

Introduction

Two heart attacks

Melissa Sutor

Mindfulness Teacher and Consultant, Hawaii, USA

“Years ago, I worked as a project manager at a tech startup in Silicon Valley. I was tasked with ensuring that the company’s flagship product was delivered on time and within budget. Startups can be challenging places to work in. Expectations were high, and timelines were tight. I was particular that work demands should not compromise the health and happiness of the people I was leading. However, the CEO did not see our health and happiness as priorities. He demanded that we work 6 to 7 days per week at 10 to 12 hours per day. His demands overrode our life balance and self-care. My team was crumbling physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually, while I was rendered helpless in effecting positive change. I was even labeled as being a “weak woman” for caring about the wellbeing of the team. The stress that I experienced at work manifested physically as body pains and insomnia.

I was not the only one suffering.

One of the engineers who reported to me ended up in the hospital with severe high blood pressure. I went to the hospital to check on him. When I saw the condition he was in, I pleaded with him to take some time off work and put his health first. He was kept at the hospital overnight for monitoring. He called the next morning to inform me that he was on his way to work. The CEO had threatened to fire him if he did not come back to work immediately and keep the project on schedule. I was appalled!

My heart went out to my friend who chose to be defined by his work. I reached out to friends and recruiters to help him find another position. But he had no time to even go for interviews. I felt crushed having to work in a culture that placed profits over people. My work was not worth the personal damage it was causing. I gave my resignation and asked my friend to take a leap of faith as well. He refused. He was afraid. He refused to see the bigger

picture of his life and what this job was doing to him. There was nothing I could do to convince him otherwise.

So I moved on.

Not too long after, I received a call with the news *that my friend had died of a massive heart attack, alone in his apartment.*

So much suffering, and a life needlessly lost!

All because of a CEO who refused to care for his people, and an employee who was not empowered to make appropriate choices in the face of

”

suffering.

Nishita Bharadwaj

IT Delivery Manager at VMware

“**R**aj (name changed for privacy) was 37 years old when he passed away. At the time of his passing, he was working as a Senior Application Developer in VMware, Bangalore, India. His wife was a homemaker, and his two children were less than ten years old. He had been an employee of VMware for almost three years at that time.

It was a Sunday evening. Raj was with his family, and he asked for a cup of tea. But by the time his wife came back with tea, he had suffered a massive heart attack. She reached out to one of Raj's colleagues, who immediately took him to a hospital. Sadly, Raj was declared dead upon arrival.

One of the first few people to respond to the tragedy was Raj's IT Site Leader at the time, Chandra Elango. Chandra had made it a priority to learn about all of his team members and their families. So when this happened, Chandra had a clear grasp of the challenges that Raj's wife could be facing.

One of the biggest challenges was navigating the legal framework to allow the release of the body for burial. In the interim, headed by Chandra, we informed HR and initiated a call to action within VMware. VMware is a large organization with offices across the globe. Chandra coordinated a financial response by organizing a global fundraiser to support the family.

Raj's wife was not very educated. She was oblivious to the financial arrangements of the household. Because of this, we had to climb through several hoops, talking to banks and regulators to transfer financial ownership to her. To do this, we had to leverage our family and friends heavily. Chandra actively got involved in the response, paying attention to even the smallest details and logistics to support the grieving family. For example, he requested a female colleague to stay in touch with Raj's widow to make sure that there was someone available for sensitive discussions.

Raj's hometown was nearly 110 miles away from Bangalore in a different Indian state. We arranged for Raj's body to be transported to his native village. None of this was easy, as there was no precedence. We were only guided by our genuine care for a colleague who had passed away, and our concern for his family who were in distress. VMWare gave us the flexibility to provide compassionate responses, not stopping with financial support, but also providing the space and culture for those responses to happen. We are lucky to have leadership that does not mind getting their hands dirty when it comes to caring. VMware's policies allow for 40 hours of paid time every year in community outreach and making a social difference in our communities. It also helps that our CEO, Pat Gelsinger, models human caring in business.

In Raj's situation, most of the challenges happened because he had not taken the effort to include his wife in emergency responses. His wife was not privy to his insurance details and bank accounts. We often had to work backward to get her the resources that were due to her. And I was able to tap into my family's contacts in Bangalore to expedite things. Many VMware IT India team members came together to help at various points. We also made sure that our support extended well beyond an immediate knee-jerk response to suffering. We had collected funds for her, but with two young children, we wanted to ensure long-term comfort. Using our collective network once again, we identified a job opportunity for Raj's widow. Chandra also created an educational fund to support the children through their schooling.

