

Healthy & Resilient You

The **GOODWILL BOOMERANG**

How kindness is a boon for givers and receivers



It's 7:45 am, and you've just stopped in at your favorite coffee spot before the commute to work. The smiling barista greets you by name and sculpts an extra petal into the foam of your latte. The interaction and first sip of caffeine boost your mood and energy level, and it sustains your good spirits the rest of the day.

Now consider the flip side: You walk into the office, and one of your coworkers makes a careless remark about a presentation you gave the other day, or even your appearance. Your morale is sapped, and you spend the remaining working hours in the dumps.

We know from first-hand experience that others' actions and words, no matter how seemingly slight, can affect us in deep and long-lasting ways—especially if we're already feeling stressed or anxious.

A comment or flash of body language can boost our spirits, or knock them down even further; so, it's understandable why we should choose to act out of kindness when we can, for the sake of others. But what if we told you that acts of kindness benefit the giver as much as the receiver?

The Kindness Boomerang

Science illuminates the unexpected, two-way potency of acts of kindness. In several studies that instructed participants to choose between performing a good deed for others or for themselves during the day, researchers found that those who chose the altruistic path enjoyed more lasting feelings of happiness and wellbeing than their counterparts.

Another study observed as participants either performed acts of kindness for others or recounted the number of kindhearted acts they received themselves. Both groups showed a bump in happiness. Surprisingly, those who reflected on receiving kindness also experienced an increase in life and job satisfaction, and a measurable decrease in depression.

So, what's going on? When we're kind to others, our bodies release serotonin and other feel-good endorphins, which boosts our mood and helps ease anxiety. Furthermore, acting in kindness sets off a chemical cascade that relaxes us and causes our blood vessels to dilate, reducing blood pressure and promoting heart health.



But most of all, being kind to others helps get us out of our own heads:

- **Step away from stressors**
- **Consider new perspectives**
- **Build stronger connections**

— all of which are essential for building resilience and wellbeing. Seems like there's no downside to doing good by others.

Seizing Those Moments of Kindness

Even though we know kindness is good for us, it isn't always easy. When we're in a good mood, spreading goodwill can be second nature. But when times are hard or we become hyper-focused on our own challenges, it can be tough to summon up a compliment or even notice that others are in need of some bucking up, too.

Here are some tips to help cultivate a more generous mindset — for our own good, and the good of others.



Make it personal: Take a moment to reflect on how someone's past kindness affected you (or, conversely, how their cruelty may have hurt you). This can help turn abstract generosity into something concrete and present.



Remember your impact: When you recall stories in the step above, focus on what it is you want to put out into the world and remember the impact even the smallest actions or words can have on others.



Put yourself in their shoes: Often, our automatic reaction is to reject something we don't understand. Instead of simply reacting, try to be an **active listener**, then take time to consider the other person's perspective during interactions with an open mind. If something is important to them, and it doesn't impact you in a significant way, why not make a conscious effort to be supportive rather than dismissive whenever you can?



Start small: For many of us, building reflex-like kindness won't happen overnight. That said, by tackling one tiny habit at a time — say, committing to performing three or four acts of kindness a day — you can start to build sustainable, healthy practices. Try ideas from **this list** to help you get started.



Finally, remember that even a few seconds and off-the-cuff words can impact others for life. You might walk away from an interaction without a scratch, but the choices you make can make or break someone's day.

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