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A day of
ordinary kindness



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A day of
ordinary
kindness

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To Leonardo la Pietra, the kindest person I've ever met,
whose life was stolen from us too soon.
But nothing will blot out our remembrance of his smile.

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the English translation by Katherine Olson

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Introduction

I live in New York, although I commute between there and Milan and Lugano. My job and the decision to be far from my home, to be able to think, brought me to Manhattan. New York City, as you know, is great; it is very different from other American cities, except for the language. Here you can find the confirmation that different cultures and religions can actually live together, peacefully and in harmony. Manhattan is the melting pot of the city, full of art, design and architecture; well, as they say, it is "the place to be." Manhattan is loved by its inhabitants. Although everyone confirms that it is a demanding city that absorbs a lot from everyone's life, at the same time it has a lot to offer. It is the city of great opportunities, of the fifteen minutes of fame predicted by Andy Warhol; it is the place where it really is possible to make a dream come

true. Manhattan, with its traffic, its noise, and its fast rhythms, with nothing staying still, has a great characteristic: it allows people to go deep inside themselves, and find an answer to almost everything. In particular, it gives one the chance to shape one's dreams.

I have been living in Manhattan for 16 years now. At first for work, and now for myself. For 16 years I have had an unrealized dream hoping that it would some day come true. Sometimes life imposes a status of semi-probation. You can do some things but not all the things that you would like to do. After 16 years of semi-probation, I decided to put on wings and jump into space and fly to the place that is best for me. My dreams were in exile on a desert island for long time, trapped to make room for the responsibilities of daily routine. The more we grow up, the more we stiffen. Curiosity, the desire to achieve, to rebel, disappears. We lose enthusiasm, the will to act, and, especially, our passion. We limit ourselves to watching others who break out, whispering about

the luck that they have and we don't, and maybe never will. All these years I have watched others, faced with the anxiety that if I have made similar choices of liberty, I would have failed. Along the way a thought took shape. At the beginning it was a vague feeling, and then it became clear: passion transforms dreams. Passion does not know failure, it does not have limits, and it means not ever having regrets. My passion consists of trying to knock the rough edges off people's rude behavior, in order to feel better together. I dream of a gentler world, rich in good sense, inhabited by people who are kind toward others, who can identify themselves in both the pleasure and suffering of others. People who have time to share, who care about things and animals, in a competitive but balanced and generous context. Kindness is a *forma mentis* that is built up slowly, the sum of a lot of little acts that result in an extraordinary sense of mental and physical well being. Donald Winnicott writes about kindness: "a sign of health in the mind, is the ability of one individual to enter imaginatively and accurately

into the thoughts and feelings and hopes and fears of another person; to allow the other person to do the same to us. When we are face to face with a man, woman or child in our specialty, we are reduced to two human beings of equal status.” Kindness is a way of behavior that is often forgotten, but not extinct. It is a universal attitude that knows no language or cultural barriers. It is embedded in our DNA just as emotions like joy or love are.

This story describes a day of ordinary life in New York. At the same time it is set in Milan, Lugano and Istanbul. Has kindness disappeared? Did we forget about it? Have we gotten too tough? Maybe we simply forgot about it and we put it aside for special occasion, like those poems we studied when we were little that are hidden now somewhere in our mind. Reading this book will bring back simple, instinctive and rewarding gestures; some important topics are outlined here. This pamphlet is a cue to begin a path to kindness. You will discover how everyday

reality can change with a simple act of kindness that clearly shows that we are vulnerable and dependent, and our best resource lies in the way we behave towards one other. If many of us can change, then we will live in a better world. You can read this story in an hour. Then I'd like you to lend it to a friend. Being kind in Manhattan is quite easy. Here you always find someone who says hello, who holds the door open, or asks you "How are you today?" My "kindness training" starts early in the morning, right after waking up.

A day of ordinary kindness

6:56 am, energy

I wake up; it's freaking hot. My apartment is in a pre-war building next to Central Park. The building has a great central heating system, as opposed to my house in Milan, which I love, but sometimes in winter I have to wear heavy socks and a scarf at home. I open the window. I want some good, fresh air, but I especially want to look at the view from the 21st floor. It is a beautiful sunny day even though it is early December. The air is limpid and clear. It seems impossible, if you think that in an area of only 88 km² there are 1.7 million people. I open the window to see the landscape of Central Park. I envy people who have the will-power to go running at 7 o'clock in the morning, and love jogging in 3.41 km² of trees. It is a unique and unforgettable moment. For me, leaving the windows open with the heating on is an unconscious and

automatic act, and I would add ingenuous. Ingenuity is the behavior I envy most in children, who express it with endless curiosity, listening, watching and trying things without worrying about danger. When we grow older we acquire common sense, which is the ability to think about actions and also to correct them to improve our behavior. I stop for a second and I decide to turn off the heating and leave the windows open for a while, get some fresh air, and then close them. We adults know that energy is a precious thing and that we can save with little acts. I smile as I think about my ingenuity, and I think about an interview in Milan where a man, ingenuous like me, stated about kindness that "the attention towards our clients is to keep the doors always open, even during winter."

During winter, if you pay attention, you can easily see the heat coming out from open doors and windows. It is the same in summer, when you can feel the cool air of the air conditioning coming out from the open windows. With my heart, I am thankful for the gift of those people who leave

the window open, with the same ingenuity. With my mind, I would like to do something about it. Energy is essential in turning the raw material into useful goods and to provide services, for direct and indirect production. The economy is linked to the quantity of energy used. The higher the standard of life, the higher the use of energy. The requirement of energy worldwide is growing at a very high pace, especially due to the contribution of big economic powers greedy for energy, and for the fat old consumer powers.

