

An Encounter with Kindness!

Once again, we have crossed into a new year – a great time to challenge our thinking. As I consider kindness and its relationship to inclusion, I am reminded of a dining experience. I was favored to share a conversation with a “healthy food,” small restaurant Chef/Owner. I will never forget how he looked me in my eyes and with all sincerity said, “*Kindness alone saved me.*” I scrambled for a pen to capture this small but profound account of his life. In just that moment, he had gained my undivided attention. I wanted to hear more, and more inspired me to include our encounter in my work as a DEI practitioner.

He explained how kindness was the one thing in life that had permeated him to the very depths of his being. It was the kindness of another person that led him to change and lead a simpler life. Kindness inspired him to both eat and live healthier. Kindness led him to a more purposeful existence, and kindness dictated the manner in which he would live out the remainder of his earthly existence, including his interactions with others. There was so much packed into this small but life-altering testimony. This small-town Chicago suburban “restaurateur” had not only served me great food, but also great lessons for life. So, here it is...

Classified as a noun, the dictionary defines kindness as the quality of being friendly, generous, and considerate. In reality, this definition did not come close to capturing the depth of what kindness had accomplished in this man’s life and truth to tell in mine. I turned to the Greek Dictionary where indeed I found my answer. Translated from Greek, kindness equates to *moral excellence*, suggesting kindness can permeate your existence. *Moral excellence* or living excellently can happen when one sets the bar higher than their comfort zone, stretching toward a spirit of inclusion when encountering others, particularly in view of perceived differences.

Kindness is not a matter of how you are served at a restaurant. It is a seed that when properly nurtured can bear life-giving, life-inspiring, and life-transforming fruit. When kindness exists as a seedling that grows into the fruit of your life, it becomes part of who you are, not just something you do. Kindness is not a box that you can – without more – check completed. It is more than please and thank you, or politeness when circumstances dictate. It is more than benevolence, or philanthropic pursuits. It is more than patting yourself on the back. It is an attitude, belief, and core value.

As an employee of the City of Naperville, “*People*” is one of our core values and a key element to inclusion. A “small” act of kindness toward another can make a difference in their sense of belonging and inclusion. Those who feel included show up authentically and are more engaged whether at work or in the world. This I argue qualifies kindness as a forerunner to inclusion.

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