

Paying it Forward

5/5/2020

Sarah here. All across the country, cities are starting to open back up. And, whether you're excited or nervous, indifferent or exasperated, it means that life is changing *yet again*. Still not normal- not by a long shot. In fact, I've talked to a number of people who question whether things will ever go back to "normal" again. I don't know if things will return to the way they were *before* COVID-19. But I do know that right now, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, people are doing what they "normally do" in a crisis. That is, when faced with a crisis, we see the very best and very worst of humanity.

It's easy to get bogged down in the depressing, infuriating and discouraging news we hear about each day and when we do, it's easy to think that's all there is. And that kind of news paints an ugly view of people and of the world. As a psychologist, I understand that in times of crisis, people may act out of panic rather than logic. They may do things they know don't make sense because they feel compelled to do so or because other people are doing them (like buying the maximum amount of toilet paper allowed, even though they have a month's worth at home already). They may be focused on keeping their family safe but aren't thinking about how their actions may affect others. Along those lines, I wrote about how parents' well-intentioned germ safety talks with their kids could backfire and have negative unintended consequences (*Let's Talk About Germs!* on 4/14/2020).

Now, if you were to ask anyone who knows me, they'd tell you that while I'm not ridiculously optimistic, I do think that most people have a lot of inherent good in them. But, reading and watching the news, witnessing and experiencing exchanges and hearing personal anecdotes over the past 6 weeks have really put that view to the test. Maybe it shouldn't be surprising, but I've had to go out of my way to find positive news. I went looking for it because I knew it was there. Because it's true- in a crisis, people often panic, worry about themselves, and act selfishly and irrationally. But (and here's a *big* but), it's also true that in a crisis, people can be absolutely, positively selfless, kind, loving and downright awe-inspiring. And, it's that side of

humanity that I'm focusing on because it's important to remember that there are so many times each day that people are kind, selfless and loving to each other. I want you to get in on all those good feelings- by paying it forward, you help others *and* you help yourself.

Lately I've been working on continuing education for my license. I just did a webinar on Positive Psychology. One of the founders of Positive Psychology, Martin Seligman, Ph.D., developed a 5-element model of well-being. He asserted that positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment (PERMA) can support well-being, happiness and fulfillment.

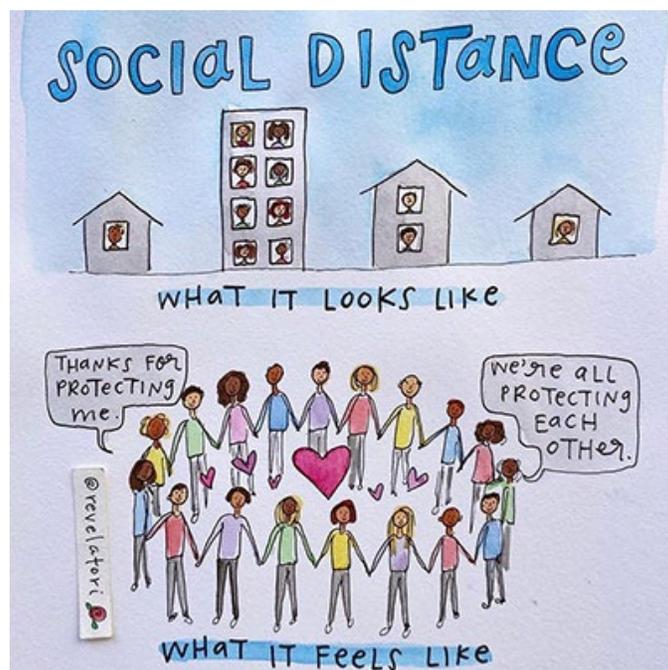


If you think about times you've felt really happy or good or content, I'm guessing that those times in your life hit on *multiple* elements in the PERMA model. I appreciate that the focus *isn't* just on feeling good *or* on having a purpose. Well-being is about the balance and interplay of these the elements, which makes a lot of intuitive sense. I also appreciate that positive emotion doesn't just mean happiness; it also includes emotions like love, gratitude, awe and optimism. We feel good when we do good, when we look for good, when we see good in others, and when we do things that we care about and that matter. And, there are all of these side benefits. For example, people who experience awe—a positive emotion experienced in the presence of something vast that broadens our understanding of the world—feel more connected to others, more generous and experience a decreased sense of time pressure. That's right- being in complete amazement and having your mind blown can help you *feel* less pressed, so you are more likely to help others...even if the actual demands on your time don't change, your perception of how you spend your time changes.