Our way of living requires a high use of the energy that the earth offers us (carbon, oil, gas). These power sources are running out. On earth there are more and more people, so we cannot imagine a dynamic of decrease of use. Jeremy Rifkin, in “The Hydrogen Economy” estimated that natural sources will run out in a few years. Technological development and energy sources are strictly connected and it is important to make good use of them, respecting the environment. Available data indicate that an increase of the global use of energy has led to a

sensible increase of the temperature of the planet. Several countries have signed the Kyoto Protocol, ratifying their agreement to reduce air pollution, in particular greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The European Council approved another plan of action against climate change, which, by 2020, commits Europe to:

- cut gas emissions by at least 20%.
- increase energy efficiency by 20%.
- increase the use of bio fuels in the EU transport sector to 10%.

It is possible to save energy and reduce the use necessary to do all human activities. Energy conservation can be obtained both by modifying the use of energy in order not to waste it, and using technologies that can transform energy from one system to another in a more efficient way, or with self-production. One recent example is replacing the incandescent light bulb with fluorescent lamps, which produce more light but consume less energy. In the heating system there are some expedients to save energy, such as the use of thermostatic valves, thermostats, and other more demanding solution such

as the substitution of old window frames, boilers, compression boilers, and external wall insulation systems. We could put to use “wasted” energy by using pressure sensitive floors, placed in the most used stairs in the underground, like they have done in Holland. We could use the power of the tides, exploiting, with specific technologies, the movement of great masses of water linked to the movement of the tide that in some places reach height difference of more than 20 metres. For example in France turbines are used. In Brittany, there is a tidal power station with a peak rating of 240 MW, located on the estuary of the Rance River, and it has been working with this method since 1966. Water, under the effect of the tides, flows in and drains from a basin that has a capacity of 18,000 m³ per second. The plant consists of 24 bulb turbines. These turbines generate electricity whether the tide is going in or out. Another possibility is to use the heat of combustion, (energy released when a kg or m² of a compound undergoes complete combustion) of waste after process of recycling.

7:30 am, waste

I prepare breakfast: instant American coffee, bread, butter, peach jam, nuts and some dietary supplements. Breakfast is a ritual I cannot do without for two reasons: First of all, when I wake up in the morning, if I do not drink coffee or tea, I am unbearable. Secondly, because I usually do not have lunch, so my breakfast has to be big, nutritional and allow me to get to dinner without having my stomach growling. I set the table the evening before. That way I have softened butter and the jam is not too cold. I drink my milk. As automatic reflex I throw the empty plastic bottle into the “plastic and cans” bin in the kitchen. Usually milk is sold in a Tetra Pak carton that goes into the paper bin, though I will never forget the lecture that an old man gave me a few years ago, stating that Tetra Pak packages go into the plastic bin due to the internal coated paper. The separate collection of rubbish has always been important for me - it has been in my head since I was little. In my first car I kept two plastic bags in the front seat: one for paper and the other for plastic. My friends made fun of me saying that my car looked like a garbage

dump. For that reason, after a while – not for long, fortunately – I had the nickname of “Lady Oechsler” (the name of the family that invented waste containers, I’m told). And I always have a lot of funny fights with my husband because he throws pots of yogurt in the paper bin and the newspaper in the plastic one... If he remembers to do it at all. If not, I find piles of newspapers and magazines everywhere.

How come it is a nice gesture towards our planet to have, at home, three different waste bins (for paper, plastic and glass)? Common actions, like drinking milk, reading a newspaper, or buying a new t-shirt, would not be important if we did not consider that every day in the world millions of plastic, glass and aluminium containers are produced, tons of objects and furniture for our houses are assembled, millions of shoes and clothes are made, millions of magazines and newspapers are printed. In other words, this means millions of trees cut down, litres of oil wasted, and tons of CO₂ put into the atmosphere. With the separate collection of rubbish, a lot of these resources can be saved. Separate collection is a sponta-

neous act in most of the industrialized cities all over the world. Ecological problems and environmental protection make it more and more difficult to find areas for dumping undifferentiated waste collection, where every kind of materials can be thrown. Especially if they are pollutants (like medicine, batteries or solvents) or useful as a source of raw materials (such as aluminium, paper, plastic and glass).

Think about the recent difficult situation in Campania. Throwing compost in a rubbish dump is a waste because it can be used to generate humus. The average composition of waste is difficult to calculate. It changes due to the area, the cultural background of the citizens, and the industrial production of the place. Some data show that the waste production per day per capita is increasing. In Italy in 2006 the waste production per capita was 1.5 kg per day. According to research of the US Environmental Protection Agency, in 2007, Americans generated 254.1 million tons of waste in their homes; 63.3 million tons were recycled; 21.7 million tons were composted and 31.9 million tons were burned. The

rest, 137.2 million tons were thrown in a dump. In the United States there are 1,794 rubbish dumps. In 1970 there were 20,000. The EPA forecasts that in twenty years American rubbish dumps will be full. The aim of the current regulations is to reduce as much as possible the quantity of non-recyclable materials to throw in the rubbish dump or to process with incinerators or waste-to-energy plants and, at the same time, to salvage all usable materials that can become a source of wealth and not a source of pollution. A few examples by Educambiente: recycling 30 kg of plastic (the amount that each one of us produces every year) can reduce the use of oil and carbon of 10,000 tonnes. That is equivalent to the energy used by 60,000 refrigerators in one year. It takes 15 kWh (kilowatt-hours) of electrical energy to produce 1.0 kg of aluminium metal, opposed to the 0.8 kWh it takes to recycle aluminium. It takes 15 trees, 440,000 litres of water and 7,600 kWh of energy to produce a ton of virgin paper and only 1,800 litres of water and 2,700 kWh of energy for the production of a ton of recycled paper. It is also calculated that recycling glass allows an annual saving

in Italy of 400,000 tonnes of oil, thanks to the separate collection. Used oil (oils used in handicraft, in cars, or industries) is almost totally recycled. From 100 kilos of used oil we can obtain 68 kilos of new oil. Every year in Italy 500,000 pneumatic tires are discarded, a volume of 3 million cubic metres, the same as six football stadiums filled to the brim.

