



BEING GOOD TO OTHERS IS BEING GOOD TO YOURSELF!

Have you ever heard the expression 'it's better to give than to receive'? For years, psychologists have been investigating the effects of kindness, not just on the person receiving the act of kindness but also on the person giving it. Here are some of their findings.

A

In one study published by Science magazine in 2008, researchers measured how happy people were in the morning. They then gave them \$5 or \$20 and told them that they had to spend it either on themselves or others before 5 pm that day. In the evening, the researchers phoned the people taking part to **reassess** their levels of happiness. The results showed that those **participants** who had spent the money on other people by buying them a little gift or making a donation to charity, were happier than those who used the money to pay one of their own **bills** or to buy themselves a gift. Generosity seemed to have a boomerang effect and benefited the giver.

B

Apparently, being kind can even make physical tasks seem easier. In a study about helping, researchers from Peking University in China asked participants to wait in the reception hall of a university building and said they hadn't decided which room they were going to use. When each participant arrived, a research assistant had been waiting there for a while, standing next to two cardboard boxes at the bottom of a staircase. The assistant then did one of two different things. In some cases, the assistant pretended to have trouble carrying the boxes up the stairs, dropped one, and asked the participant if they could lend them a hand. In others, the assistant simply explained that the first part of the study was for the participants to carry a box up the stairs. Afterwards, participants

had to **estimate** the weight of the box. Incredibly, the participants who acted out of kindness by helping the assistant carry the box estimated its weight as lighter than those who simply carried the box because they thought it was part of the study.

C

Meanwhile, being unkind clearly has its dangers. Many of us like to gossip about others. But Dr John J. Skowronski and other researchers from the Ohio State University at Newark decided to look into the negative aspects of this type of behaviour. The researchers asked an actor to record a video in which they spoke about another person: a colleague or friend. In the video, the actor made negative comments about their colleague, for example accusing them of being cruel to animals. The participants in the experiment watched the video and then answered questions about the speaker. What was unusual was that the participants often attributed the same negative personality trait of cruelty to the speaker, despite the fact that they were clearly describing someone else, not themselves. In other words, there is a boomerang effect. When a person **spreads** negative gossip behind someone's back, the listener will often subconsciously attach the same negative **personality traits** to the speaker, not just the person they are speaking about. The good news is that when you describe somebody else as kind and intelligent, listeners usually see you in just the same way!

D

Finally, did you know that we are kinder to others when we're alone or in small groups than when we're in large ones? In the 1960s, two psychologists called Bibb Latané and John Darley asked a student to pretend to fall ill in a busy part of New York. They repeated the experiment with different numbers of people present. The student received help 85% of the time when there was one person present, but only around 30% of the time when there was a group of five people there. Psychologists have repeated similar experiments and the results are always the same – the larger the group, the bigger the chance people will give you the cold shoulder. Latané and Darley suggested different reasons for this. Firstly, when there is a sudden emergency, we can't be sure whether it is real, not very serious, or just a trick. To decide, we usually observe other people. If they aren't doing anything, then maybe the situation is not serious and we can just continue on our way. The **downside** is that everyone does exactly the same and nobody reacts. Secondly, when there are lots of people around, everyone is waiting for somebody else to **take the initiative** and do something. Why should you do it? However, when you are on your own, there's no one else to take responsibility. Under those circumstances, most people are willing to stick their neck out for someone else.