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## A Cure for the World's Hidden Viruses

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, it was easy to perform simple acts of kindness on a daily basis, with or without using the Internet, but lockdowns have sharply limited opportunities for physical contact and ordinary acts of compassion.

Complicating this global challenge, shadow viruses of greed and selfishness seem to be spreading alongside COVID-19, eroding the natural environment and civil rights at an alarming rate. For instance, in my country, the Philippines, an "Anti-Terror Bill" has been passed to purportedly monitor terrorist movements, but those movements include pro-democracy activist movements, and the government has now arrested hundreds of people without clear grounds.

As a college student still under the care of my parents, I thought that I should just be grateful for what I have, and that I should simply focus on my schooling in order to avoid taking risks. My belief was that it would be okay to remain silent, and that other people would defend the country. In terms of social psychology, I now recognize that I was a victim of conformity pressure and the bystander effect. I thought that as a college student, I should just conform by focusing on my studies and pursuing normal routines with my family. Before long, however, I began to feel helpless.

I wanted to be more compassionate and help people in need, but I wasn't sure how. Then, coincidentally, the assignment for this course challenged me to a "Day of Compassion" amidst the pandemic. I ended up having two days of compassion—one after learning of the assignment during Week 1 of the class, and the second after the assignment was given in Week 6.

For my first Day of Compassion, I contacted the Philippines branch of [Teresa Charities](#), an international anti-hunger organization, and asked how it was coping with the pandemic. I was especially concerned about the elderly because they're at greatest risk of getting the virus. The group's representative told me that it needed help and lacked the money necessary to buy food for elderly residents in their region.

This was disturbing news, and I wasn't sure how I—a college student without any income—could be of much help. After thinking further about the problem, though, I came up with a plan and gathered a trusted group of friends to help me out. The plan was to launch an online student-run donation drive that I called "Project ReaTCH Out!"

During that initial Day of Compassion, my fellow students and I were able to launch a week-long fundraising drive that gathered around Php16,000.00 (\$320) from our own pockets and from other people willing to help out. This amount was large enough for the organization to buy biscuits, powdered milk, and face masks for 75 elderly people residing in the area.

Here are some images that I created and posted on my Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter accounts to publicize the project:



And here are some photos of the supplies that were distributed, and three volunteers delivering them:



On my second Day of Compassion, I began another project to reduce some of the stress and suffering I noticed around me. As someone who serves as a human resources officer in the Department of Mental Health at [The Initiative Philippines](#) (a nonprofit organization that helps coordinate young people's initiatives for communities in need of assistance), I decided to talk with a coworker about proposing a month-long program filled with events intended to address pandemic-related anxieties and boost the morale of our members and staff. Although we were only two lower-level officers in the organization, we wanted to at least try to do something to help those in distress, and we made the case to our superiors that doing so might reduce staff turnover, early retirement cases, and leaves of absence.

This is the proposal we developed:

**THE INITIATIVE PH**  
**Department of Mental Health**  
**First Executive Board**

RESOLUTION No. 5  
Series of 2020

**RESOLUTION PROPOSING THE CREATION OF A BONDING SERIES  
(ENTITLED PROJECT QUARANTHINGS) TO ESTABLISH STRONGER  
RELATIONSHIPS AMONG THE MEMBERS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF  
MENTAL HEALTH (DMH)**

Some of the higher-level officers were surprised that we were able to come up with this idea. With so many problems confronting our country and organization, these officers were running out of ideas to help maintain the mental well-being of staff members. I'm pleased to say that our resolution has now been passed and is ready to be executed.

Speaking frankly, it was a bit daunting to develop this initiative. I never knew that I had the potential to do this much given the circumstances. While I was working on the resolution, however, I felt an invisible push motivating me to do everything I could. This push was not about academic grades, financial compensation, or official recognition that I could use to decorate my résumé. It was about the power of social psychology to address human need.

I believe that being more aware of the motivations that lead me to be compassionate—whether from conformity, impression management, or the need to persuade people to see me as good—conditions me to be a better person in the long run and gives me a sense of fulfillment. After a while, treating other people with compassion starts to come naturally as I see again and again that my happiness is linked to the happiness of others. In addition, I feel less stress knowing that I have personal agency to help in many cases.

In conclusion, I believe that the compassionate me is a better me. As just one example, the compassionate me is not afraid of the government or of taking a standing for what is right. Moreover, the energy that I spend being compassionate often ignites compassion in those I have helped, thereby multiplying the impact of my efforts. As more people engage in compassionate deeds, that positive energy spreads like a virus—overtaking the hidden viruses of greed and selfishness that I mentioned earlier, and moving society in the direction of greater happiness and less suffering.

### **Epilogue from Professor Plous**

After Adrian's first Day of Compassion activities ended, he and other contributors donated additional money to Project ReaTCH Out! to meet the physical and safety needs of more elders during the pandemic. And after his second Day of Compassion, Adrian went on to serve as overall head of the month-long mental health program he proposed for The Initiative Philippines. The program turned out to be a great success, leading to improved social ties among the nonprofit staff members, and to more collaborative work among volunteers both within and across departments. Two years after completing the Social Psychology MOOC hosted by Coursera, Adrian graduated summa cum laude from De La Salle University with a degree in psychology.