8 am, water

I love having a bath, especially in winter, adding essential oils to hot water (orange oils to strengthen and verbena essential oils in the evening, before sleeping in the arms of Morpheus). Having a bath from time to time is one of the nicest experiences. The body is bathed in the water, caressed by the water; the heat helps to relax muscles, soft lightning slows down negative thoughts, and closed eyes help your imagination brings you to beautiful places. I am sad when I think that in Medieval times people thought that having a bath was the reason for illness and later on Queen Isabel of Castile, supporter of Christopher Columbus' travels to the New World had only two baths in her life, one when she was born and another one when she got married.

I decided to give up having a bath in the evening after work or on Saturday afternoon. 100 litres of water is too much when you know that there is not enough water in a lot of countries, not even to cook a meal. Washing teeth, flushing the toilet, shaving, or having a shower are actions that need respect. A lot of people prefer to have a shower because it is more convenient, quicker, or they do not have a tub. Leaving the hot water running for a few minutes is enough to have a thick mist and regenerate from daily stress.

A moment of real comfort and relax but also a clever idea to stop that moment when you shiver with cold, especially during winter, when undressing is very difficult due to the cold.

The process of washing is very simple: wash, soap up, maybe with a sponge, and rinse. It was very hard the first time that I turned the tap off and I started soaping myself very quickly because I was cold without the nice feeling of running hot water on my body. I was more surprised when I realized that it took only two showers to change my routine to: wash, turn off the water, soap up and rinse. It is amazing to notice

the adaptability of a human being. Very often we can change our habits using very little energy.

An ever growing number of countries suffer because there is no water. The problem is most serious in the hotter areas of the planet. In these areas more than 2 billion people live, and half of them are the poorest in the world. Most regions of Middle East, North Africa, Mexico, Pakistan, South Africa and a large part of China and India suffer because of a dire lack of water. In these areas, a large amount of water is used to water fields dedicated to intensive cultivation. The production capacity of agriculture is essential to reduce poverty and to encourage socio-economic development. However, the price paid to increase agriculture is very high. 80% of the agricultural area in the world is based on a water supply such as rainfall, and 20% on irrigation, but the latter produces more than 40% of the agricultural global production. Water interventions have reduced water sources both underground and on the surface, and they have weakened the quality and the resistance of the soil, due to salt deposits and soil water satu-

ration, therefore reducing the spontaneous vegetation and the local fauna. In the world, one person in seven, that means one billion people, does not have daily access to 20-25 litres of clean and fresh water. That is the minimum quantity that UN considers necessary to satisfy the most important needs of a person, such as: drinking, cooking and washing. Two people in five do not have appropriate sanitation and hygiene services, and every day 3,800 children die because they do not have drinkable water and do not have appropriate sanitation and hygiene services. The United Nation created UN-Water to help member states to reach their goal regarding water resources and sanitation and hygiene services. UN-Water focuses its attention on integrated water resources management, based on the fact that every single person, governments, and international organizations, have to share information and the decisional processes to obtain the best results. Talking about water:

- Leaving the tap on when you brush your teeth can waste up to 40 litres of water in one time.
- Leaks inside a toilet can waste up to 100 litres of

water a day.

- A dripping tap can waste up to 4,000 litres of water a year.
- When shaving, it is enough to fill the sink with hot water instead of letting the water run continuously.
- Having a shower instead of having a bath can save 80-100 litres of water.
- Washing a full load when using the washing machine or the dishwasher can save up to 11,000 litres a year.
- Putting aerators on taps reduces the flow of water and can save as much as 6,000 litres of water a year for every family.

8:30 am, to communicate

In the electronic mailbox of my MAC there are 66 e-mails. Among these there are at least 40 advertising messages or newsletters to which I have never subscribed. The privacy rule of cybernauts applies in all Western countries, but it is not always respected. In fact, I do not understand how they managed to get my e-mail address to offer me their “kindness” of their services or products. At the beginning, I

welcomed the Internet with glowing enthusiasm, as a new way to communicate. Internet allowed me to bypass the long waiting imposed by traditional correspondence. With electronic mail the immediate effect was at hand. Now, sometimes, I consider this comfort an annoyance. I schedule my time dedicated to mail correspondence with sad parsimony. I do not want the electronic mail to become compulsive behavior. Once, longing for a love letter from a boyfriend or an admission letter from the University was a source of anxiety. Sometimes trepidation. The postman was a welcome visitor, you would wait for his arrival, and you could scold him for being late: “Mario, it’s 7:20, I am waiting for a letter. You are 20 minutes late, what happened?” Mario always had a great smile and the right word, and everything ended there. E-mail is a drag. Especially if you have the Direct Push feature on iPhone. In the morning there are a lot of Marios who ding, ding, ding, inform you that you have mail. A crowded virtual garden. They are always on time, and I often miss my old Mario and his being late. New Marios intrude during my long process of waking up in the morning. Of

course, I could press the “off” button and the Marios would be silent. I do not do it because discourtesy entered my life. As if “on” is good and “off” is bad. As if being distant from the knowledge – of not knowing what people want to tell me – would be rude. Therefore, to avoid being rude towards others I am not very kind to myself. Phew! It is a very difficult case to solve. For now I have solved it working on the assumption that means of communication take time. Text messages and Twitter are immediate; let’s say they take 12 hours. E-mail and Facebook take more, 24 hours. And traditional letters – yes, I still receive them sometimes – take one week. I conduct my life based on kindness and I respect the time delays in communication. I do not bother others by demanding a quick message from a slow medium; I do not feel bothered while waiting but I live peacefully.