To that end, I want *you* to pay it forward by...well, paying it forward *and* by helping your family pay it forward. Look for the good around you. Notice the kind, nice, caring, loving things that

are happening *in your house on a daily basis*. Do your kids fight like cats and dogs sometimes? Sure! But, do they also have those “awwww...so sweet!” tender moments every now and again? You bet. Are the people on social media making you crazy? You betcha! Have you read *any* posts that were actually touching or kind, where people were just genuinely doing or saying something nice and encouraging just because? I’m guessing you have.

I *know* you’re tired and you and your family are dealing with long days. But awe comes in all kinds of shapes and sizes- it isn’t just about seeing the Grand Canyon or the Northern Lights. Look for things to be in awe of in your daily life- look for ways that other people and things that are going on inspire you and leave you in amazement. That’s a great way to feel good and to get recharged. And, what should you do with all of that increased sense of time? Sit on the couch and watch reality TV? Tempting...but, maybe you could do something for someone else. ☺ Pay it forward with your own actions using the PERMA model. To do good and feel good, help others by do things you enjoy that matter to you. Not sure how to play to your strengths? Lisa has curated an awesome list of volunteer opportunities for adults, youth and families. Remember that there’s good all around, so why not be part of it?



Ready to Pay it Forward? Check out These Volunteer Opportunities

Links to Opportunities for Kids and Teens

DoSomething – youth-led organization with volunteer opportunities for social change
<https://www.dosomething.org/us>

Storiitime – connect with a senior to read to your child or have your child read to a senior
<https://www.storiitime.com>

Teenangels and Tweenangels – learn about/create content for internet safety/cyberbullying
<http://www.teenangels.org/index.html> AND <http://tweenangels.org>

Teens Give – high schoolers tutoring younger students can earn community service hours
<https://teensgive.org/virtual/>

Youth Volunteer Corps – volunteer group, check to see if there is a chapter in your area
<https://yvc.org/volunteer/>

Links to Opportunities for Adults

Bookshare – scan, proofread, and format books for people with reading barriers
<https://www.bookshare.org/cms/get-involved/volunteer>

Career Village – professionals answer career-related questions posed by students
<https://www.careervillage.org/about/mission/#become-a-mentor>

Crisis Text Line – volunteers are trained to provide text-based crisis support
<https://www.crisistextline.org/become-a-volunteer/>

Infinite Family – connect as a mentor with a student in South Africa
<https://www.infinitefamily.org>

Learning Ally – narrate and/or provide feedback about audiobooks
<https://go.learningally.org/Get-Involved/Volunteer-Opportunities>

Red Cross – variety of volunteer opportunities, including virtual work
<https://www.redcross.org/volunteer/volunteer-opportunities.html>

Translators Without Borders – volunteers translate documents created and used by humanitarian agencies as well as other non-profit organizations around the world
<https://translatorswithoutborders.org/volunteer/>

UN Volunteers – online opportunities to support various global nonprofits
<https://www.onlinevolunteering.org/en>

Links to Opportunities for Families

Be My Eyes – app connects sighted and blind or low-vision people to help with everyday tasks
<https://www.bemyeyes.com>

Binky Patrol – volunteers usually make blankets for those in need; current focus on making masks for healthcare workers and others who must interact with the public
<https://www.binkypatrol.org>

Catchafire – searchable database of virtual volunteer opportunities
https://www.catchafire.org/volunteer?name_filter=&page=3&priority=1&init=1

Feeding America – food bank volunteer opportunities
<https://www.feedingamerica.org/find-your-local-foodbank>

Generation On – youth and family volunteer opportunities, projects, trainings and resources
<https://www.generationon.org>

Girls, Inc. – focused on empowering girls; volunteer opportunities differ across chapters
<https://girlsinc.org/about-us/>

Help from Home – volunteer opportunities that do not require long-term commitment
<http://www.helpfromhome.org>

Idealist – searchable database of volunteer opportunities
<https://www.idealist.org/en/volunteer?q=&searchMode=true>

Lifetime Connections Without Walls – program focusing on providing classes and social activities by phone between senior citizens and volunteers
<https://www.familyeldercare.org/programs/lifetime-connections-without-walls/>

Volunteer Match – searchable database of a variety of volunteer opportunities
<https://www.volunteermatch.org>