



HeartBeat

ON THE QUALITY PATIENT EXPERIENCE™

Insights, tips, tools and resources to help you achieve the unparalleled patient, family and employee experience

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Why Compassion? Elevation

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- Can you think of a time you witnessed a compassionate act by someone else and were deeply moved?
- How do you feel when you see others being kind, compassionate, or generous?

“A Glass of Milk”

Based on a true story about Dr. Howard Kelly, a founding physician of Johns Hopkins

A poor boy, who was selling goods door to door to pay his way through school, found he had only one thin dime left, and he was hungry. He decided he would ask for a meal at the next house. However, he lost his nerve when a lovely young woman opened the door. Instead of a meal he asked for a drink of water.

She thought he looked hungry so she brought him a large glass of milk. He drank it slowly, and then asked, “How much do I owe you?” “You don’t owe me anything,” she replied. “Mother has taught us never to accept pay for a kindness.” He said... “Then I thank you from my heart.”

Years later that young woman became critically ill. The local doctors were baffled. They finally sent her to the big city, where they called in specialists to study her rare disease. Dr. Howard Kelly was called in for the consultation. When he heard the name of the town she came from, a strange light filled his eyes. Immediately he rose and went down the hall of the hospital to her room. Dressed in his doctor’s gown he went in to see her. He recognized her at once. He went back to the consultation room determined to do his best to save her life. From that day he gave special attention to the case. After a long struggle, the battle was won. Dr. Kelly requested the business office to pass the final bill to him for approval. He looked at it, then wrote something on the edge and the bill was sent to her room.

She feared to open it, for she was sure it would take the rest of her life to pay for it all. Finally she looked, and something caught her attention on the side of the bill. She read these words...

“Paid in full with one glass of milk”
(Signed) Dr. Howard Kelly



“...it also motivates people to do more good deeds, thus creating ripples of kindness.”

The questions above and this story reflect my recent fascination with an emotion that I have not previously considered. The emotion? **Elevation**. I am fascinated because I suddenly realized that this word captures “The Why” for compassion. Typically, compassion is considered an end in itself. After reading about “elevation”, I realize this is the overarching reason for compassion. Aside from all the researched benefits and consequences, compassion is most important in my view because it elevates other people, and this alone is powerful and healing.

Elevation is a distinctive emotional state triggered when we witness (and even hear about) compassionate acts. Drawing on a description by Thomas Jefferson in 1771, Jonathan Haidt coined the term. According to Haidt, “Elevation not only produces a warm tingling feeling in the heart, sometimes causing tears or a feeling of getting choked up, but it also motivates people to do more good deeds, thus creating ripples of kindness.”

Here’s how the cycle works. We feel elevated by seeing or hearing about an act of compassion. After we get that warm, tingly feeling, we think, “How wonderful” and then, “Wow, I have the power to do that!” Then, we ourselves want to recognize and seize opportunities to elevate other people. It activates our compassion. We feel motivated to want to be more caring ourselves.

What’s more, researchers have found that elevation can alter our views on humanity altogether, making us feel more optimistic, inspired, and grateful. In my view, we are living in times when politics feel more polarized than ever and daily events trigger fear and even disgust. Said, Jonathan Haidt in *What Makes Us Good*, “If frequent bad deeds trigger social disgust, cynicism, and hostility, then frequent good deeds may have a type of social undoing effect, raising the level of compassion, love, and harmony in an entire society... Powerful moments of elevation seem to push a mental reset button, erasing negative feelings and replacing them with feelings of hope, love, and optimism.” So, shifting our attention to how we can elevate others feels very important in these times and could be an antidote. In so many ways, elevation can be a driving force in our quest to create cultures of compassion and caring.

My Sister Linda

A few years ago, my sister Linda passed away after losing her battle with complex health problems. My mother and I had sat at her bedside through much of her care, and we saw a lot!