Kindness expressed through e-mails has two levels: the action and the reaction that we talk about, and the contents. Talking about the contents, we have to respect the same rules we used in letters, but briefly. I love paying attention to the opening and

the closing of a message. As far as possible, I use good Italian and I try to explain what I want in a few words. Personally, I like to add a bit of warmth when I start a message. I prefer to sign with my first name, my surname and if possible, my address and phone number. It is very sad to receive e-mails signed with "The team XY." It makes me feel invisible. I hate electronic mail as a barrier for the operator in a company. People call because they want to talk to someone whose name they don't know. The operator asks you to send an e-mail to an address like info@. An e-mail that probably no one is ever going to read. This is frustrating for the user and a problem for the company that will be overwhelmed with messages. You can try to negotiate with the operator and sometimes you realize that he is embarrassed too, because he has to follow the procedures. In 99% of cases you finish the conversation being certain that it was wasted time. Companies never answer the info@ that they treat like virtual plague victims. Nobody comes near. Sometimes some good Samaritan clears out the now dead e-mails, but only to make room for others. Somehow, all the people

who get in touch with the reception of a company or who send an e-mail (or a letter), show interest regarding what we do or who we are. You cannot put a price on the time they give us or the interest they show. And, if we have to be honest, telling a stranger to talk to Madame “info@” to avoid dialogue is rude, and not answering is boorish. Of course, e-mail is a powerful ecological tool. It offers a real chance of reducing the use of paper. Document dematerialization is a process followed by a lot of enterprises that now save money (paper is expensive!) and work in a more efficient way.

The most used raw material for producing paper is wood. The old paper industry caused massive deforestation. China, Columbia, Congo, Brazil, India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Malaysia, Mexico, Nigeria, and Thailand together account for more than 70% of world deforestation. Forests preserve biodiversity (more than half of the world's species of plants and animals are found in the tropical rainforests, which cover only 7% of the planet), they are essential for water conservation and to prevent soil erosion, and they supply wood and other products. They take in a

huge quantity of carbon dioxide and release oxygen into the atmosphere: they are nature's air purifiers. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), since the beginning of the twentieth century we have lost 50% of tropical rainforests.

Also the process of optical brighteners in paper, when it is not based on kaolin, it is often based on oxidative compounds deriving from chlorine and if they are released into the environment or they are not handled correctly, they can pollute water. To avoid these problems there are two solutions: one is to produce recycled paper with salvaged materials, but the paper would not be suitable for every use; or replanting trees cut down for this purpose. The NGO Forest Stewardship Council is working very well on this, to urge people to adopt FSC paper, which is paper made from wood taken from trees of a well- managed forest, according to environmental, social and economical standards.

11:05 am, relationships

I have an appointment in Union Square and I am

getting ready to go out. In Milan, I usually walk down the four flights of stairs. I am very lazy for every kind of physical activity. In the last few years I tried to join a gym more than once, but after the first few days I lost my enthusiasm and I started not to go, until I vanished completely, with the excuse that nobody would notice, but I did feel guilty for my lack of character and for the money I wasted for the umpteenth time. I decided to abandon the idea of going to the gym, so now I go up and down the stairs and I walk as much as possible (a few years ago I gave up my Hyundai Accent, blue with flames on the side, the most “truzzo ” means of transportation in history, but also the car that, 17 years ago, guaranteed the best performance in carbon emissions). In Milan I live in a beautiful 19th century, five-floor building. I cannot affirm that the owner cared about it too much, but it maintains its decorum. I was talking about stairs: usually people go up and down the stairs. In some buildings, there is a weird rule: if you meet someone while going up or down the stairs, even if they walk really close, you have to look down and go straight ahead. It is not behavior

dictated by malice, but motivated by circumstances. In 1896, René Quinton, a physiologist and biologist also called the French Darwin, formulated the “Theory of Constancy.” He found that the natural tendency of a person is to be in “osmosis” with the environment he lives in, acquiring its qualities and defects. The rule says that people tend to become degraded in proportion to the degradation of the environment they live in. For this reason, it is normal that in some buildings the behavior of some people has been transformed according to the stress of the place. In my building in New York, I use the elevator, because 21 floors are too many. Very often I meet other owners with their dogs: Greg, Thinkabout, Ariel and Big Master (a Chihuahua that is very funny but also very fat – in fact, in the snow, he is carried in a baby buggy). When the elevator doors open, a person enters with a smile and a welcoming “Hi” for the short trip. This welcome makes you appreciate the fact that you are going out, even when there is a cold wind outside. A smile warms everyone. 21 floors in the elevator last 30 seconds, if the elevator does not stop. In this short time people can talk

about everything: dogs, clean laundry, perfume, holidays. People relate to each other, even though they are strangers. When the sound of the door opening breaks the chat, it is kind of sad. In other buildings, for example, the one where I work, things are different. It does not depend so much on people as on the environment they live in (as Quinton would say). In the elevator, full of silence and discretion, everyone is totally lost in thoughts or worries, and it is impossible to talk, even to say "Good morning." These elevators are very fast means of transportation. There are no relations between people; there is not enough time. People offer room to the newcomer squeezing against the wall to avoid any contact with others. The trip is neverending. Even breathing or coughing breaks the silence. When the elevator arrives at the final destination there is a feeling of liberty, people sigh with relief, straighten their shoulders, and with their heads held high go out happy after winning back their freedom. They are as happy as the cows when they are let out of the cattle shed to graze the grass during spring. Everyone knows that man is by nature a social animal, who needs others to identify

and claim his identity.