One good thing that came out of this experience was that we set up precedence for human responses in the face of incredible suffering in the workplace. When a similar challenge happened in VMware later, they used our experiences as a compassion framework for intervention. End of the

day, we lost a member of our team but built relationships with the others that will last a lifetime.

Raj's death happened almost six years ago, but we still actively look into the wellbeing of our fallen colleague's family. We know that their loss cannot be compensated, but we can certainly minimize the impact of suffering. This is

”

what compassionate workplaces are all about.

Choices

Viktor Frankl was a successful Jewish neurologist and psychiatrist in pre-world war II Germany. After the Nazis invaded his hometown of Vienna in Austria and things became increasingly difficult for the Jewish people, he obtained an immigration visa to America. But not wanting to desert his aging parents, he chose to let that immigration visa pass. It was a painfully fateful decision, because two years later, the Nazis arrested him. He lost his entire family- his father, mother, wife, brother, and his sister-in-law- to the brutality of the Holocaust.

In his book, 'Man's Search for Meaning,' he recounted the extraordinary cruelty and suffering he witnessed and experienced in the two years as a holocaust prisoner. More importantly, his book highlights the human capacity for resilience and compassion, even in the middle of the sea of human suffering.

“Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedom,” he writes in his book, *—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.”*

Melissa's CEO chose to harm. Chandra, Nishita, and the team chose compassion. One caused suffering. Another alleviated suffering.

Our ability to choose makes us human. But in the rat race of living, we often forget that we have power over our choices. In our choices lie our happiness, peace, and strength. But sometimes, we need reminders. Sometimes we need the inspiration and tools to choose compassion over harm. This is what this book offers. The stories and narratives in this book

demonstrate that compassionate responses are possible, even under challenging circumstances.

Although compassion is a framework for every aspect of human living, this book focuses on the practice of compassion in the workplace. Work takes up a massive part of our time and our mind space. The time we spend at work is the most energized part of our day, and where we are primed to give our mental and physical best. When we invest so much time and effort into our workplaces, one would expect that we would do everything in our power to make this part of our living a happy, purpose-filled, and empowering experience. More often than not, workplaces are associated with stress and distress. Burdened by social judgment and comparison, work has become a mad scramble to board the 'nowhere train'. Workplaces are filled with a diverse set of individuals, each bringing unique mindsets, expectations, behaviors, and end-goals to the collective experience. When there is no clear cultural narrative to weave these range of personalities into a common functioning unit, negative outcomes are inevitable.

Work can kill!

Karoshi is a Japanese word, which means 'overwork death.' As hard as it is to believe, some of us literally work ourselves to death. A 2013 article from the International Labor Organization identifies some typical cases of Karoshi, including the case of an employee who worked for as long as 110 hours a week and died of a heart attack at the age of 34. Another was that of a 22-year old nurse who died from a heart attack, after 34 hours of continuous duty five times a month¹. The extreme physical and mental pressure created by overworking is now recognized as a global problem. Heart attack and stroke due to stress and a starvation diet are the major medical causes of Karoshi deaths²

Another equally disconcerting phenomenon is suicide from overworking and stressful working conditions. The Japanese word for this is **Karojisatsu**. Karojisatsu results from 'long work hours, heavy workloads, lack of job control, routine and repetitive tasks, interpersonal conflicts, inadequate rewards, employment insecurity, and organizational problems could become psychosocial hazards at work.'³

We are conscious and intelligent creatures. Our health and our happiness are our most valuable gifts. Still, we choose to exchange our most valuable assets for a lifestyle that drains and destroys them both.

The challenge is that we often don't know that we are on that path of destruction. A friend once told me that when there is more than one person in a room, there is bound to be suffering. Perhaps we do not need another person in the room for suffering to happen. We can suffer without anyone's help. What is often missing is the capacity to pause and realize that we are suffering and that our suffering is optional. We need to recognize that we can choose to escape from suffering in ways that are pragmatic as they are effective. And, we can choose to alleviate the sufferings of those around us in our workspaces. We can do this any day, every day. This is the choice of compassion.

Compassion is a multifaceted human response to suffering. In the workplace, compassion *is simply being able to make the right choice to alleviate suffering and balancing those choices with wisdom*. Compassion is evolutionarily hard-wired into us. Often we only need to recognize that we **can** act with compassion, and permit ourselves to do so.

In the context of the workplace, compassion translates into a fearless desire for all-around success. Compassion allows us to create success for ourselves, our colleagues, our organizations, and the customers we serve. Cultural narratives, lack of awareness of suffering, and fear often block compassion. But these are blocks that can be easily overcome. Compassion is a muscle that can be strengthened with practice. In the coming chapters, we will explore the why, what and when of compassion, discuss the science of compassion, and understand why compassion matters in workplaces. We will then do a deep dive of nine pragmatic life skills that come together as pillars upholding a personal and cultural framework of compassion. The final sections of the book explore how we can apply compassion skills to address real-life challenges, create organizational shifts, and create a vision for a happier future.

