

Acts of kindness shouldn't be random?

Mark Pavilons



Carry out a random act of kindness, with no expectation of reward, safe in the knowledge that one day someone might do the same for you.

Princess Diana

The term "random acts of kindness" has been rather vogue in the past few years. I find it encouraging that at least we're making kindness topical.

But such acts shouldn't be random, but part of our very nature.

According to a national survey conducted by Environics Research for Coca-Cola Canada, Canadians have shown kindness to others through random actions an average of four times in the last four weeks. That's once a week!

These include opening a door, offering to carry heavy items or giving up a seat on public transit.

I visit a well known coffee shop on a daily basis and I find many customers hold the door open for others. When younger guys hold it open for me, I'm not sure whether to just embrace it, or feel like a senior. Do I look that old?

At my daughter's soccer game last week, it rained steadily throughout. I grabbed an umbrella out of the car and shared it with a mom next to me. It didn't take any thought at all - it was the only thing to do.

While Canadians seem to be getting the point, the abovementioned survey indicated the majority (70%) feel many of these acts don't receive ample recognition.

If you've seen the unique Coca-Cola commercial lately, you'll be inspired. It contains several real video clips of acts of kindness and bravery. When you tend to see the worst in our species portrayed on the small screen, it's refreshing to see such a positive message. "When it comes to kindness, seeing really is believing," says Carolyn Harty, senior brand manager, Coca-Cola. "More than half of Canadians are motivated to pay-it-forward themselves when they see others making a kind gesture. It is these small acts of kindness that make a larger difference and inspire and create happiness."

Coca-Cola Canada completed a cross-country search to find stories about Canadians who are on a personal mission to create more happiness in the world. Here are just a few of the special stories identified:

Sixteen-year-old Sheliza Kassam from Calgary decided on her 13th birthday that instead of gifts, she and her family would help feed families in need. Her one small gesture ballooned into a non-profit organization that Sheliza now runs to throw birthday parties for children living in shelters who otherwise would not be able to celebrate their special day.

Winnipeg teen Nathan Unrau, with the support of his parents Rohan and Elsie Unrau, launched Lunches with Love - a non-profit organization that makes and donates 450 paper bag lunches to Winnipeg's homeless shelters every other Saturday.

More acts of kindness have been documented by filmmakers from across the country and can be seen on www.youtube.com/openhappiness. The Open Happiness Project is a special program that provided 22 aspiring Canadian filmmakers

with \$2,000 or \$3,000 grants to help inspire more kindness and inevitably happiness through their art. Coca-Cola is honoured to help showcase the diversity of voices through these films and shine a light on these young adult filmmakers' work as they grow in their careers.

The 'kindness survey' revealed that holding a door open for other people is the most common act reported amongst Canadians (92%). Forty-one per cent of Canadian teens (15-17) have donated money to a stranger in need or offered up their seat on public transit.

Approximately half of Canadians have helped someone lost find correct directions.

'Ask yourself: Have you been kind today? Make kindness your daily modus operandi and change your world.'

Annie Lennox

I believe that down deep, humans are basically good. We are compassionate, empathetic and we all have our soft spots.

The Dalai Lama has always promoted kindness and compassion and has even said that his 'religion' is 'kindness.'

Can it possibly be that simple?

'Every day, think as you wake up, today I am fortunate to be alive, I have a precious human life, I am not going to waste it. I am going to use all my energies to develop myself, to expand my heart out to others; to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all beings. I am going to have kind thoughts towards others, I am not going to get angry or think badly about others. I am going to benefit others as much as I can,' wrote Dalai Lama XIV.

If you think about it, we have ample opportunities in the course of the day to be kind to others. At home, at work, during our lunch hours and even during our commutes, kindness should be front and centre, and not an after thought.

Most of us shop several times a week, whether it's for groceries, necessities or incidentals. And we don't even have to use words to express our gratitude or kindness ??a smile is universal and goes a very long way to making someone's day.

Perhaps we are all doing these things, and kindness abounds all around us.

There are many things in our daily routines that we don't enjoy. But a little bit of kindness is something that will put a smile on our faces.