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Cover Story

Treat People With Kindness

Today – *More Than Ever in Our Lifetime* – It Is Worth Taking a Moment to Consider the Merits of Decency, Respect, and, Most of All, Kindness



This focus on kindness may seem “touchy-feely” and something that those serious about their condominium communities may be inclined to overlook in favour of articles that focus on things like reserve fund planning, the insurance crisis, or the latest court decisions.

ILLUSTRATION BY JAMIE BENNETT

I tell you though that I have found the “kindness climate” of a condominium can impact how issues are addressed. Not every dispute has to cost tens of thousands of dollars. By being kind, you situate yourself to avoid unnecessary escalation of conflict and the cost, stress, and time that comes with it.

When I was a kid, my father invited me to join him for a meeting with his lawyer. They were meeting someone my dad was suing, along with that person’s lawyer. I agreed to go because there were plans to go to lunch afterwards and they were heading to my favourite restaurant, Chi-Chi’s. I remember arriving for the meeting and being shocked to see the parties smile as they greeted one another, shake hands, and exchange pleasantries. I had expected them to scowl and trade insults. (Admittedly, part of my expectation was fuelled by my enjoyment of professional wrestling at the time, where adversaries would not treat one another with such courtesy.)

Afterwards, over enchiladas, my dad explained to me that the tone of the interaction made little difference in how a judge would decide the matter. That while the business relationship between the parties was over, it would be more comfortable for everyone to be respectful and mature as they journeyed together through the trial process. It made sense. Unfortunately, it is a mindset that I have seldom



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experienced in condominium communities, even without lawsuits in play. Today - more than ever in our lifetime - it is worth taking a moment to consider the merits of decency, respect, and, most of all, kindness.

I expect few to look back on 2020 and consider it to be the best year ever. There has been so much stress as we have faced unprecedented times and related unknowns surrounding how best to deal with them. In a condominium setting, concepts of isolation, staying home, and keeping distance are complicated. They certainly provoke anxiety. With this, many condominium residents have been inclined to put pleasantries aside. They push the “door close” button in the elevator as others approach. They forgo small talk as they come across neighbours in passing. Some might smile from behind their masks, yet many avoid eye contact or interactions that risk people getting too close. These are natural reactions and part of putting health and safety first. Still, empathy and understanding remain important traits – they should be embraced by anyone wishing to be a good human. Being kind may look different these days, yet we all should treat people with kindness.

You Don’t Know What Others Are Going Through

Whenever someone wrongs me in a minor way when driving and I am tempted to honk at them, my wife reminds me that I do not know what else is going on in their life. They could be facing any assortment of challenges far more deserving of their attention than extending a courtesy to a fellow motorist. In condominium communities, the same think-

An advertisement for CANLIGHT and ACMO. The background is a cityscape with several tall buildings. Overlaid on the buildings are large, colorful geometric shapes: a red triangle, a yellow triangle, and a green triangle. The CANLIGHT logo is in the top left, and the ACMO logo is in the bottom left. Text on the right side reads: "We've got you covered with expertise, forethought, and the right strategy for your condo community. Our goal is to make your life easier." At the bottom, there are contact details: "CONTACT US 905 629 7000" and "VISIT canlight.com".

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ing applies. Many people face significant concerns these days. People worry about the sustainability of their livelihoods or their investments (including their condominium). They worry about their loved ones, particularly those who are considered high risk or who are forced into less than ideal situations. Put your issues in perspective and be nice! Think before you act and select a kind course of action. Even if you disagree with someone, there are a number of ways to communicate that and some options are nicer than others. It would be unreasonable to expect everyone to agree. In fact, there can be benefits to considering different views and perspectives. We need to move away from dynamics in condominium communities where residents worry about the prospect of running into others who do not share their views and toward an environment where folks can agree to disagree and interact as mature adults.

Good Gossip

Evolutionary psychologist Frank McAndrew shares a different perspective than the notion that gossip is a bad thing. McAndrew suggests that if someone knows that others are going to talk about them when they are not present, they have incentive to be nice. In my career, I have yet to come across a condominium community free of gossip. As people come together to form a community, as they go about their business and observe each other, they will form impressions. Boundaries are needed and many times judgment should be withheld; however, this notion of good gossip applies to condominiums because those forming the community have ongoing relationships – whether they want to or not. Do your part to prevent your community from being one of those where everyone is a stranger. When people know one another, when faces in passing are familiar, there is a greater chance of preventing the escalation of conflict by fostering a collegial environment. There is a greater tendency to be kind to people we know.

Intentional Communities

In the spirit of getting to know your neighbours, there is a housing trend toward creating “intentional communities”. Intentional communities offer communal living space in a manner that is concep-

tually similar to university dormitories. Individuals have small, private space to themselves and common spaces to interact with others as they do such things as cook and watch television. The idea is to easily allow for social interaction, including to combat loneliness. Most condominium communities are not designed as intentional communities in the strictest sense – and intentional communities certainly have challenges in this day and age – however, many condominiums have been built to offer residents opportunities for social interaction. Limits on public gatherings and the closure of amenities have caused condominiums to move away from community-building social events. All these months later, particularly in the spirit of the holiday season, it may be time to get creative and find ways to bring your community together socially, in a safe way. There is no good reason for a condominium community to only gather virtually for their AGM.

Fostering Same-Group Dynamics

Much research around kindness and conflict has concluded that people tend to be kinder to those they view as being part of



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their group and crueller to those they label as belonging to a different or “out-group”. We see this in society everywhere from teen dramas to fans of competing sports teams to atrocities connected to systemic bias. Applying the same-group concept to condominiums, cliques of residents or owners who identify as having something in common can promote harmony within their group. They also risk forming conflict with those viewed as outsiders or who feel excluded. The science on kindness suggests that forming a single group that everyone within a condominium community belongs to would promote harmony. Kindness would be fostered amongst group members. While it can seem it at times, it is often not all that difficult to identify what members of a condominium community have in common. Sure, they may have many differences, but the idea is not to focus on differences. Residents in a community have a common geography. Owners have a common investment. Focus on what people have in common, as opposed to what sets them apart. The idea is to try to foster a dynamic where everyone feels a part of something and welcome.

The Most Important Person to Be Kind to

As you consider how you can be kinder to those around you, do not forget that it is most important to be kind to yourself. Many hold themselves to a high standard and are their own biggest critic. Particularly with the added stresses of the holiday season, it can be all too easy to get down on yourself. Being isolated can be depressing. This does not put us in a good mindset to be kind. Love yourself. Forgive yourself. In the world of dispute resolution, a popular focus looks at the intentions behind certain actions. We all know where the road paved with good intentions but, it can be important to go back and recall what was intended when something does not go well. There comes a point, though, where you need to accept, let go, and move on from your mistakes. Learn from them, yes, but don't stay stuck in them.

“Maybe we can find a place to feel good and we can treat people with kindness.”
– *Harry Styles* 

Source: “The Power of Kindness.” TIME.
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