

The Power of Starting with Kindness

Here are two fundamentally different approaches to seeking someone else's cooperation:

Option #1: "I would like to achieve X. Can you help me?"

Option #2: "Here's a list of all the bad things I will do to you if you don't help me achieve X."

Option #1 will almost always give you the advantage if you're trying to motivate people to cooperate with you and it's usually less stressful for everyone involved. When people don't feel antagonized or attacked, they're usually more creative and clear-headed in their ability to help you get what you want.

Option #2 will almost always cost you more time, energy, trust, and social capital. Even if you get what you want, you'll likely end up with a headache and an enemy at the end of the process. It's a very difficult strategy to sustain. The more you do it, the less you can get away with doing it.

Some people prefer to lead with option #1. When they need things, they begin with a polite request and they go from there.

Some people prefer to lead with option #2. Rather than risk having their request rejected, they begin with threats in an effort to let the other party know they mean business.

Option #2 is actually a powerful and legitimate technique, but it's a terrible place to start.

When you start with being mean, it's very hard to go back to kindness.

If you want to be effective, being kind is usually the best place to begin. If you eventually need to get mean, you'll still have the opportunity to get mean.

There's no expiration date on your ability to be mean. Kindness, on the other hand, is time-sensitive.

And that's one of the greatest advantages of starting with kindness. It's the only option that doesn't eliminate your other options.