Industrial Revolutions

We are in the middle of the fourth industrial revolution. The first industrial revolution, dating to the end of the 18th century, witnessed the emergence of mechanization using steam power. The second industrial revolution,

which started toward the end of the 19th century, utilized a new form of energy- electricity - for mass production, and allowed for the division of labor. The third industrial revolution, dating to the latter half of the 20th century, utilized electronics and computers to automate manufacturing. The ongoing fourth industrial revolution aims to integrate our physical and virtual worlds to create globally connected factories.

With all the emphasis on production and productivity, it is easy to overlook *the human motivations of the industrial revolutions*. I believe that all of the industrial revolutions had the same underlying human needs- a need for fair access to resources, a need to flatten out limiting social hierarchies, and a desire for improved human health and happiness. Even with the clumsiness and callousness with which we have wielded the tools of the industrial revolutions, the quality of life has undoubtedly increased since the revolutions began. Resources, knowledge, opportunities for connection and equality, access to happiness tools are at an all-time high. But the truth remains that we are still an unhappy generation, and the tools that were meant to ease life and make us happy are only making us stressed and depressed.

What I believe is happening is that we have stocked up the refrigerator with vegetables that we don't know how to cook. What we need is not more physical or digital resources, but tools that can help us consume the fruits of the industrial revolutions in ways that will make us happy. These tools are tools of the mind and heart. More technology, more digitalization, is not going to make us happier. We need to return to our roots- and develop personal skills that nurture happiness. This is the fifth revolution as I see it- a rediscovery of tools and skills that make us uniquely human. While steam, electricity, electronics, and artificial intelligence have powered the other industrial revolutions, the fifth one will be powered by the human spirit.

The fifth revolution is superbly on target to elevate human progress and happiness at the same time. And I believe that *the fifth revolution, while universally applicable, will find their ground-zero in workplaces*. As we will discuss in the following pages, there is no shortage of suffering in workplaces. Our current paradigm for success is skewed. We wander into work, become temporary automatons, meet short-term goals, collect paychecks, and pick our personalities up on the way out. In the process, the best of our potential lies unrecognized and unused. Therefore, we lose

purpose, become stressed and distressed, and become unhappy. We deserve better. We deserve an internal and cultural framework in workplaces that allows us to flourish both personally and professionally. Workplaces that bring out the best in people thrive. The fifth revolution starts with creating these workplaces. The fifth revolution has a secret sauce. That secret sauce is compassion. Compassion, practiced by individuals and organizations, will maximize our capacity to consume the fruits of the industrial revolution in ways that elevate happiness and efficiency.

About this book

This book is designed to challenge and inspire individuals and organizations to become compassionate by 'looking inside' to 'shift outside'. I trust you will find all the workplace compassion tools and skills in these pages. So, this is my invitation: to discover your personal capacity to be compassionate to yourself and all the people in your world, starting with your workplace.

After all, all global transformations start as a transformation of the human spirit.

'The Fifth Revolution' has stories, perspectives, exercises, assessments, affirmations and more. These are meant to inspire, challenge and nudge you toward a happier, kinder lifestyle and work setting. The image below shows the five key intentions of the book.



I hope that this book seeds a revolution of human compassion in workplaces. But there can be no revolution without **you!**

As Ursula K. Le Guin says, *“You cannot buy the revolution. You cannot make the revolution. You can only be the revolution, it is in your spirit, or it is nowhere.”*

I invite you to be a part of the revolution by experimenting with your learnings from this book . If you feel compelled to inspire others, you can share your stories and perspectives at **www.FifthRevolution.life**.

Onward to The Fifth Revolution!

Self-reflection

Before you start reading this book, please try this short self-reflective exercise. List out five human challenges that you are currently experiencing at work (for example, stress, connection, communication, anxiety, leadership challenges).

In Column A, indicate how intense the challenge is for you at this time, in a rating scale from 1 to 5. 1 is minimal emotional stress, and 5 is as painful as it gets. After you have completed the book and had a chance to experiment with some of the concepts you have learned, revisit this page and complete Column B.

Observe what has changed.

	My greatest human challenges at work	As I start this book Column A	After experiments with compassion Column B
1		Rating: Notes:	Rating: Notes:
2		Rating: Notes:	Rating: Notes:
3		Rating: Notes:	Rating: Notes:
4		Rating: Notes:	Rating: Notes:
5		Rating: Notes:	Rating: Notes:

SECTION 1

**UNDERSTANDING
COMPASSION**



What

Why

When

Where