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## The Day of Compassion

I chose to hold my Day of Compassion on September 7th for a very specific reason. On that day two years ago, I was presented with the opportunity to permanently leave an abusive marriage. I took the chance, and I am so grateful that I did. I was 20 years old, scared, and emotionally vulnerable. I did not have a plan, but there were people in my life who showed me immense compassion and reached out to me even after I had made mistakes and hurt them. So I set aside September 7th this year as a day to remember my life back then, to make peace with those events, and to show compassion to myself and everyone around me.

I would define compassion as the act of offering acceptance, kindness, and help. It involves meeting people where they are at the moment, without judgment or expectation.

### **My Day of Compassion**

I believe that compassion, to be effective, has to start with your own heart. Every time that I am down on myself, it carries over to how I interact with others. The phenomenon of self-fulfilling prophecies is powerful. When I believe that I am unlovable or don't fit in with others, that situation is actually created. How can I be present in another person's pain if I am not accepting and kind toward myself? It's impossible.

I therefore did some things to bring simple joy into my day. I bought some houseplants, took them home, and set them in the windows. I brewed fresh tea leaves, and I let myself reflect on the last two years. I noticed that I wasn't angry with my ex-husband. I reminded myself that I am a well-meaning person who deserves good things, and that my past doesn't dictate my future.

While sipping the hot tea, I called the local university and set up a campus visit and meeting with an admissions counselor. My goal is to return to school and do the things that I used to take for granted. Being kind to myself and following my dreams instantly gave me energy and the desire to spread compassion outward.

I made the decision to become a vegetarian in order to reduce animal suffering and the impact of livestock on the environment, and I set up an area in my kitchen to separate and collect recyclable items.

I've always tended to just "go with the flow" in life, not really thinking about the consequences of seemingly small choices, but I liked how it felt to slow down and ponder the effects what I do. In the next few hours, before going to work, I set up an appointment to donate plasma at the local BioLife center, and I emailed my availability to the volunteer coordinator at a homeless shelter downtown. I even sent a text message to my best childhood friend, and we made plans to catch up with each other.

## Some Unexpected Benefits of Compassion

That evening, at the restaurant where I wait tables, I made a conscious decision to be as kind as possible to all guests and coworkers no matter how I was treated. Throughout my shift, I wore a genuine smile, exercised patience with all my customers, and refrained from venting any complaints to my coworkers (complaining is a very common and even expected thing to do in the restaurant industry). I was very pleasantly surprised to find that I enjoyed my work *much* more when I kept compassion in mind. It's tough to say how much my coworkers noticed, but that night I made considerably more money in tips than I had in awhile! My only explanation is that my guests had noticed my positive attitude and tipped accordingly. I left work feeling unusually fulfilled.



## Summing Up the Experience

I like the more compassionate me! I truly wish that I could be so kind and present each day. I think that a major factor that makes daily compassion difficult for people is the fundamental attribution error (Lecture 2.2). It's hard to give others the benefit of the doubt and respond to unpleasant behavior in a kind way. Another reason that compassion is difficult has to do with our locus of control (Reading 2.1). If we have an external locus of control, we may believe that our attitudes and actions are mostly the result of circumstances beyond our control.

I think that the benefits of behaving with compassion outweigh the risks. The joy it brings is amazing. It benefits the environment, animals, and other people, and it fosters communication in families and even across the world. Of course, there is always the risk of rejection or betrayal when extending a helping hand, but I think it's a risk worth taking.

If I wanted to encourage others to live compassionately, I would begin by asking them to imagine the possible outcomes (Lecture 2.8). I would also use the foot-in-the-door technique and suggest committing to something small at first, such as one day, much like what our class did with this assignment (Lecture 2.8). Speaking personally, I hope that in a month's time I will be a more compassionate person than I am now, both in regard to myself and to those around me.