

# Creating a compassionate workplace

Chet Taranowski Ph.D., CEAP  
NIEAPA 2017  
6/6/2017

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## Who am I?

- Ph.D., University of Illinois
- Worked at Aon for 23 years
- Past President of NIEAPA
- EACC Commission
- Positive Psychology
- Currently
  - EAP counselor at Gottlieb Hospital
  - USC Instructor

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Virtual Academic Center  
University of Southern California  
Social Work In Business

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### What I will present today

- I. Why Compassion?
- II. What is Compassion?
  - A. What do Buddhists say about this?
  - B. How is this similar to Positive Psychology?
- III. How does one become more compassionate?
- IV. How do we sell this idea in the workplace?
- V. How does a workplace become more compassionate?
- VI. What I hope you will take away.

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"I learned compassion from being discriminated against.

Everything bad that's ever happened to me has taught me compassion."

Ellen DeGeneres,  
Comedian, TV host and producer

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**We are not perfect people.**

**We don't operate in a perfect world.**

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## Why a program on Compassion?

What does this have to do with the workplace & EAPs?

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### How I became interested/Professional

- Intriguing article
  - Emphasis on Mindfulness
  - Buddhist Parallels to Positive Psychology
    - Fredrickson – Positive emotion
    - Emmons - Gratitude

Journal of Occupational Health Psychology  
The Scholarship Compassion

Volume 17 Number 1 Spring 2012

Article  
**Compassion at Work**  
Dore E. Emmons  
University of Oregon, Eugene, OR  
Fredrickson, B.L.  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI  
Fredrickson, B.L.  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI

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Compassion at Work

Keywords: compassion, mindfulness, positive emotion, positive psychology, workplace

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### How I became interested/Personal

- Western Religion
  - I am not a Buddhist
- Retirement
  - There is no corporate ladder any more
  - Identity/Narcissism
  - How are people judging me?
- What is really motivating about this work?
  - Connections with individual
  - Creating a more positive workplace



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### How does this relate to EAPs?

- We are compassionate people
- We witness suffering
- Our clients often live in hostile worlds
- Many managers want to be better leaders
- Engagement & Compassion
- What about our own workplaces?



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### What is Compassion?

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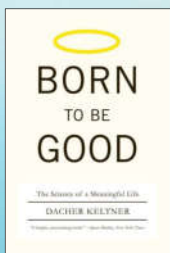
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### Origins of Compassion



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## Happiness:

### “People Matter”

Compassion is a key component of well-being



Christopher Peterson

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13

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## A Buddhist Perspective

### “Less suffering”



Thich Nhat Hanh  
Buddhist Monk

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## A Buddhist Story



Avalokitesvara

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**Western Saints of Compassion**

**Saint Francis of Assisi**



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**These are discussion to have with managers employees, & ourselves**

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**Cultivating Compassion**

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### P.E.R.M.A. (Seligman)

- Positive emotion - affect
- Engagement – opportunity for flow
- Relationships
- Meaning – sense of life purpose
- Accomplishment - mastery



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### Four Considerations

1. We all suffer
2. Desire is the cause of suffering
3. The cessation of suffering is letting go of craving
4. The path to achieving that cessation is awareness and living “right”

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20

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### How does one move toward insight or enlightenment?

A few suggestions for thought experiments based on the Four Considerations

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# Impermanence



staring at the sun  
overcoming the terror of death

IRVIN D. YALOM

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## Impermanence: Thought Experiments



- Imagine yourself at a different age in life –  
– progressing through the lifecycle
- Imagine your own time of death  
– just choose one method of dying, then think of other ways
- imagining the loss of smaller things and work up to larger –  
– loss of car, house, eyesight, hearing.
- Watch a clock and contemplate the time ticking by
- Be aware of waking up in the morning

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## What about my son? My wife? People I know?



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**Service, compassion and humility**  
Loyola Medical Center EAP

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## Even mindedness or equanimity

Seeing through projections

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### Parataxic distortions:

*Question your current projections.*

- Does everyone see the person as you do?
- Do other see qualities in them that you don't?
- Regarding your friend, are there people who don't like them and see something else in them?
- If you know the other person, by empathizing with their perspective, would your view change?

