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Random Acts Of Kindness--A Lesson Plan

By Martin Kimeldorf Draft #4 Copyright. Kimeldorf. 1995.

Dear Instructor,

Here is some material I developed for Valentine's week and beyond. You may freely distribute this material as long as you do not alter the content of this document. This document contains background material and 4 exercises or mini-lessons. I generally require the first 2 and make the last 2 optional.

--Martin Kimeldorf

INTRODUCING THE CONCEPT OF RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS AND COMPASSION
I recommend that you get a copy of the book " Random Acts Of Kindness." (Editors of Conari Press. 1993. Emeryville, CA). Set the stage by reading examples of the random acts of kindness illustrated in the book. This can be followed by a discussion of the following question and the background material related to volunteerism in America. Some background material follows, after this you'll find 4 exercises.

Questions for Discussion

- 1) What is your definition of kindness?
- 2) Have you ever felt disappointed or cheated because you did something nice for another person, but their did not return the favor?
- 3) If you expect to get something back are you then performing a kind act or are you really trading favors for favors?
- 4) Re-tune your definition of kindness.
- 5) Has anyone ever done something for you anonymously, without expecting something in return?
- 6) Do one generous act each day and then write down how you feel afterwards.

Background--Samples from Volunteerism in American History

Many people believe that young people volunteering, these "habits of the heart," are deeply rooted in the American community's volunteer spirit or frontier tradition of help-your-neighbor.

The observation by the French historian Alexis de Tocqueville over 150 years ago is often cited as an example. He felt that the strength of our democratic institutions lay in the citizen's habit of getting involved through our uniquely American "voluntary

associations.

A brief summary of volunteering and serving in America will reveal the depth of this experience. This material is excerpted from a report on community service which I wrote: Imagine .

Colonial Period Through 1700s

Town meetings began in New England and set an example for citizen involvement. The Quakers developed a plan for responding to the needs of the poor. The revolution was fought by volunteer army. One example of "youth service" includes children making bandages. During the 1700s, youth were often recipients of volunteer-driven social reforms (free school societies, local public health boards, labor unions, and aid societies).

1800s

In the 19th Century, voluntary associations flourished and became more organized, especially in urban areas. Examples of these include the Temperance Crusade of 1830s, Volunteer Health Boards working on epidemics, and fraternal organizations supporting orphanages and poor houses. Civic groups with a service emphasis evolved American Red Cross, settlement houses, Bónai BÖrith, boys clubs, Ys, Travelers Aid Society, and PTAs. Abolitionists relied on young people to help gather support.

1900s

In the early 20th Century, the social reform movement resulted in the creation of the Children's Bureaus, Urban League, Goodwill Industries, 4-H in rural areas, Scouts, etc. In the early part of the century William James described service as "moral equivalent of war." In 1918, William Kilpatrick advocated experiential learning outside of school. During the 1930s, the Progressive Movement advocated using education as tool of social transformation. At mid-Century (1940s to 60s), private foundations and peace crusades surfaced. During the 1950s Eisenhower advocated through The Citizenship Education Project. In the 1960s, Kennedy's "New Frontier" campaign ushered in programs like VISTA and Peace Corps, and Grass roots involvement with social activities, civil rights, labor reform for migrant workers, consumer rights, urban renewal, and the peace movement.

In the 1970s, several national reports encouraged service as a way of broadening the range of people young adults interact with and as way to reconnect with community. In the 1980s, President Reagan advocated volunteerism and President Bush promoted a Thousand Points of Light. Several states created initiatives for funding, planning, and encouraging service while Congress debated national service and service corps options. School reformers (Foxfire Eliot Wigginton, A Place Called School by John Goodlad, Student Service: The New Carnegie Unit, W.T. Grant Foundation reports) encouraged the use of Service Learning and community service in school programs. In November 1990, President Bush signed the National and Community Service Act of 1990. (19)

--Excerpted from "Imagine" (a report on community service by Martin Kimeldorf)

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Exercise #1--Why People Are Doing Random Acts of Kindness?

