

KINDNESS

This is one of a series of occasional papers by The Dilenschneider Group to bring clients and friends a different perspective. We hope you find it of interest.

KINDNESS

It is obvious that Americans are angry. The reasons are many, and it is likely that this attitude will hold for some time before it is tempered.

Hence this “Red Book” on how we all might think about our daily lives and advise others on the need to reflect what this Country stands for.

JUST HELP THE NEXT GUY

The driver woke up at 5:30 a.m. with the kind of headache he knew was going to be an all-day affair. On top of that there was achiness throughout his body that presaged the flu. And he had a 500-mile drive ahead of him. His presence at a 9 a.m. meeting the next day in the nation’s capital was not negotiable.

He got out of bed, scanned the contents of his medicine cabinet and pried open a bottle of some kind of headache/cold/flu remedy with his fingernail, noting that it had not expired but not bothering to read the label. If he had, he would not have popped two pills into his mouth. The label warned of drowsiness as a definite side effect.

Editor’s Note: The events described in the opening paragraphs of this “Little Red Book” happened in 2015 to a member of The Dilenschneider Group family, who is forever grateful to a man from West Virginia and his son.

About two hundred miles later, listening to a Lee Child thriller about Jack Reacher, an impossibly perfect person who traveled thousands of miles with nothing but a fold-up toothbrush, he realized he was not paying attention. In fact, all he wanted to do was close his eyes. Just for a minute. He ground his fingernails into his palm, willing himself to wake up. He looked around for a rest stop; nothing but trees and beyond that endless field.

Suddenly, he woke with a start. His car was plowing into the median, headed toward the opposite lane of ongoing traffic. He wrenched the wheel violently to the right, swerved back across his own two lanes of traffic just in front of two cars and into the ditch, reversing direction and coming to a halt halfway up a hill.

Heart beating faster than he had known possible, he pushed open the car door and shakily climbed out. His muffler was bent up toward the underside, his bumper was resting right on the tire. Impossible to drive. A call for roadside assistance revealed that because it was a holiday and his location was remote, it probably would be several hours before help would arrive.

Ten minutes later, a pickup truck drove by, slowed and reversed. A man in overalls and his grown son, wearing jeans and a plaid shirt, got out of the car and hurried over. "Man, you OK?" said the father anxiously.

Twenty minutes later with brawn and some wire found in the back of their truck to hold the wounded muffler in place, the two good Samaritans had his car ready for the road, and he was set to be on his way.

"How can I ever repay you?" he asked. "Don't worry about it," they assured him. "Just help the next guy."

ARE WE LOSING IT?

The 2016 election cycle has been especially shocking in the coarseness with which some of the candidates expressed disdain for rivals, in the lack of civility toward those with opposite political views and the near total lack of kindness on public display.

Americans have been known around the globe for our friendliness, our openness and our willingness to help a stranger.

We may be in danger of losing that valuable reputation.

In some ways Americans seem to be shrinking from our traditional thoughtfulness toward others.

Fear of change, worry about our children's future and anxiety about national and economic security are leading to retrenchment from our instinctive values of helping one's neighbors and charity to all. Not completely, of course. Philanthropy is still part of the American psyche. But carelessness towards others is occurring more broadly.

This is not good; we must make certain it is not permanent.

We need to work harder to be kind to those we see every day, from our families to our friends to our colleagues to those who make our lives run more smoothly. We need to set an example for others.

And, just as important, we must be kind to those we do not know, the ships that pass our bow every day.

How many times has someone gone out of his or her way to be nice to us? A door held open. A cup of coffee or a bottle of water. An unexpected compliment. A thoughtful word or gesture.

Unexpected help from two strangers on a rural road.

Such help, such kindness is remembered long after it occurs. It is the substance that stories, often passed down for generations, come from. It is a cause for a smile or a warm feeling or a spark of reflection that things may turn out OK after all. Often the smallest token of kindness is remembered for years.

*“Be kind, for everyone you meet
is fighting a harder battle.”*
- Plato

THE BOOMERANG EFFECT

Blanche DuBois, Tennessee Williams’ character in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, famously says at the end of the play she had always depended on the kindness of strangers.

That became a kind of shorthand for an unhealthy, grim refusal to face reality, an inability to survive alone and a cunning way to take advantage of others. In a way, that memorable phrase from a great Pulitzer-Prize winning drama cheapened the concept of being kind to those we don’t know.

Yet it is surprising how many business leaders who write their memoirs speak not about the killer instinct or the desire to be the smartest one in the room but about kindness. They note its “boomerang” effect – the act of being kind affects the one being kind as much as the person on the receiving end of a kind act.

Kindness, they say, is as necessary a part of good management skills as knowing when to close the deal. Of course, you would be kind to an employee who had a personal tragedy. But how much better for your soul to be kind to someone you do not know, someone who can do nothing for you, someone you may never see again.