We all know that we live in a time where relationships are fluid, flexible, and liquid. According to the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman “Individuals are added or removed from our life with a no stronger effort than deleting a number from the contact list of a mobile phone.” The consequence is that relationships are considerably dissolving and easy to handle, without a fixed length, without clauses and without long term bonds. Actions such as smiling, saying “Good morning,” chatting in the elevator – that has been conceived as a place where people can relate and not only as a mean of transportation – or chatting while queuing at the post office, or with the staff at the supermarket, are not simply behaviors. They are pure magic, something very strong that can transform people. That feeling of fluidity and transparency disappear for a moment. You can find yourself and your interlocutor in the middle of “something” that has a spreading effect on time and mass. The central nervous system is urged to produce endorphins to give pleasure, gratification and joy. Feelings we cannot live without, once we

feel them. Go inside a bar and greet everyone with a loud and healthy “Good morning.” It looks weird; you will probably feel stupid and embarrassed. You will say that people would think “Who is this weirdo who is greeting everyone?” Some of us prefer to stay quiet and greet only the waiter at the counter.

We can get some mental and physical benefits from breaking these rules: not caring about the embarrassment, smiling, speaking with as many people as possible, maybe when you let them have your place in line, or when you let someone get on the train before you.

The choice to open ourselves to others, and refuse to isolate from the world, opens our minds. We are happier, as if the world turns slower, we sleep better and longer, and our facial muscles are more relaxed. Paul Ricard (a French entrepreneur), the brilliant founder of the company Pernoud, used to say “Il faut se faire un ami chaque jour.” (“It is necessary to make a friend every day”). I think it is a wonderful idea.

11:10 am, empathy

I pass by the porter's lodge: "Hi Dave. Today is a wonderful sunny day!" The building has a porter's lodge 24/24. In New York there are nine doormen who work in shifts all night and all day. In Milan there is a young couple. To administer the porter's lodge is a very difficult job, like a sales assistant, a barman or a taxi driver. They do not have time tables, they work during holidays and they have to be standing or seated for hours. Some of them did not have the chance of realizing their professional dream, or they chose this job out of necessity, or they did not have the luck of studying. Others accepted the toughness of these kinds of jobs for the freedom they represent, as some taxi driver say, or for the chance of devoting themselves to a passion, as some barmen affirm. When you meet this people you admire their kindness, smiles, kind gestures, and the attention they give you. Sometimes they are also rude. "Good morning" is a grunt and if you ask for something their reply is "What/huh?" I can imagine and I can read the effort on the faces of people who work in supermarkets in front of a cash reg-

ister for 8 hours, and of waiters who run from one table to another with a tray full of glasses. I can read the claustrophobia of people working at a tollgate on the highway, during hot summer, or during freezing winters, together with the “healthy” emissions and the noise of the cars. For this reason it is important to empathize, without taking for granted that everyone has to welcome us with a big smile. Sometimes a little talk is enough to light up faces. Barriers fall and words become tender, light, like a relief from an aching back or sore feet after a long walk or because of the cold, simply because someone talks to you, enters your world and is supportive. According to Jeremy Rifkin, every personal or professional human relationship has a strong element of emotional exchange, which is the base to developing human relationships such as trust, collaboration and respect. Compared to ants we are inferior beings. I am not crazy! Ants, like us, are productive, organized, and active beings. When they pass each other, they exchange information that allows them to organize the team. Very often we do not even do that. This is why we are inferior compared to ants. Laying the foun-

dation of human relations means developing and refining the skill of understanding what is happening “here and now” between people, and what drives everyone from an emotional point of view. Empathy is the skill of reading between lines, capturing emotions, seeing the signals that indicate mood and reading the importance of an event for the person we are talking to, without being influenced by our way of rationalizing things. Empathic understanding consists of empathizing with the interlocutor and understanding his or her point of view, without adopting it, but keeping self-control. The empathic capacity allows us to read and understand both the emotions that people express with words, and those – consciously or not – that are expressed by tone of voice, gestures, facial expressions, and other non-verbal behavior. In other words, it means being more like an ant, being receptive to the information transmitted to us. It means understanding that other people, even if they have similar experiences to us, may adopt different ways of behavior, because they have a different personality, attitude, values and reference points.

11:15 am, means of transportation

I walk towards the underground station. Public transportation is a problem all over the world. There are some exceptions: Zurich, Istanbul and Singapore. “The Swiss are Swiss,” so they are very well-organized. In Turkey the service is recent and restricted, as they say “New brooms sweep clean.” In Singapore the government is not democratic so “you can like it or lump it.”

Three key points allow public transport to work: the citizen’s attitude (respect, determination), the ability of investing and spending money in the right way, and the State authority. If there are all of these principles, or at least two of them, public transport works. The administration of a transport system (service, time table, safety...) is a very complex topic. To deal with it we need to consider a lot of things, for example the relationship between private and public systems, and the technical aspects. Here, we deal with users to understand reasons for using public transports. I am looking for the incontrovertible

evidence that it is better to use public transport instead of private transport. In 2001, I decided to park my amazing Hyundai (the one I mentioned before) forever. I do not have any other alternatives than using public transport; I do not like using airplanes either and, when possible, I pay the carbon tax. In my opinion there are five reasons in favour of using public transport:

1. Economic reasons (costs are lower compared to cars in terms of fuel, taxes, tolls, parking, etc..)
2. Saving time (it is easier to get around without being afraid of traffic jams or of looking for a parking space for hours, and consequently the chance of getting a ticket for parking in a no parking area is non-existent. Obviously we are not considering possible strikes or technical and natural problems (such as snow, landslides), but they are exceptions.
3. Convenience (you have more time to work, to sleep, to play, and why not, to flirt).
4. Ecological reasons: thanks to the new means of transport we save energy with less carbon emissions.
5. Safety reasons: public transport accidents are inferior to those occurring to private transports, even ac-

ording to the most pessimistic statistics.

