

■ A World of Civility

15 Ways to Wage Kindness Starting Now

by Tom Terez

What in the world is happening? Just several years old, the 21st Century is already making history as a time of raging division, self-interest, suspicion, incivility, and violence. Surely we can do better. We *must* do better. But how?

Directly below are 15 answers. These action-oriented aspirations are all about bringing compassion, empathy, and civility back to life – in our workplaces, communities, and beyond.

Gandhi had it right: We must be the change we wish to see in the world. It's up to you.

1. Treat each person as if he or she is God. That reckless driver who cuts you off on the highway? God. That telemarketer who calls three times in a row? God. That store clerk who keeps you waiting? God.

2. Recognize the divine within yourself. You have the power to love, to do good, to create, to effect remarkable positive change. It's the ultimate gift – and responsibility.

3. Leverage the power of one. There's a reason it's called the *universe* and not the *multiverse*. What happens to one of us affects all of us, to such a degree that small acts of kindness really can change the world.

4. When the other “side” seems irredeemable, uncover what you have in common. That's

right, you *do* have common ground, beneath all the misconceptions and stereotypes: common principles, experiences, and priorities. Work from there and you'll make progress together.

5. Promote “power with” instead of “power over.” One is about people wanting to, the other is about people having to. One is about influence, the other is about control. One is about effectiveness, the other is about efficiency. One succeeds over the long term, the other doesn't.

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6. Assume the best about people. Most of them wake up wanting to have a good day. They go to work wanting to do a good job. They strive to be good family members, neighbors, and citizens. If you insist on “catching” people, then catch them doing something positive.

7. When someone attacks you, stay away from their low road. Take a deep breath, engage in a strategic pause, and decide how best to respond. (For more guidance, see #1 above.)

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8. Stand tall against injustice. There's a lot of it out there: prejudice, intolerance, hate. When you hear it or see it, rise up and be a loud voice for what's right.

9. Put integrity ahead of loyalty. Who cares if it's your best friend, or your boss, or some big-titled leader? If they want to drive over the moral cliff, you don't have to go with them.

10. Talk less and listen more. The word *discuss* literally means "to shake or break apart." Strive instead for *dialogue*, which gathers other perspectives and forms a new understanding that is better than any one viewpoint.

11. Say what you mean, and mean what you say. It takes tremendous self-understanding and a load of courage, but there's no substitute for authentic communication.

12. Honor and learn from the youngest and oldest. Children are models of creativity, possibility, and unconditional love. Our elders are rich with experience and wisdom. Follow their lead.

13. Build your own bridge to another culture. There are so many ways: visit a foreign country, learn a second language, host an exchange student, organize an exchange program. With the Internet at our fingertips and air travel so accessible, we can all be citizen ambassadors.

14. Don't wait – act now! Every day brings new opportunities to turn civility into action. Hold open a door. Greet a stranger. Check on an ailing neighbor. Help a work colleague. Give extra time to a friend. Each act of kindness brightens the present and creates a better future.

15. When in doubt, return to #1.

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