Harry Stack Sullivan

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### In considering projections with managers

- Do you experience strong feeling about that person that I can't explain?
- Do you often feel excited, inflated, upset, anxious, angry or obsessive about the relationship?
- So could there be a projection?



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### Right Speech:

- **Being viewed as possessing wisdom**
  - Introspection:** about your own thoughts and feelings
  - Empathy:** A sense of caring for the other
- Careful choice of word:**
  - an essential component



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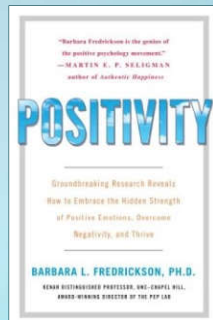
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### Focus on positive emotions,



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### Barbara Fredrickson Ph.D.



- University of North Carolina
- Positive emotions:

**“Broaden & Build”**

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### Positive Emotions

- |              |                |
|--------------|----------------|
| 1. Joy       | 6. Pride       |
| 2. Gratitude | 7. Amusement   |
| 3. Serenity  | 8. Inspiration |
| 4. Interest  | 9. Awe         |
| 5. Hope      | 10. Love.      |

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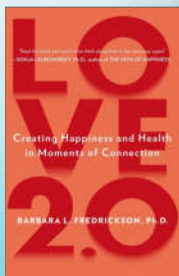
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### Thought Exercise

**• Feel the emotion**

- May I be free from suffering
- May others be free of suffering
- May my children be free from suffering
- May my spouse be free from suffering
- May all I whom see be free from suffering



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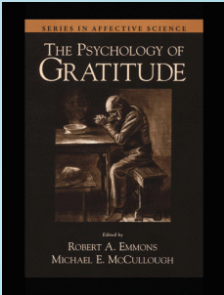
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# Gratitude



Robert Emmons  
Professor of Psychology, UC Davis  
Author, *Thankful*



THE PSYCHOLOGY OF GRATITUDE

Edited by  
ROBERT A. EMMONS  
MICHAEL E. MCCULLOUGH

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# Gratitude Exercises

- **Seligman/Emmons**
  - Three Good Things
  - Gratitude letter
- **Compassion related**
  - Feel thankfulness for what we have today
  - Thank people who have helped us
  - Ask for help when we need it
  - Reflecting on kindness from the past
  - Thanking our parents



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# What really makes humans happy?

People count

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## Compassion vs Narcissism

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## Scrooge was confronted about his own narcissism



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### Narcissism: What is really important?

- Seeing yourself through the eyes of compassion.
  - Self-inflated position toward ourselves.
  - Being a spiritual narcissist (holier than others).
- What is the image of myself I'm grasping?
  - Am I really empathizing with and feeling compassion for others?
  - Am I worried about my status or image?
- How might my efforts at protecting myself be causing me more suffering?

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## Compassion vs Compassion Fatigue

The path of compassion requires the fierce & brave heart of a warrior.



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## Self Compassion



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## Compassion at the workplace

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### Is the workplace compassionate?

- Most companies are not very compassionate.
  - People are often treated as objects
- Many people don't like their work.
  - Many dread work and often uses alcohol & drugs to cope.
- There are no prisons at corporations,
  - but many hide suffering in their basements



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43

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### Sources of workplace suffering

- Suffering can come from external sources
  - Economic, Loss, Illness
- Downsizing, change, stress, etc.
- Workplace bullies
- Injustice
- Lack of trust
- Relationship issues



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### Selling the idea

#### Reasons for compassion at work

- The business case
- The personal case



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### Why cultivate compassion? The business case

- Contributes to resilience,
- Profitability
- Higher customer retention
- Fuels collective capabilities such as learning and creativity
- Employee engagement

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1. I am doing something I am good at
2. I have all the things I need to do my job
3. I know what I should be doing
4. Every week someone notices something good about my work
5. People care about me at work
6. I have a mentor at work
7. People listen to my opinions
8. I understand how my job is related to the goals of the company
9. The people around me want to do a good job too.
- 10.I have a good friend at work
- 11.I get respectful feedback at work
12. There are opportunities to further my career.

### Gallup: Elements of quality management

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### Compassion at work: Other reasons

- Contributes to
  - innovation
  - service quality,
  - collaboration,
  - retaining talented people,
  - change.