An entire movement has been created around people doing kind things as individuals rather than as members of a group. It could mean walking down the street and plugging parking meters as Janyce Mose does in Olympia, Washington. Perhaps one day you pass out pencils to friends in your class. Someone is doing a report and you see a television show they could use, so you call. These are all little, unselfish acts that make our work less hostile and more hospitable. And the good news is, it probably makes you feel good doing them. The following passage is my opinion of how random acts of kindness fits into our world today.

"We live in a world where so much is uncertain. Nature's random floods and earthquakes destroy homes and entire communities in a flash. Drive-by gangster shootings terrorize entire neighborhoods. These random acts of violence douse hope, call forth anger, and destroy all that is good in us.

When you are uncertain if you can combat this pervasive misery, when you are unsure of what to do next, when you don't know who is on your side--stand up and do the unthinkable! Contribute a random act of kindness, and in the doing, stake our a small part of the planet which looks forward to your presence.

When you buy an ice cream cone for the kid who just dropped his chocolate scoop you buy more than ice cream. If you are in a long line of cars and you let someone turn in from a side street, you momentarily turn the asphalt jungle into a safe haven. Letting the stranger behind you (with only one package) go first in the grocery line, means there are fewer strangers in the world at that moment. When you take the bunch of pink carnations on a cold winter's day to the elderly widow at the end of the block, you treat yourself to wisdom beyond your years. And if you take the time to leave a message on a phone machine to cheer up a depressed person, you put a human face on the technology that surrounds (and sometimes threatens) us.

In the process acting compassionately, you change life for yourself as well as others. You give yourself the power to be a hero, to experience a divine and cleansing moment unselfishness. For that brief instant, you crash through the darkness of cruelty, ignorance, and mistrust which daily threatens to engulf us.

These random acts of kindness may not end racial hatred, droughts, or murders. But it does throw a counter weight into the scales where we measure our worth each day. At the end of the day, you'll know one thing for sure: you chose not to live in the world as it is, but rather as you would like it to be."

--Martin Kimeldorf

This is my personal journal entry after reading "Random Acts Of Kindness."

Samples of Random Acts Of Kindness

Look over the following samples based on the book Random Acts Of Kindness. Then make a list of 10 random acts you could perform in your life at home, school, or in the community at large.

¥ÊLeaving a small gift at the door of family suffering sever illness like cancer.

¥ÊPick out some place or object to make an improvement to. Clear out a vacant lot and plant trees and shrubs, straighten a street sign, or re-paint a bus stop

¥ÊReturn your shopping cart to the storage area, turn in items to be re-cycled.

¥ÊWrite a note to an teacher, thanking him or her for a lesson.

¥ÊSelect a person in your neighborhood or class who is feeling down. Send that person a greeting card anonymously.

¥ÊIf you've been a jerk, apologize, even if the other person is wrong. (Like when got into a name calling situation and you lost control)

¥ÊTake bird seed in a small pouch and spread it where you see our feather friends congregating. Visit an animal shelter and bring some treats for the animals and the staff.

¥ÊDo a job for someone and surprise them by not charging. Especially do this if they are having bad luck or hard times.

(Like mowing lawn, cleaning house, shoveling snow)

¥ÊTake another student to the library with you and help them get started on the report that is due in a few weeks.

¥ÊSend a letter to someone (like a teacher or coach) who made a difference in your life.

¥ÊLet the impatient person behind you go ahead of you in line.

¥ÊBake something like cookies and give them away at school or at work.

¥ÊBring pencils to school and give them away to people who forget to bring one.

¥ÊSlip some money in the pocket of a needy friend.

¥ÊBuy the movie ticket for the person behind you.

¥ÊReverse roles. Do something for others who usually do something for you. Clean up the living room, make breakfast on Sunday, do the laundry.

Your List of Possible Random Acts

Create a list of 10 random acts of kindness which might interest you. What could you do for classmates, people you see everyday, neighbors, bus drivers and cafeteria workers, even strangers?

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Exercise #2--Journal Reflections About Performing Compassionate Acts

Perform at least 5 random acts of kindness. In a journal, document the following for each random act of kindness. Decorate this journal page and turn it in. It will be posted on the wall.

