



Common courtesy as a daily practice

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Do you ever feel like you don't have the time or energy to be available to others as readily you would like to be? It happens to me more often than I care to think about. I find that time flies by so fast sometimes that it doesn't seem like there's time enough to accomplish what I have set out to do each day. Often I am left with little time for myself or anyone else. Is it poor time management, good old-fashioned stress or just life moving us at another speed?



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The small gestures that make us feel good about ourselves and can be amazingly helpful to others are part of what we refer to as common courtesy. It sometimes seems as though these kindnesses have been relegated to the good ol' days when life moved at a slower pace, without all the electronic aids of the 21st century, and when downtime meant quality time with good friends and family. We seemed to have more energy. This need not be the case, though, if we rethink what we do each day and consider a little forethought.

When someone shows me courtesy or politeness, I always feel happy, yet oddly surprised. I notice how someone who helps a senior citizen struggling with grocery bags makes a good impression by this helpful act. Many people might just walk right by. Something as simple as making the effort to look someone in the eye, to smile at the solitary person sitting on the park bench or greet others cordially upon entering a room stands out. These people display kindness and grace, and I am always thankful for my contact with them. Such common courtesies make big differences in peoples' lives.

Much has been written about random acts of kindness. These usually short articles always bring on a warm fuzzy feeling in the reader because we can relate to these simple gestures.

I remember the first time I went through a toll booth at the Harbour Bridge in Saint John and gave two fares to the attendant - one for me and the other for the car behind me. That particular time I knew the driver of the car behind me. It was a fun and unexpected perk to brighten up her day. I would later be thanked and perhaps the gesture would even be reciprocated. But I cannot tell you how many times I have done that since then without knowing the driver behind me. I would not be thanked save for perhaps the flashing of headlights and the gesture would probably not be reciprocated. But I got the same thrill. I liked doing this kind deed.

How often would this dynamic benefit our lives and the lives of those around us if we practised these gestures daily?

How many arguments could we dodge? How much road rage could we avert from the highways? How much positive energy could we generate? I think if each one of us thought about this for a moment and decided to try it even just one gesture, we would feel quite different about our everyday dealings with the world around us. Helping in these simply, generous ways would benefit us as well as others.

Key components of these considerations are awareness and common sense.

Look beyond your world and notice when someone might benefit from a helping hand, a genuine smile or nod of acknowledgment.

As a courteous person, you often consciously and purposefully notice other people when you walk into a room, just as you do when your waiter approaches your table to take your order.

Awareness naturally leads to action. It is often clear what needs to be done. Step up to the plate and open the door for the woman carrying her baby, move your car a tad to accommodate a parking vehicle, acknowledge your sister's shy boyfriend with a smile and some conversation, apologize if you bump into someone - better yet, be aware that someone is coming toward you and avoid a collision.

An important component is to give of yourself freely. Do not expect anything in return. Your thank you comes in the doing and knowing that you have been a kind person. People may not even take notice, much less return the kindness, but you can take heart in the fact that you are creating the kind of world you want to live in with your actions.

As you go through your hectic day, remember to be aware of others, lend a hand when one is needed and give this help without an ulterior motive. Through these small actions, you make this world a better place in which to live.

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