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IT MAKES YOU THINK

BY BUD BILANICH

The other day, I was asked an interesting question. “If today were your last day and you had the opportunity to leave a note for humanity, sharing your wisdom—what would you write?”

If today were my last day and I had this opportunity, I would share three bits of advice that have guided me and served me well in my life.

- Always do your best.
- Treat everyone with the dignity and respect they deserve as human beings.
- Help others with no strings attached.

Find Out If Your Best Is Enough

When you do your best, you’ll be proud of yourself. Being proud of yourself increases your self-confidence, and self-confidence is key to personal and professional success. Beware, however, because doing your best means that you are laying it on the line. When you do your best, you have no one but yourself to blame if things don’t work out.

When I applied to graduate school at Harvard, I promised myself that I would write the very best application I could. And I did. When I put the application in the mailbox, I knew that it was the best that I could do. I was proud of myself and a little nervous. The pride that came with the certainty of knowing that I did my best was tempered by the nagging fear that my best might not be good enough. Fortunately, I was accepted. But when I sent off my application, I was prepared to live with the idea that my best might not be good enough for Harvard.

Smile at the Barista

Next, respect every person you meet—just because he or she is a fellow human being. We are all united by our shared humanity; something more important than race, gender, religion, sexual preference, or any of the other artificial differences that drive us apart, rather than bringing us together. Choose to treat all of the people you meet with dignity and respect. Do it for the simple

reason that they are fellow human beings and therefore are entitled to it.

There are opportunities to do this every day. Smile at the Starbucks barista. Say please and thank you. Realize that the telemarketer who calls at dinnertime is somebody trying to make ends meet. Treat him or her with respect. Don’t just hang up. Listen for a few seconds and then politely ask to be removed from the list. Be pleasant with the customer service representative when you are reporting a problem. If you do this, two things will happen. You’ll be much more likely to get what you want. More important, you’ll brighten someone else’s day. To me, this is reward enough.

Be Helpful

Give to others with no expectation of getting anything in return. You’ll be creating a win-win situation. You’ll feel better about yourself, and other people will benefit from the help you give them. Too many people live in a quid pro quo world—you do for me, and I’ll do for you. While it’s always appropriate to repay a favor, realize that some people are not in a position to do so. Others don’t realize you’ve gone out of your way to help them. Some just don’t care; they take what they can get and never think about helping someone else. Still others might repay your favor by helping someone else. It doesn’t matter if you never get repaid. What matters is you’re willing to help others.

In conclusion, if today were my last day, and I had the opportunity to leave a note for humanity, I would share three bits of advice that have served me well. Always do your best. Treat everyone with the dignity and respect they deserve as human beings. Help others with no strings attached. To me, this is just common sense. And, after all, I am The Common Sense Guy. ○

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