THE POWER OF GIVING

A recent study of children found that given something by an adult to give to someone else made the youngsters smile and feel good about themselves.

This has nothing to do with religion. Another study by the University of Chicago found that across all countries, parents in religious households reported that their children expressed more empathy and sensitivity for justice in everyday life than non-religious parents. But, according to the study, children reared in non-religious households were found to be more altruistic and kinder to others than those who were told that they would be punished if they were unkind.

Nearly every week on television, an ordinary person who becomes a hero or heroine who rescued someone, saved a life or gives time regularly to a cause is quoted as saying they personally felt helped more than they thought they helped another.

Scholars of literature have frequently noted that most of William Shakespeare’s plays involve the act of kindness or its withholding. In other ways, they are studies of human kindness.

In 1999, Catherine Ryan Hyde published a book, *“Pay It Forward,”* later made into a movie starring Kevin Spacey and Helen Hunt that showed how one person’s good deed could multiply, causing a chain reaction of other good deeds. A Social Studies teacher, Reuben St. Clair, challenges his students to change the world. The book and film follow one child’s determination to do this and how one act of kindness cascades.

In other words, by committing one act of kindness to one stranger, we may have the power to make the world around us a better place.

A popular TV commercial carried through this theme. One person helps another, who helps another, who helps another. And the day is made better for people, and often by those who don't even know each other. And ultimately, we have a more caring world.

“Three things in human life are important: the first is to be kind; the second is to be kind; and the third is to be kind.”

- Henry James

RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS

Consider steps you can take.

- Don't just ask 'how are you?'—take time to listen.
- Don't just think a compliment—give it.
- Tip well.
- When you see something good, share it.
- Write an unexpected note.
- Send an email that makes someone smile and feel good.
- Make a phone call that lifts someone's loneliness.
- Remember the anniversary of the loss of a friend's spouse.
- Give someone the benefit of the doubt.
- Smile!
- Help someone overloaded with packages. Return your grocery cart to the stall.

It is a good habit to get into—simple, thoughtful, gentle ways of being kind. With time, it will become easier and more instinctive. There is a bus route in Washington D.C. where everyone who gets on or off says “hello” to the driver and “thank you” when getting off. Day after day, year after year. It's is a nice bus ride. Kindness is catching.

How wonderful at the end of one's days to be remembered this way: He was always so kind. She was always thinking of and helping others.

And the truth is, that along the way, being kind makes us happier, more caring people who just might change the world.

“Guard well within yourself that treasure, kindness. Know how to give without hesitation, how to lose without regret, how to acquire without meanness.”

- George Sand

KINDNESS IS UNIVERSAL

Every November 14, the United Kingdom celebrates Kindness Day UK, with the goal of perpetuating the act of being kind to others. Children are routinely asked what they are going to do for their kind acts that day. There is also a World Kindness Day, celebrated on that day, begun by the World Kindness Movement, which is now celebrated in 18 nations. There is also a Small Kindness Movement.

In the United States, after the tragic school massacre in Newtown, Connecticut, a movement started urging every American to commit 26 acts of kindness in memory of those who died. It is now an annual event.

“Kindness covers all of my political beliefs,” President Obama said in one of his speeches. “Empathy, the idea that we have a stake in each other's success, gets me up every single day.”

*“My religion is very simple.
My religion is kindness.”*

- Dalai Lama XIV

YOUR MOTHER WAS RIGHT

One of the best things about reviving the old virtue of kindness is that anyone can practice it. The bedridden patient can be kind to her caregivers. The poorest person can be kind to those he meets. The littlest child can be taught to be kind to grown-ups and children alike. And the richest men and women in the world may have far more than money if they are instinctively and routinely kind.

Every good mother wants her children to be kind. In an age of bullying, it is especially important to teach children kindness. There is even an “It’s Cool to Be Kind” movement, trying to instill in children that being unkind to others will make them unpopular. Who among us has not winced at seeing a child who has not been taught kindness. Who among us has not smiled in appreciation of a child who shows kindness.

“Kindness is a language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see.”

- Mark Twain

“Kindness” is the latest in a series of “Little Red Books” published periodically for our clients and friends. We hope our readers find them relevant and of value. Previous titles include:

- “Why Community Service Matters”
- “Have You Done Enough?”
- “The *Underappreciated* Art of Saying Thank You”
- “The Age of Apology”
- “Managing Uncertainty”
- “C.I.V.I.L.I.T.Y.”
- “The Lost Art of Listening”
- “Two Decades (1991-2011): The Words and the Deeds”
- “The Art of Disagreement”
- “Why Accountability Matters”

If you would like additional copies of this or previously issued booklets, please contact Joan Avagliano at jma@dgi-nyc.com.

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