

Lee's Summit CARES
Community of Character
Partners Linking Arms for Character Education

Kindness—Automatic or Intentional?

Generally, we think acts of kindness are second nature to us—we do them without thinking about them. And we do. The happier, the more joyous we are in our lives, the more kindness becomes almost inevitable. When the motivation for all our behaviors is based on acceptance and appreciation of others, the behaviors tend to be positive, more life-giving. When we operate out of fear or worry, we tend to be negative, scarce with what we share and what we do. At Metropolitan Community College-Longview, I see students, faculty, staff and administrators who are kind in many ways—sometimes in ways that we think are small. But the small acts of kindness are great gifts we give others and others give us. Holding the elevator, helping me pick up a whole set of papers that dropped from my bag and scattered all over the grounds, helping with chairs, watering plants, and bringing someone's copy job from the center are all quiet ways people show kindness every day. There are larger ways, as well, that groups of people organize—helping bring healing when people are hurting, clothing when people need assistance; bringing social justice to people caught in situations beyond their control. Members of the clubs at MCC-Longview are involved in acts of kindness, charity and justice almost every day. Life and Leadership office leads many of the organized acts of kindness.

College personnel have engaged for a number of years in finding ways to make things better—to go for excellence in an intentional way. Intentionality is part of being responsible for self because it involves choosing for ourselves to be life-giving instead of life-taking. To decide to be intentionally kind can cause people to ask—who has been kind (even in the quiet ways)?

And how have I expressed kindness to others? Maybe we ask ourselves in what ways have we been unkind? Even if the unkindness is unintentional, we can examine what difficulties we may have caused someone else to determine how we can avoid causing trouble and difficulties.

Being intentional about how we respond when we become angry is important for the development of an attitude of kindness. Robert G. Ingersoll, a lawyer and orator who died in 1899, said “Anger is a wind that blows out the lamp of the mind.” When the light of the mind becomes darkened, it is good for us to take the time and be very intentional with the response to the anger. Anger is destructive to kindness; is it possible to be intentional to respond to a situation that has caused anger in a kind manner? Intentionality helps us commit to a way of doing things not left to chance. If we leave to chance the expression of kindness even in the face of adversity, we may not ever be as life-giving as we have the capability of becoming. When we practice fear and anger, we can be life-taking. When we practice kindness and compassion, we can be life giving.

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