A trip using public transportation is a unique experience. Here we are confronted with some “Buts!”

- But number 1: Using public transportation can be a stressful experience. Being tired, both mentally and physically, and having to travel is one of the main causes of stress.
- But number 2: Sometimes getting a ticket at the ticket counter is a nightmare! Fortunately, very often, it is possible to buy and print the ticket at home, thanks to Internet.
- But number 3: People seem to be afraid of not being able to get off public transportation. For this reason, people stand in front of the doors and it is difficult to get on, while the rest of the bus or train is empty. Therefore, the risk of being insulted or being pushed is very high.
- But number 4: During rush hours, buses/trains are very crowded.
- But number 5: For many generations, the only background noise was rain, wind, and people’s voices. Nowadays, the soundtrack is illegible.

I myself cannot work without some background

music or go shopping without my iPod. Public transportation is very noisy.

- But number 6: You can find everything on public transportation. The longer the trip, the more we ruin the space around us. Empty bottles, newspapers, half-eaten sandwiches, and I do not even want to imagine the chewing gum stuck under the seats or tables.

- But number 7: There are some people who may decide to grope you or pickpocket you.

- But number 8: On public transportation there is less freedom because you cannot change timetables. These are 8 “buts.” However, if you compare them to the advantages, it is not that bad. Curiously, though, all the “buts” can be solved with kindness and relaxing. Try to find a reasonable answer to all the “buts.” Then you can go on reading.

These are my answers to these “buts”:

- Do not travel if it is not absolutely necessary (1)
- Use technology to schedule your route (2)
- Try to adapt to other people’s choices (8)

Kindness rules:

- Respect the people around you (3)

- Make room for those who are in a hurry (4)
- Reduce the noise you make (5)
- Don't make a mess (6)
- Be careful and report any irregularities (7)

The public transport company in Milan (ATM) is participating in the project CHIC (Clean Hydrogen In European Cities), financed by the European Union. For five years from the end of 2011, the agency will launch three Hydrogen power buses. On the website, ATM informs that it is working to improve the problem of noise pollution caused by public transport. The number of buses has been increased. There will be thirty new buses which use the engine as a generator using regenerative braking, thus permitting to save 25% of energy. In 2009 the agency introduced a training course for bus drivers, and it was possible to reduce the use of petrol of 1,500,000 litres per year. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority of New York (MTA) has recently promoted an annual survey to evaluate the satisfaction of travellers. Out of 1200 interviewees, 70% claimed to be satisfied with the service and with the general

conditions of the stations. In some stations people criticized the number of seats, cleanliness of trains, or safety. 78% of interviewees regarded the MTA operators as very kind and helpful. We cannot say the same in Milan. A recent survey conducted by Gentletude Onlus shows that 65% of interviewees think that the level of kindness and willingness of operators in public transport is very low.

12 (noon), shops

The Union Square area is very dangerous for those who are “shopping addicts.” On every street corner there is a brand new world, like in a Japanese garden: shop windows are full of tempting objects that make you want to enter and make a purchase. Because of the favorable exchange rate of the dollar, Europeans (and Asians) are perfect consumers. Some of them try to resist, but generally they buy something useless anyway. In Milan, the open-air temple of fashion, stoic consumers from all five continents, despite high prices, are sticking it out. Angrier activists tell us that in retail sales, companies exploit their employees and contribute to environmental degrada-

tion with questionable production activities and the disposal of goods. Consumers are often disappointed by the bad quality of products and services. In the long run it has been proved that companies which respect consumers and the environment, and work for their clients, are more successful than the companies that don't.

Relationships between people in big cities are often filtered through business. People relate when they buy a dress, a coffee, a parking voucher. Stores have a great opportunity to change the world, by adopting kind behavior. How? Using behavior aimed at creating an atmosphere of well-being that can be spread around. There are ten principles that any store can apply to the public : 1) welcome, 2) availability, 3) respect, 4) pro-activity, 5) attention, 6) commitment, 7) care, 8) politeness, 9) accessibility, 10) kindness promotion.

The first point is certainly an important element. A smiling face and a "Good morning!" or "How can I help you?" that welcome you, are reassuring and precious signals when you enter a store. Listening

to the necessities of the client is an essential point to create a kind atmosphere.

Availability does not have to be intrusiveness or misuse of power.

Respecting time is another important element of kindness. How many times have you sat in a restaurant and had to wait for a long time before someone came to take your order? Researchers estimate that the maximum time that a person should wait is five minutes. After that, even the most tolerant clients lose their patience.

Pro-activity is the same as “empowerment” (assume responsibility). Empowerment is the ability to anticipate possible problems, demands or changes. Concerning individuals, it is the ability to react to events in a conscious and responsible way, without being influenced by circumstances different from our beliefs. It means to “go beyond,” it is a meta-cognitive exercise.

