

Wellbeing at the Bar Blog – October 2021

In the book 'To Kill a Mocking Bird', by Harper Lee, a neighbour tells the lawyer Atticus Finch's children, "*there are some men in this world who were born to do our unpleasant jobs for us. Your father's one of them*", I suspect that this is too harsh a summary of the job of any criminal advocate but it is certainly clear that our job has become more and more difficult as the pressures have on the criminal justice system increased. With that in mind, I am often thinking about how we can make life easier for those that work so hard and try to do their best when working with often harrowing or disturbing content.

This summer my interest was caught by a piece on Radio 4 called the 'Kindness Test'. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m000z5hf> . Kindness has long been a virtue I have admired. Some of my best memories at the Bar are of cases where there was fierce advocacy on both sides or co-defending but where friendships were forged during the case due to kindnesses delivered during those stressful times. Other instances of kindness come from the admiration I have for various family members or friends who always seem to have a kind word or make so much effort to be kind to other people.

I know that 20 years ago kindness was not a popular word or concept for the workplace. However the BBC Radio 4 piece, made me look into Professor Banerjee's work and contact him after I assisted with the research, see: <https://www.sussex.ac.uk/research/centres/kindness/research/thekindnesstest> by filling out the Sussex Kindness Research test, see: www.thekindnesstest.org. The Sussex University research led by Professor Banerjee is a partnership with Radio 4 to explore amongst other issues how kindness is viewed within society at large and how it is valued in the workplace. The research will be analysed and then announced on Radio 4 in February 2022.

That lead me to also explore The Kindness Research Foundation which was set up to see if it is possible to measure kindness. I joined the Foundation and did a Kindness Test on <https://www.testmykindness.org>, which you can do too without joining. It tells you how kind you are (go on give it a go, it's fun and if you are really honest you may even be pleasantly surprised!).

However it was the Radio 4 programme and Sussex University's research that made me think about how we could bring Kindness to the workplace as an ethos for the Bar to work by. I am delighted to be able to tell you that the Criminal Bar Association and South Eastern Circuit have invited Professor Robin Banerjee to speak in an interactive session on 22 November 2021 at Middle Temple to discuss how we can take this project forward. For my part I cannot see that there is any possible negative to considering this. I don't want to preach just to quote my favourite t-shirt – "*in a world where you can be anything be kind*". Granted it won't solve issues with remuneration or listing but it could allow us all to enjoy work more and feel less stressed whilst we are at work. Rolled out across the Bar and judiciary we might even get Kindness to rule the world! I am soon to stand down as the Criminal Bar Association's wellbeing director, having worked on wellbeing for the last seven years as past recorder of the SEC and having been on the Bar Council's working party group but I would like this to be my final project.

We plan to run an interactive session where we can develop how Professor Banerjee's work could be taken forward for the Bar and how we can encourage kindness in our workplaces, within the court system whilst still maintaining excellence with our adversarial skills. Please come along and join us – this is for anyone working within the justice system. The session is not just for criminal barristers but is for all those interested in taking this forward on their own circuit or within their own chambers.

Christine Agnew Q.C., leader of the SEC and Jo Sidhu Q.C, Chair of the CBA, have agreed to form part of the panel with myself and Nicola Shannon, head of wellbeing and past recorder for the SEC. Professor Banerjee will be our guest speaker and we will be inviting questions from those who attend. Please come along and tell us what you think.

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