



# LEADING with COMPASSION

## share your umbrella

Dr. Brad Shuck

Associate Professor and Program Director of the  
Human Resource and Organizational Development program  
University of Louisville

There's no question that almost everything right now is being handled differently. How we lead is no exception. The traditional way of leading starts by sharing a plan, which is followed by directing the execution of that plan. But truthfully, plans right now sound like noise. The leaders we need right now are showing up with a different set of skills. We call that skill set compassionate leadership. I believe the companies that are doing it right start by leading with compassion, then they inspire with a plan.

What does leading with compassion look like? Compassion is grounded in three easy and often overlooked principles that help us understand how to lead differently right now:

- 1** Compassion is totally undeserved;
- 2** Compassion requires relentless commitment; and,
- 3** Compassion comes from a place of unselfish humility.

### Principle 1: totally undeserved

Let's start with the analogy of an umbrella.

You may have had an experience where you've been walking down the street in the rain and saw somebody else walking who is getting soaked. It's raining like crazy and you have an umbrella. So, you decide to come alongside them and share your umbrella. That's compassion. There is no judgment with the action. You don't scold the poor wet person because they didn't have an umbrella. "You didn't check the weather today? Everybody has access to this information; why didn't you plan ahead?" or "What's wrong with you?" Rather, you simply extend and share your umbrella. You help the person in need — not because they earned it, but because they need it. That's compassion.

This illustrates what is different about our current situation. This is the time to simply show up and share your umbrella, whatever that is and whatever it looks like. Just share it. In a business context, sharing your umbrella could be about noticing someone who is struggling with a project or is simply overwhelmed.

## Principle 2: relentless commitment

Let's continue with the 'sharing your umbrella' strategy and talk about relentless commitment. Imagine you are walking down the road and see someone who needs an umbrella. Rather than turning around and walking away, ducking out of sight or going in a different direction, you actively pursue the person and offer to share your umbrella. That's relentless commitment. Essentially your actions say, "Let me help you; let me shield you; let me support you here in the moment." It is about leading with a sense of relentless and committed pursuit. The alternative leadership style is fragile, transactional and judgmental. Compassionate leadership is judgment-free and more importantly, transformational.

## Principle 3: unselfish humility

The third principle of compassionate leadership is unselfish humility. It means putting others first. Maybe there isn't enough space under the umbrella, so your shoulder gets a little bit wet. Maybe in your pursuit, your socks get soaked. No problem. Socks dry. This is all about putting others oftentimes before ourselves. It's about taking responsibility and stepping into the gap. Every single day there's a new opportunity to put out a fire, to do something different, to pivot, to move, to change, to modify, and we need leaders who will step into that gap. That is an unselfish humility. It is about serving and being in service to others.

But what happens when you share your umbrella, you pursue that person, and you find out they actually like walking in the rain. Getting wet is a choice they want to make. That is okay. Compassion does not require a reaction, only action. Extending the offer is the compassion and then we empower others around us to make their own choice. Some will duck quickly under your umbrella, relieved they are no longer alone. Others may say thank you and choose a different path forward. Both are perfectly okay. That choice is theirs to make and at the end of the day, that's an acceptable and judgment-free choice.

But don't miss that extending the offer lets them know you're available for them. Sometimes simply letting people know they're invited into the conversation means as much as being part of the conversation.

Our view of compassionate leadership provides a framework that has the potential to transform the lives of the people who work on our teams and in our organizations. How we do things as a business during this time will be forgotten, but the way in which we lead will define our legacy for generations to come. It begins with acts of compassion.

## share your umbrella



This article is a modified excerpt from a webinar Dr. Shuck delivered with BI WORLDWIDE on April 22, 2020. To hear the webinar in its entirety, [click here](#).