To “pay attention” means to dedicate oneself to the other person, respecting his or her time, and listening to him or her with patience. Apologizing for making somebody wait, or for a problem not solved

yet, is a way to make the client feel part of a process. Martin Buber, an Austrian philosopher and educationalist, talks about relationships between I – You (Ich-Du) and I – It (Ich- Es). The “I-It” relationship is the relationship of a person towards the things around him, in a cold way, without emotions. People sometimes see others as objects, part of the environment, and they are not open to true dialogue and relationship with them. On the contrary, the “I – You” is an even relationship that conveys the openness to real dialogue and understanding. This attention is underlined by manners and gestures, or through words and tone of voice. The voice, if used in the correct way, can control our instincts but also awaken our energies. How the voice is used can reveal part of one’s personality. It is the true mirror of emotions, (I already mentioned the importance of empathy to “build” kindness).

Then, apart from attention, we have to add humility, patience, and flexibility. A lot of research shows that competitiveness makes us less efficient and receptive towards new processes of learning, as well as less creative, because performance anxiety affects us

negatively. Humility is the opposite. A modest person does not need to triumph to prove his existence. “Being modest” means being ready to learn from the other person. Patience is not boring. It is a different perception of time. We must not forget that time is an illusion built by our mind. Being patient means to face the constant flow of time without fear. Caring about the environment means caring about ourselves and future generations. It is a simple equation with an explosive consequence. A clean-smelling environment, in which you can breathe a nice atmosphere and scent, makes you feel better and more relaxed. According to a study conducted by Brigham Young University (US), published on the journal of the Association for Psychological Science, “clean-smelling environments” promote our moral behavior. Have you ever felt disgusted by the strong (maybe even expensive) perfume of somebody when in line at the supermarket? Or have you ever noticed the really kind waiter with body odor?

It would be better to avoid the embarrassing scene of two members of the staff in a supermarket: they

started arguing and yelling at each other, due to a change in the schedule, and seek the consent of a group of clients who were staring at them absolutely dumbfounded.

Or the owner of a tobacconist in Milan who started yelling at a client who just moved a lollipop from its original place. She did not even eat it! There is a lot of other more severe examples, such as: doctors arguing in the ward over a childbirth about what went wrong.

It would be a good thing if every shop assistant, barman, or bus driver, had their names on a label on their shirt. The effect of being called by one's first name is great. CNN knew it well when, in the nineties, it introduced the habit of calling anchors by their first names. This habit has now spread to every TV network. You can call somebody by their first name, while maintaining a respectful tone.

Accessibility is the art of knowing who we are talking to, thinking that, maybe, he or she might be our friend in the future. A public office, a shop, or a bus can help promote kindness. So why don't we generate positivity, believing that is this which can reach

the environment around us until we get home?

1:15 pm, traffic

The main problem in big cities is traffic. Milan, Lugano and Manhattan all have this problem. Getting around is a gamble: you know when you leave but you never know when you are going to reach your final destination. In many cities there are moments in which traffic seems to be only traffic lights, noise and the smell of smog in the air, but no movement. For example, it is impressive to see the Bosphorus Bridge in Istanbul after 8 pm. There is a line of lights kilometers long, and from a distance it looks like a dragon of fire waiting for its prey. The obstructions caused by works, accidents, or weather conditions are the main causes. The stress of traffic does not spare anyone, causing uneasiness to drivers, pedestrians and cyclists.

The pollution, caused by the concentration of thin dust, does not decrease, not even in pedestrian areas. At the moment in Italy, the limit for PM10 emissions (50 µg per cubic metres), has increased almost

everywhere. It is good for your health and for our planet to switch off the engine when you stop at the red light or to avoid keeping the engine on only to use air conditioning or heating. Some people advise to drive after resting, to not eat fat food, and to leave early from home. This way you avoid the stress and the anxiety of arriving late. In reality, even if you follow that advice, the stress when you drive is very subtle and it is caused by other reasons, such as anxiety (of being late, of not finding a parking space, etc..), hyperattention (due to the reckless driving way of others on the road or because of confusing signs), oppression of the enclosed space, automatic movements (tests show that automatic transmission cars in the city reduce stress), smoking (which in a small space has the effect of a gas chamber) and dehydration (because blood does not move properly and the hearth strains). Moreover, we should try to do one thing at a time, like driving, and not using a mobile phone. Cities are obstacle courses (cars parked on the sidewalk, double-parked, on the pedestrian crosswalk, or misuse of parking spaces for disabled people, etc.). I felt a strong feeling of helplessness

when, one day in Rome, I saw a blind man trying to cross the street, but access to the crossing was blocked by an SUV. For a lot of people, the steering wheel is part of their body. They are proud of it. The more powerful it is, the better. For those who haven't had (yet) the chance of waking up one day thinking "from today I am not going to use the car anymore," a kind act towards the environment would be to use public transportation, car-sharing, or going out with friends instead of driving your own car.

4:34 pm, shopping

In New York there are megastores such as Daffy's, TJ-Maxx, or Century 21, where you can buy a cashmere-blend coat for only \$80. How can you give up a chance like that? The pre-Christmas period transforms the city not only with decorations, and the Salvation Army bells on every street corner, but also with the huge number of people who choose NY to buy Christmas presents, because of the favourable exchange rate and the amazing sales. Most of the merchandize that you find on the market is produced in China, as are 70% of Christmas decorations. China has the ability to produce and sell a lot of things at very low prices.

However, very often they are poor quality products both in terms of manufacture and the materials used. Thanks to China we can have a closet full of t-shirts, jeans, bags and shoes. At Christmastime we buy a lot of unthinkable things that will never be used but maybe they will be lucky enough to be put in the cellar or in the attic, instead of directly in the trash. The waste produced only in the USA between Thanksgiving and January 1st is 5 million tons. Zara has shops in 75 countries, using the slogan “Join fashion,” and the store allows you to have latest fashionable dresses at very low prices. Christmas lasts all year round in Zara shops. Even though Zara respects the environment, the chance to buy clothes at low prices has consequences. Recent research in England shows that in London alone, 5% of waste is made up of clothes.

