

Paying It Forward

- In New York City, hair stylist Mark Bustos spends his only day off each week on the streets of the city cutting hair for the homeless. Of this kindness, he simply says he wants to bring positive energy and hope into this world.
- In Chicago, window washers dress as superheroes when cleaning windows at children's hospitals so that they can surprise and delight the kids.
- Recently, in a St. Petersburg Florida coffee shop, a spontaneous 10-hour chain of kindness erupted, with more than 400 people paying for the drinks of strangers behind them in line.

Each of these random acts of kindness are the embodiment of "paying it forward," a principle in which the beneficiary of a good deed repays the favor to others instead of to the original benefactor, creating a chain of generosity. You've probably been the recipient of an act of kindness that changed your day, yet been unable to adequately show appreciation for the act. That's when "paying it forward" comes in to play: you repay the kindness by doing something good for someone else.

While kindness is often spontaneous, researchers are finding evidence that it can be taught and that it is contagious. UK psychologist Steve Taylor speaks of the three-way benefits of kindness, with a positive effect on the recipient, a positive effect on the doer of the good deed, and the positive effects on passers-by who witness the act.



In YES! Magazine, author Jen Angel talks about the benefits of incorporating altruism and acts of giving into your daily life: "Researcher Stephen Post says helping a neighbor, volunteering, or donating goods and services results in a "helper's high," and you get more health benefits than you would from exercise or quitting smoking. Listening to a friend, passing on your skills, celebrating others' successes, and forgiveness also contribute to happiness, he says."

Random acts of kindness are free and open to anyone to perform. There are hundreds of ways that we can improve our daily lives by paying it forward: spending time with an elderly neighbor, bringing baked goods into the office to share with colleagues, singling out a worker by writing a note to their boss to comment on their good performance ... it doesn't have to be a large, dramatic or costly gesture – it just has to come from your heart.

Work on cultivating an "attitude of gratitude" and sharing it with others through small acts of kindness throughout the day. Think of your family and work colleagues as a practice laboratory – you may start a trend!