

“I Matter Because...”

Three words that had me analyzing what I have done to make myself matter to others. After lots of pondering and pacing, I concluded that I hadn't done anything to almost everyone and everything in the world. My actions in life, good or bad, have only affected the people around me, so it is doubtful that my actions have impacted you directly.

Everyone has done a random act of kindness in their lives, even if it was just smiling at the young woman in front of you while you waited for your coffee in the morning. Sure, the young woman was probably grateful. She probably smiled back at you before picking up her drink, but your smile, as friendly as it was for her, will not affect anybody else. Fifteen minutes later, the young woman may not even remember that you smiled at her that morning; work filled her head with more pressing matters as soon as she walked into the office. But neither of those reasons discourage us from smiling at the crossing guard as you leave the coffee shop and the other people you made eye contact with while walking down the street.

Additionally, the young woman probably perceived you as a “nice person.” When we see someone we don't know, we start categorizing them inside our heads, inside our self made boxes of personal stereotypes to judge first impressions, which are probably very different from person to person. A set of common ones may be “nice” and “mean”. You smiled, so you may qualify as “nice.” When the young woman left the coffee shop, she saw a middle-aged stony-faced man. His expression may have landed him in her “mean” category. However, the young woman was not aware that the middle-aged man just received a call from his bank saying that someone stole his credit card number, his dog just ate his jacket, and he had left a rather large bag of strawberries at the back of his fresh drawer in his fridge, so they're now black with white fuzz all over the outside. Yet, his coherent stern face got him placed in the young woman's “mean” category that day.

Now, why does that matter? Because there are some people to whom your smiles and placement in your personal personality boxes are going to matter every day, and those people are your friends and family. Your friends and family are people that you interact with more often, causing them to see patterns in your behavior and actions towards others. For most people, a family is an automatic support system to help you get through your daily life, but you have been with your family your whole life, and liking the people in your family comes naturally to most people. This leads me to our friends, who are the family members we choose for ourselves.

As much as you may think that your friendship could never end, it really can. People are constantly changing, and sometimes, they transform into people we no longer want to spend time with. A family would say that its members are lovely, as I'm sure they are, but part of it is

because they are a family already; they get brownie points! The first time you met your friend, you categorized each other, and whether you like each other now, neither of you got a leg up. Your friend *chose* to let you into their life, and now they are grateful. Why? Your family continues to be a support system to you, even if you're not on the best of terms at the moment. Why? Because you matter to *them*. *You* were the one that ordered an extra coffee for your dad because the young woman's smile made you think of him. *You* were the one who bought your friend more strawberries so that they could bake that pie they've been craving. *You* are the one whom your friends and family call when they need a shoulder to cry on, and even if it helps just one person out of the 7.8 billion that there are in the world, you still go to them.

Now let us look at the people whose actions affect many people, and they would be anybody famous, with much publicity. Celebrities, politicians, and in this generation, people well known on various social media platforms, are continually being judged by everyone who sees what is said about them in the media. The media is what allows these people's actions to be so well known around the world. If a politician shares their opinion, everyone knows, but when you vote in an election, even though every vote counts, you become a number with the millions of other people who agreed with you; you still make an impact, just not as big as the politician. A famous actor/actress who volunteers for a few hours at a homeless shelter will be praised by the people who find out through the media, but if you've been volunteering every week for years, only the people around you will know. We're not famous, yet, this does not discourage you and others from helping people in need, even if they will get no recognition for it.

Why do we not care that no one notices our acts of kindness every day? Think about all the people that smile at anybody on any given day, not just the young woman at the coffee shop. Think about how many people the young woman smiled at that day just because you smiled at her that morning. When people see others doing random acts of kindness, it inspires people to copy and repeat them on their own, even if they're barely noticeable! It's a chain reaction that goes through you, and you have the task of making sure that the young woman will smile at someone else, who will smile at someone else, who will smile to someone else, and create tiny bursts of happiness bursting around your community and the world. Don't be the one to stop these chain reactions! Continue to spread hope and joy to people's daily lives! Your small acts and my small acts all add up to create a better world every day.

So why do we matter? Individually, we don't. We have to add to the greater whole, which is made up of all the people who smiled at the person in front of them at the coffee shop this morning, not just one. I am not a special person. I'm 14, and I am not a child prodigy, I am not a tremendous athlete, I am not a young activist who strives to fix the world's greatest threats and

problems. My unique talents include naming different types of trees in the Sierra Nevada, hearing a note or melody, and being able to sound it out on the piano, and my cake decorating skills are somewhat satisfactory, but to almost all the world, I am invisible, they don't know I exist. I could say the same about them too. I don't know their life stories, what they do for a living, what they like for breakfast on a Thursday morning, but that's okay because I know that together, we all continue to make the world the best place possible for *everybody*.

My impact and role in this world are to try to make even one second, just with a fleeting smile, better for any person at a time. I matter because I know that one fleeting smile can give someone the confidence to perform their next task. I matter because I know that one "Hey! How ya doin'?" can brighten up the next few minutes for someone. I matter because I know and don't mind that no one ever finds out when I or anybody does something like that because we know that we are part of a greater whole, the love in the whole world. I matter because... I don't.

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