People should not mess with food, either.

The “Confederazione Italiana Agricoltori” (Italian Agricultural Confederation) estimates that in Italy, after Christmas, New Year’s Eve and Epiphany dinner, 500 tons of food are thrown away, worth around 1.4 billion Euros, i.e. 80 Euros per family. Being careful, being caring and common sense are dictated by discipline.

Shopping, if respectful, can become a gift for the environment.

6:18 pm, parks

Every big city has its green space. New York has Central Park, Milan has Parco Sempione, Paris has Les Tuileries, and Lugano has Parco Ciani. They are a small or big bit of nature despite the concrete. They are a “preserved environment” for people who always stay in the city. It is a beautiful feeling to walk in a park at dusk. It seems to be in a place an out-of-this-world place, in silence, while in the distance you hear the noise of life in the city. You can have revitalizing moments for your body and your soul. Owners of animals love their life companions. They want the best for them. Bringing them to the park does not mean just bringing them to do their business – always hoping that the owners do not think that the street is the toilet for their animals.

Bringing them to the park means having the chance of getting some fresh air, being quiet and meeting other dogs. A dog in the park is happy and almost free. The

link between park-green-peace connects the animal to man, because all of us who live in the city are like hysterical beasts and parks are our escape. We want parks and we promote them (Central Park and the Highline in New York depend on donations). Parks are nature within the city. They restore the balance between us and nature. Renzo Piano (an Italian architect) says that buildings should not be taller than a tree. He is right - it is a way of understanding our dimensions. These places are closed-in, protected. And they teach us that even outside, where there is only concrete and smog, we should not accept garbage and dirt on the streets, nor degradation. Because there is only one world. Kindness means working to allow parks and cities to live. Without parks you cannot dream, and without the city you cannot live.

8:45 pm, noise

I like having friends at home for dinner. I love those kinds of dinners that do not relegate me to the kitchen, but allow me to be with my guests. Hours spent idly chatting about the world's potential, and what to do to make it better. Chatting is important in every culture.

It is a liberating action that releases tension and negative energies. It does not matter if you are celebrating a promotion, a birthday, the upcoming weekend, carnival, or a wedding anniversary. Talking produces sound, acceptable sound. Noise is something else, and it has two different forms: phonic sound and communication sound. We all know the phonic sound; you can hear it when you switch on the radio at maximum volume. Or you can hear it when you sit on the train, trying to read a book, and the lady sitting next to you is talking loudly on the phone to her best friend. The sound of communication is made up of useless or too many words. For example: “Our business generates a value for shareholders and stakeholders,” which means “We make money to satisfy both owners and people who work with us.” Italian singer-songwriter Francesco Guccini, in a great song of his from 1965, wrote: “Il perbenismo interessato, la dignità fatta di vuoto | l’ipocrisia di chi sta sempre con la ragione e mai col torto | è un dio che è morto” (“conceited conformism, empty dignity, hypocrisy of people who always want to be right and never wrong, is a God who died”). Kindness means being able to communicate and be-

have without hypocrisy.

10:30 pm, good night

“Dream sweet dreams for me, dream sweet dreams for you. Now it’s time to say good night.” That is what the Beatles sang in the sixties. Tonight maybe I will go to sleep with my soul lighter, thinking about the little things I did today. Some may seem insignificant, others foolish to some people. I do not care about other people’s judgments for not insulting someone, not pushing anyone while on the subway, for smiling when I was verbally attacked, for not keeping my seat at all costs on the subway, and for keeping my half-eaten sandwich in my bag instead of throwing it out in the street. Being kind makes me feel good, makes me understand who I really am, and helps me rise above the complicated sea of human relationships. Maybe my little acts of kindness will not save the world, but if I insist, if I share them with the others, I am sure that something will change in the future, and that one day my microcosm will be a macrocosm, creating cultural changes.

Gentletude

Gentletude is a neologism composed of the words “gentilezza” (gentleness/kindness) and “attitudine” (attitude). It pursues the aims for a better world without violence, arrogance and rudeness. A world where caring and paying attention to others, common sense and balanced competition are the most important things. The production provided by the association is completely free, based on the “Commons Creative Criteria”. Gentletude in Italy is a non-profit organization (NPO), and in Switzerland is a non-profit association.

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The Art of Kindness

We are happy to welcome within our pages this kind message, written by Cristina Milani. Her diary harmonizes with the praise of common sense outlined by Raffaele La Capria, when he talks about “nostalgia of beauty.” The brief comments of the writer are rich in simplicity, and they promote silence in a season of vulgarity, discretion in a time of waste, differences in a time of uniformity. It is a strong and kind invitation addressed to the reader, who is meant to rediscover lost qualities – respecting nature, outside the jungle of traffic and the spectacle of politics – in order to live together better.

Matteo Bianchi and Carolina Leite

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Has kindness disappeared? Did we forget about it?
Have we gotten too tough? Maybe we simply forgot
about it and we put it aside for special occasion,
like those poems we studied when we were little
that are hidden now somewhere in our mind.

Proceeds from booklet's sale will be entirely given to
Gentletude.

Cristina Milani is a psychologist who has done psycho-social consulting and consulting of psycho-oncology and on the subject of drug and alcohol abuse. She received a master's degree in communications and a master's degree in cognitive and behavioral psychology. In 1998 she set up Hes-Human engineering Systems, a company with which she collaborated in the US and Asia with Great Places to Work International and Gds Brand consultancy (of which she also has been assistant chairwoman). Cristina is also co-founder of the Work Style Magazine. In 2011, she left all other activities to focus entirely to Gentletude.

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