- a) What you did
- b) How others felt (or how you think they felt)
- c) How you felt afterwards.

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Exercise #3--Consider The Impact On Your Health

It has been shown that doing "for others" can benefit the volunteer as much as the recipient. Read the following quotes to understand how this could happen. Then, answer the question at the end.

From High School Student #1

I got involved after I was required by the court to do community service. Funny thing is, I was good at it. In fact, my supervisor asked me to stay on and start a program to get other youth involved...They gave me a desk, phone, and a small budget. I started a phone bank where neighbors could call in to get some help with chores they were unable to do themselves. Most of the requests came from elderly people and single parents. I believe that youth can make a difference if we work together. In the end, I realized that I am not a bad person and I am capable of incredible things if I take advantage of the freedom within myself. By giving away my time and myself--I got back a whole lot.

From High School Student #2

Whenever my buddy (a child at the family shelter) knows that I am coming to see her she waits at a certain corner. As soon as she sees me she runs to me and gives me a huge hug. I can relate to the relationship I have with my buddy because I had no brothers or sisters and when I was young and my father traveled 70% of the year. I would have really valued a relationship similar to the one my buddy and I have. My buddy is not the only one benefiting from this program--I feel needed and appreciated.

From A College Student

The organization I work in, Deaf Access Anonymous, provides information and access to 12 step recovery programs for hearing impaired individuals. Our goal is to raise money to hire the services of interpreters to allow these men and women the opportunity to participate in group meetings and related activities. The benefits I personally received from volunteering have been ten-fold. I could never have imagined how much I would get back from giving of my time and ideas. I am in recovery myself, and helping others helps me to stay clean and sober. When I reach out a helping hand to someone else, I receive help in return. When I am at a DAA meeting, giving information on the TDD, making phone calls to raise money, or just telling someone about our organization, I take the focus off myself. Other gifts from my volunteer work are the opportunity to practice and learn sign language, learn more about Deaf Culture, and meet deaf individuals. I am currently taking the prerequisite classes for the Interpreter Training Program at SCC. Had I known all the unbelievably good things that would come my way when I quit drinking and drugging--I might have stopped long ago! Life is so much richer when you give some of what you have away.

From my book, Write To The Core (about journal writing)

Many people who volunteer are described as altruistic. In that

larger sense, they work from their hearts first. In the magazine American Health, Allan Luks and Eileen Growald speak convincingly about the health benefits of altruism and volunteering. In the article "Beyond Self" they cite evidence in various studies which reveal that men who volunteered had life expectancies that were two-and-one-half longer times those who did not volunteer. Even, people who simply viewed movies showing altruistic acts displayed an improved immune response. All of this research lead the authors to conclude that our evolution or biology has lead us down a path where our individual health is tied to our collective health. In other words, we are dependent on interacting with others, and volunteering is one of the highest quality interactions one can engage in. When you help others you engage in another form of health--building community wellness.

Conversely, people who are cut off from others experience increased rates of illness. Other studies revealed that women living in isolation had more health problems. In other words, people need people for their health.

In 1 or 2 paragraphs, tell why you agree or disagree about the following statement:

Performing random acts of kindness or volunteerism may make me feel better or help me to live longer and happier.

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Exercise #4--Thinking Big

Pick a quote which best describes your feeling about doing a random act of kindness. Then tell why you picked it. Explain what it means to you.

We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.

--Winston Churchill

I am certain that after the dust of centuries has passed over our cities, we, too, will be remembered not for victories or defeats in battle or in politics but for our contributions to the human spirit.

--John Kennedy

Our culture is at a critical cusp--a time that requires that we define what it means to be a citizen in a democracy. Within our nation we need to foster a greater sense of collective responsibility.

--Robert Bellah (Author)

For whatever befalls the Earth, befalls the sons and daughters of the Earth. Man did not weave the web of life; he is merely a strand of it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.

--Chief Seattle

Everyone can be great, because everyone can serve
--Martin Luther King

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