Early on, after hip surgery, a heart attack, cardiac arrest and 3 months in a coma, Linda had regained her senses and from then on, she became very, very difficult. I heard one of her nurses say, “The nightmare in 613 wants attention again!” Others snapped at Linda, scowled, or said nothing at all, possibly to protect themselves from what they felt was abuse. Most of Linda’s caregivers were so on edge when they entered Linda’s room that they brought a second person along to help deal with Linda’s impatience, demands, and accusations.



“And isn't
elevation why
we do what we
do?”

While I was appalled by Linda's behavior, deep down, I couldn't blame my poor sister, because she had transformed from a thriving, active family woman and prominent attorney to a debilitated, pained, helpless shadow of herself with a poor prognosis for much the future.

Sitting at Linda's bedside, my mother and I tried to reason with Linda and encourage her to tone down her grouchiness, complaints and demands—to no avail. As you can imagine, it was agonizing to watch.

Then, one day, a nurse Julia tended to Linda and when Linda became nasty, Julia didn't reply to the nastiness. Instead, she put her hand on Linda's arm, stroked her lightly and said, “Linda, I can't even imagine how upsetting it is for you to see your life change. You are enduring so much pain and worrying about your future. It has to be agony for you. I'm so sorry and only wish I had the power to make things better for you.”

Linda, quieted down. Tears began to flow, and she whispered, “Thank you.”

What had I witnessed? Elevation, and it was stunning. I will never forget those few precious moments because they moved me to commit to bringing my own compassion to a new level.

Elevation. It is the effect produced by compassion. And isn't elevation why we do what we do?

As we enter the new year, I'm asking myself:

- How can I spread more compassion stories that inspire?
- How can I be a force of kindness and compassion that lives and breathes elevating acts?
- How can I pay forward the kindnesses, resources, and support others have extended to me over my lifetime?
- How can I step up in bigger and better ways in the world?

I'm asking you to join me. Ask yourself these questions and become an even greater force for good in this troubled world.

Learn more in Haidt's talk, [***Emotions that Praise Others and Change the Self: Moral Elevation, Admiration, and Awe.***](#)



On Elevation

Purpose: Engage your team with the concept of “elevation.” Propose that the goal of being compassionate is to “elevate” people. Explain further that when you elevate people, those who see it or hear about it also feel elevated and are inspired to elevate others as well. It’s positively contagious.

Instructions:

1. Ask people:
 - “Think of a time when you witnessed a compassionate or generous act and you felt deeply moved. Share the story with a partner.
 - “Think of a time you believe you had an elevating effect on someone else by your good deeds, words or behavior. Share the story with a partner.
2. Invite people to share thoughts and feelings they have when they see a coworker engage in a compassionate interaction.
3. Challenge people to watch for times when a coworker elevates another person (patient, family member, resident or coworker). Ask them to prepare to share the story at the next meeting.



Another Great Resource on Civility in Health Care

This month, I received many notes from HeartBeat subscribers after addressing the importance of ensuring “Civility” in health care. I was particularly delighted to hear from Cynthia Clark, PhD, RN, and learn about her amazing work on fostering civility and healthy work environments, especially in nursing. Now Strategic Nursing Advisor to ATI Nursing Education, Dr. Clark is also Founder of Civility Matters™. A prolific writer, Dr. Clark has many publications that reflect her determination to promote civil workplaces. Two that I found especially enlightening are:

- <https://www.reflectionsonnursingleadership.org/features/more-features/ending-the-silence-antidote-to-incivility>
- Her book, *Creating and Sustaining Civility in Nursing Education*



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[Click here](#) for more information and to register online.



In Honor
of the New Year



“
QUOTEWORTHY

“Cheers to the new year and another chance to get it right.”

Oprah Winfrey



**Introducing the Fellows in Person-Centered Care Program:
A New Professional Credential**

Date: January 16, 2020 – 1–2pm EST

Description: Join Sara Guastello, Planetree International’s Vice President of Knowledge Management and Lori Shanahan, Associate Director of Engagement Strategies, for a one-hour introduction to the requirements, application process, cost and benefits of participating in the Fellows in Person-Centered Care Program.

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- Learn how the programs work and their specific components
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- Get to know our implementation services that help you jumpstart the programs and accelerate results
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