

Sue Thompson's BeExceptional

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PRACTICE MAKES REASONABLY CLOSE TO PERFECT

A recent "20/20" episode on television featured a security expert who gave instructions on how to react in the event of a shooter in one's place of work. Along with details such as tightly wrapping a belt around the door closer of an office in which one is hiding, or running when the opportunity presents itself, the expert said it was necessary to practice these things in the same way we do fire drills, because in times of crisis we rely on "muscle memory"—actions we've physically rehearsed and replayed.

I think it's the same with just about any unexpected situation. It's not easy, for instance, to remember to forgive and be empathetic and practice kindness in a workplace where people seem utterly absorbed with themselves, their stuff, their places, their domains. It means we must go out of our way to cultivate a way of responding that is counteractive to everything going on around us and counterintuitive to our personal survival skills.

I'm not saying it's *never* easy; for some, the kindness and empathy genes are so firmly hardwired there's simply no other way to act. Some environments are undoubtedly less unpleasant than others. To decide to practice virtuous behavior, however, is a challenge no matter how you look at it.

Take the angry confrontation, for instance: someone berates you openly, maybe publicly. They say something particularly nasty in the hearing of others. PRACTICE your response: "Jim, this is hurtful and unnecessary. Let's talk when you've calmed down." REHEARSE walking away immediately.

A coworker makes a snide comment that could be meant as a joke, but you're not sure. PRACTICE saying, with a smile on your face, "I hope that's meant to be funny and not nasty. Is it?" REHEARSE keeping your voice calm if the response is,

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“Oh no, it’s nasty. Your work is rotten” (or whatever), and saying, “Then let’s discuss this like adults and dispense with the sarcasm. Shall we go to my office?” PRACTICE keeping your cool, particularly if the other person is emotional.

If you’re routinely asked to do some sort of scut work, ask yourself: is this my job? Is this in my job description? If it’s not, you may want to bring this up with your supervisor. Or you can PRACTICE being humble and do things you know others don’t want to do just because it’s your choice to give of yourself in this way. REHEARSE responding in a positive manner to requests. There can be a fine line here between being taken advantage of and choosing to do things that are handed down the line to the last person who will take them on. Of course, sometimes the line is not fine at all, but since we’re talking about kindness, this is a decision you must want to make.

What about the coworker who is negative, rude, unprofessional, and/or generally odious? PRACTICE ways to win the person over. Consider this truth: you may be the only person in his or her life who has any interest in being empathetic or kind or generous. It’s true. Some people have no one who cares for them in the least. Their behavior might certainly be the reason, but as with anything else, if you make the choice to be what no one else chooses to be with them, you may be providing a priceless gift. REHEARSE new ways to relate to people like this. Put on your creative thinking cap and make the person your project.

Superiors act like fools? Forgive. Let them go. Employees act like spoiled children? Forgive. Help them grow up. People who require your services treat you like an underling who has no feelings? Forgive. The alternative—living with poison in your veins—is a pain in the butt. Extending yourself is an honest-to-goodness, this-is-hard-but-I’m-doing-it-anyway, nothing’s-going-to-stop-me-now decision. Sometimes you drop the ball. Sometimes they get the best of you. We fall down, but we get up.

Practice and rehearse until being kind, forgiving, and empathetic is part of who you are. Character can be strengthened. Make yours rock-solid. *

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"People are often unreasonable and self-centered. Forgive them anyway.

If you are kind, people may accuse you of ulterior motives. Be kind anyway.

If you are honest, people may cheat you. Be honest anyway.

If you find happiness, people may be jealous. Be happy anyway.

The good you do today may be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway.

Give the world the best you have and it may never be enough. Give your best anyway.

For you see, in the end, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway."

–Mother Teresa

"Kindness is a language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see."

–Mark Twain

"I believe empathy is the most essential quality of civilization."

–Roger Ebert

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YOUR

Click here listen to interesting people talk about their character strengths!

CHARACTER Is SHOWING

Three things to do today:

1. Do something nice for someone anonymously.
2. Pretend. Put on your Academy Award performance and act as though the big thing at work that bothers you . . . doesn't.
3. Go to www.viacharacter.org and take the free VIA character strengths survey. Find out what your most motivating character strengths are and find ways to act within them.

About Sue

Sue Thompson is a personality expert, etiquette trainer, and an instructor in life lessons. Her work on recognizing and developing talent, identifying personalities and working effectively with the people who possess them, responding appropriately to difficult experiences, treating others with respect, and behaving like a professional have caused companies and business organizations throughout the country to value her consulting skills. She trains those entering the workforce how to present themselves with style and authority; new employees in the importance of respecting one's work and the workplace; managers in the value of understanding employees' talent and temperament; and everyone in the timeless rules of behavior that will always bespeak excellence.

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