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**Most managers want to do the right thing**  
The personal case

- **Human Needs at work**
  - Self interest
  - The need to care
  - The need for meaning



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# Feeling empty?

This is an opportunity to make you job a “calling.”

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# Awaking Compassion

1. **Noticing**
2. **Interpreting**
3. **Feeling**
4. **Acting**



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# 1. Notice

- Curiosity
- People don't express suffering due to shame.
- Most workplaces rely on punishment, which masks suffering;
- We notice the rule being broken rather than the person behind the rule



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52

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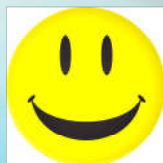
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# 2. Interpreting

- "Everything is Awesome!"
- We quickly blame individuals.
- "He does not deserve compassion," often due to stereotypes
- How do we understand our own capacity to respond?
  - If we feel we don't have the skill or resources, we won't



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53

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# 3. Feeling:

- **Imbuing others with worth**
- **Cultivating presence**
- **Empathy for Suffering**
  - Build perceptive engagement
  - Cultivate capacity for attunement,
  - Empathetic listening
  - Foster mindfulness



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54

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## Psychology and Mindfulness



- Ellen Langer Ph.D.
- Social psychologist
- Harvard University



55

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## What if they are not doing their work?

Will employees who are given compassion take advantage of it?

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## 4. Action/Acting What do you actually do?

- Giving people time to cope with suffering
- Giving task flexibility and buffering
- Monitoring and listening
- Providing reassurance and safety
- Having rituals, memorials and mementos
- Generating resources

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57

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## Awakening compassion in entire organizations

- Seeking Positive Deviance
- Building Compassion Competence
- Leading for Compassion Competence
- Creating a Culture of Compassion Competence
- Investing in Compassion Competence

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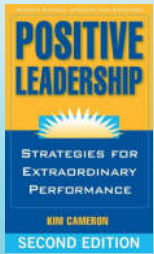
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## Positive deviance



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## Compassion Competence

- Honoring compassionate acts
- Greater speed in addressing suffering
- Making resources available
  - May be material or emotional
- Building an infrastructure to respond

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60

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## Not Compassion Competence

Compassion must be customized to the suffering

Not rote & automatic



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## A Culture of Compassion

- Teaching people basic assumptions about human nature and relationships
  - when you live values that view humans as basically good
  - the positive default assumption
  - more generous interpretations of suffering and legitimize compassion
- Continually modeling positive values, goals & aspirations
- Retell stories of compassion in organizational history

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## The other side of culture



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### Leading for Compassion Competence

1. Leading *with* compassion
2. Leading *for* compassion



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### Obstacles to compassionate organizations

- Tolerance of incivility, disrespect or injustice
- Self-interest at the core of the culture with little emphasis on shared humanity.
- A system that focuses solely on protecting itself from risk
- Organizational leaders readily generate blame for errors
- Work overload characterizes the workplace
- An organization led by someone who models only self-interest,
- A system dominated by stories showing a lack of compassion
- Stories that spread self-interest or a punitive approach to suffering, even when the organization has a mission of compassion

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### What I hope you might take away

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# Resources

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Charter for Compassion  
<https://www.charterforcompassion.org/>

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Twitter

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I am speaker, therapist and consultant addressing issues of well-being

Oak Park, Illinois, USA drtaranowski.com

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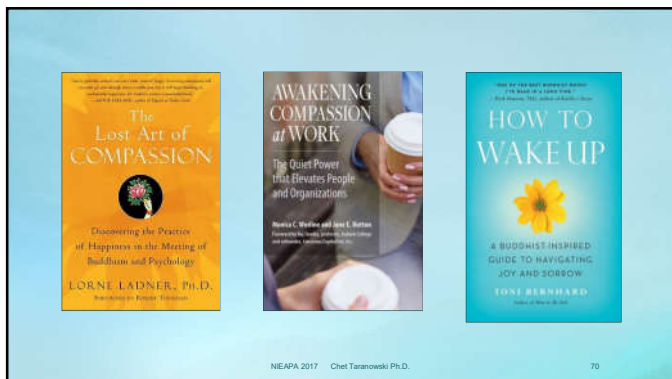
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