

## TRANSFORMING RELATIONSHIPS<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

Professional relationships influence both how well we perform and how enjoyable and successful our work experiences are. People often give relationships as the reason why they leave jobs and also as an impediment for their ability to be productive. Unfortunately, many work relationships are not positive ones. The purpose of this assignment is to practice—and to learn from practicing—how to change relationships. Although it is a word that is not commonly used in the workplace, transforming relationships from negative to positive involves forgiveness. To complete this assignment, you will need to practice forgiving.

### How to Get a Bad Grade on This Assignment

There are common patterns that explain many of the bad grades that students receive on this assignment. Please read these and ensure that you do not make the same mistakes.

1. *Failing to read this document carefully.* If you do not follow the instructions, you will lose points. In particular, study the template and the rubric at the end of this document.
2. *Reporting on something that happened in the past.* You must do this project during this term if you want to receive full credit.
3. *Procrastinating.* This is not the kind of project that you can complete at the last minute. Start right away.
4. *Doing the project half-heartedly.* If you do not do this project sincerely and with real effort, it shows in your written report, and points will be deducted. Even more importantly, doing this sincerely and enthusiastically will also have a profound effect on your personal and professional life.

### Overview

Is there anybody who dislikes you or treats you negatively? It is time to turn that relationship around.

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<sup>1</sup> This assignment was created by Salar Mesdaghinia, with design and editing help from Ryan Quinn. Your participation in this assignment will be used as the basis for class discussion, and not to illustrate effective or ineffective handling of a particular situation. The goals of this document are to provide a framework for practicing intentional forgiveness in the workplace and observing the results of these actions, thus, transforming relationships from negative to positive.

Human beings tend to react positively to forgiveness and kindness. If somebody forgives you and shows genuine kindness to you, it often improves your attitude and behaviors toward that person. You are likely to feel inclined to return kindness with kindness. The same is true when you show forgiveness and kindness toward others, even if those people are not on good terms with you.

Genuine kindness involves actions and words that are not intended as instruments for gaining something in return. Many people do favors in a calculative or instrumental manner. For example, they may help or praise their manager with the hope of getting a favorable performance appraisal. However, genuine kindness involves acting generously without an expectation for gaining something in return. For example, people may help a stranger that they are unlikely to meet again.

## **The Assignment**

Choose a person or a group of people, preferably in your workplace, who is not currently getting along well with you. Try to forgive this target person or group and start doing kind, helpful, and supportive acts toward them. For example, you may greet them with a smile, help them in difficult situations, offer a gift, etc. Do this without expecting anything in return. Do not even expect them to change their behavior. They may change their behavior sooner or later, but do not expect it. Focus on being kind and try to enjoy being kind. Continue such behaviors for at least three weeks, no matter what the reaction from the target person or group is. Keep notes on both your efforts and the outcomes. At the end of the term, report the results using the format prescribed at the end of this document.

## **Choosing the target person or group**

The individual or group you select for this assignment should meet the following criteria:

1. Individuals or groups in the workplace are preferred. If you are not currently employed you may choose a person from your neighborhood, a roommate, a relative, or school, but not a person from this class. The person must be someone that you see often.
2. Choose an individual or group who has been behaving negatively toward you on a consistent basis, not someone who has done something negative once. Examples of negative behaviors are backbiting, silent treatment, ignoring, ridiculing, showing hatred, jealousy, verbal abuse, sabotaging your work, or taking credit for your work.
3. It is harder to be kind to some people without your kindness seeming calculative or instrumental. For example, if you choose your boss, there is a chance your boss may think that you are kissing up or trying to curry favor. Generally, it is recommended that you do not choose people for whom this is the case. If you must, check with your instructor first, be sure to repeatedly ensure your intentions are solely to be kind, and communicate your intentions as clearly and as appropriately as you can. This assignment is likely to go better, however, if you choose someone for whom this is not applicable.

4. If you choose to be kind to a group of people, show kindness to the whole group. If you are kind to only one member of the group, other members of the group may think your behavior is confusing or poorly intended.

If you cannot find anyone who meets these criteria, speak with the instructor so that you can find a mutually acceptable solution.

### **Doing Kind, Generous, Helpful, Supportive Things**

Once you have selected the individual or group, begin practicing kindness. Please use the following guidelines as you do so:

1. Involve your heart. Enjoy being kind and generous to others. Do not worry about how others will respond. Be kind for the sake of being kind. It might be difficult, at first, to be kind to someone you dislike. This requires forgiveness and humility. Do not focus on what that person has done in the past. Your goal is to do kind things for three weeks, no matter what happened in the past.
2. Persist. Repeat your kind behaviors. Some people may find it hard to believe that you are showing genuine kindness. That is fine. Your purpose is not to persuade them. It is simply to be consistently kind for three weeks.
3. Try not to engage in any negative behaviors toward the individual or group that you chose for three weeks. Negative behaviors may undermine your kind behaviors. If, for some reason, you must take an action that the individual or group is likely to perceive negatively, be sure to respect their dignity, provide adequate explanation, and avoid blaming when you do it.
4. Do not overdo it. Do not make your kind actions so big that the target person becomes suspicious and confused about your intention.
5. Examples of kind behaviors include, but are not limited to:
  - a. Greet the individual or group warmly
  - b. Buy a coffee, doughnut, or lunch for the individual or group.
  - c. Give the individual or group a gift.
  - d. Help the individual or group when they are in a difficult situation.
  - e. Let the individual or group use a limited resource that belongs to you.
  - f. Show empathy.
  - g. Forgive.
  - h. Inform the individual or group about opportunities.
  - i. Warn the individual or group about threats.

### **Observing the Results**

As you observe the results of this assignment, know that you will not be graded based on how the individual or group respond to your efforts. If your kindness has no impact, or makes them behave worse, your grade will be the same. In most cases, people experience highly positive results by participating in this assignment, but if that is not the case, you need not worry. The following instructions will help you do a good job of observing and reporting on the impact of your actions:

1. Keep a record of what you do each time you do it, and also what, if anything, the individual or group does in response. This record will help you write your report.
2. Be careful about your expectations. If they have been treating you poorly, you may be tempted to expect negative behavior from them, or to interpret their behavior negatively. Try to be objective. Perhaps even ask neutral parties for their interpretations of the individual's or group's responses.
3. Consider counting the instances of specific negative or positive behaviors by the target and see whether there is a change in the number.
4. If the individual's or group's behavior changes, consider whether the change occurred for some reason other than your kindness.
5. If there are changes in behavior, observe how long the changes last.

## **The Report**

Write a report of what you did and what you observed. Please write clearly and proofread a few times so that it is understandable for somebody who is not in your situation and does not know you or the target person. The following criteria will be used to grade your assignment.