach.com, to pass along your thoughts. What does grace in business mean to you? I hope to write a follow up paper to keep this important subject visible.

About The Author



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