

Practice Random Kindness and Senseless Acts of Beauty

"Whoever you are - I have always depended on the kindness of strangers."
Blanche DuBois, "A Streetcar Named Desire", Tennessee Williams

The title is a phrase attributed to writer Anne Herbert in 1982. The catchphrase "random acts of kindness" was coined as an offshoot. A random act of kindness is defined as "a selfless act performed by kind people to either help or cheer up a random stranger, for no reason other than to make people happier" (Wikipedia).

In 2000, Catherine Ryan Hyde wrote a book entitled Pay It Forward which was made into a successful movie starring Kevin Spacey and Helen Hunt. The premise of the story involves doing a favor for another person without expectation of being paid back. Recipients in turn "pay it forward," by doing a good deed for three people who in turn each do good deeds for three other people.

"Pay it forward" has become a grassroots social movement since the popularity of the movie, translating into school and community projects worldwide. The concept of "random acts of kindness" has also taken on an identity of its' own to the extent that the second week in February is observed as "Random Act of Kindness" week.

Although all lawyers are ethically required to do occasional pro bono work, random acts of kindness allows the lawyer to act as a human being and not act through his or her professional persona.

Hans Selye, a physician and endocrinologist, wrote 30 books and more than 1,500 articles on stress and related problems in his lifetime, including the seminal work The Stress of Life in 1956. It was Dr. Selye's belief that neuroendocrine factors play major roles in most, if not all, diseases.

Practicing random kindness has a distinct stress-relieving factor to it. Dr. Selye explains it in this manner:

"I went on to write another volume, Stress Without Distress, in which I expanded what I had called a "philosophy of gratitude" into a code of behavior named "altruistic egoism" and based on the conviction that by earning our neighbor's love and becoming necessary to him, we can satisfy our own selfish needs while helping others. In this way we avoid creating interpersonal stress situations and instead can make stress work for us."

It is important for lawyers to be able to step out of their roles as counselors and personal guides through the legal system for their clients to embrace fully their humanity.

"How far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving, and tolerant of the weak and strong. Because someday in your life you will have been all of these."—George Washington Carver

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35 RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS

1. Extend a hand to someone in need. Give your full attention and simply listen.
2. Bring coworkers a special treat.
3. Let your staff leave work an hour early.
4. Laugh out loud often and share your smile generously.
5. As you go about your day, pick up trash.
6. Transport someone who can't drive.
7. Say something nice to everyone you meet today.
8. Volunteer at an agency that needs help.
9. Adopt a homeless pet from the humane society.
10. Give a hug to a friend.
11. Tell your children why you love them.
12. Let someone merge into traffic during rush hour.
13. Give another driver your parking spot.
14. Tell your employees how much you appreciate their work.
15. Let the person behind you in the grocery store go ahead of you in line.
16. Leave an extra big tip for the waitperson.
17. Open the door for another person.
18. Pay for the meal of the person behind you in the drive-through.
19. Pay the toll for the person behind you.
20. Open the door for another person.
21. Call an animal shelter and find out what donations they need.
22. Be a friend to a new student or coworker.
23. Hold the door of the elevator, subway, or bus for someone rushing to catch it.
24. Provide transportation for elderly neighbors to help with their shopping.
25. Offer to take a friend's child to ball practice.
26. Write something nice about your waitperson on the back of the bill.
27. Deliver soup and crackers to a sick friend.
28. Roll an elderly neighbor's garbage cans back up the driveway on trash pick-up day.
29. Stop for a person waiting to cross the street.
30. Have a potluck at work to celebrate a milestone like a birthday or a successful event.
31. Call loved ones just to say "I love you" or to tell them what you appreciate about them.
32. If you play a musical instrument, visit a senior center or hospital and give a brief recital.
33. Help someone struggling with heavy bags.
34. Compliment a stranger about something they are wearing.
35. Call someone who has no family nearby and invite him or her to your home for a visit or meal.