



# BE KIND— EVERYONE HAS A STORY

---

Life is short and we have never too much time for  
gladdening the hearts of those who are travelling the  
dark journey with us. Oh be swift to love,  
make haste to be kind.

—Henri Frédéric Amiel

Everyone who is reading this is struggling with something—right now. Everybody. No question, rather than admit we’re struggling, we often prefer to put ourselves in our fancy cars and big houses while sporting new clothes, great haircuts, and perfect makeup (as I shared in a previous chapter). It’s more comfortable to go through the world and put our public persona out for display. However, every now and then, we let our guard down and let the challenges behind our masks be visible.

Imagine seeing somebody stuck at a stoplight, just not moving. What’s your immediate reaction? Mine? I tend to jump to the conclusion that the person is on a smartphone texting, reading Facebook, or something else like that. However, maybe I could consider the fact that the person may have just gotten some bad news and is sitting there trying to deal with it and being distracted as a result. What happens if that person cuts in front of you in traffic or someone doesn’t return a phone call or an email? We have ready-made stories for their behavior too, right?

Maybe there’s a 100 percent-opposite approach

## WHAT'S RIGHT, NOT WHO'S RIGHT

---

we could take. What do you think? Maybe we could offer a moment of compassion, tell ourselves that maybe there's a different perspective. What if—instead of going negative—we could choose to assume best intentions as opposed to saying to ourselves, “They just blew me off!”

Again, everybody is struggling with something. To turn the topic around just a little bit, when somebody's struggling, the right response is not to jump into the middle of that person's suffering, to commiserate and deal with it, or worse yet, to try to solve it. The hard lesson I've learned through my life as I've gotten older is that I can't take on someone's suffering for him or her. I can't. What I can do instead is I can empathize with where that person is.

I have a friend whose wife suffers from severe, often-debilitating depression. He told me once that he, personally, had stopped her in the middle of suicide attempts—twice. She's struggled with medications, with therapy, with *every* approach known to the human race to manage her depression. My friend told me that well-meaning people often have no idea what to do. They offer words of

encouragement (“You can do it!”), they offer help and support (“If you *ever* need anything, just ask.”), and they offer attempts at understanding (“My \_\_\_\_\_ also suffers from depression and has found that \_\_\_\_\_ works.”) My friend told me that each of these approaches actually makes his wife feel worse, not better. I asked him, “So, what is one thing that someone has offered, or something a person has done, that actually made a difference?” He asked his wife, and she responded, “There’s one person who comes over, sits on the couch with me, and just rubs my feet. No words, no encouragement, no pity—just the simple act of rubbing my feet.”

Who, among all the people who have been in your life, gave you the most comfort when you were at the deepest, darkest spot in your life? Maybe it was the person who came over, sat on the couch, and did nothing but rub your feet. The person didn’t say anything or offer problem-solving or advice. That person just sat with you, in your darkness, and rubbed your feet.

I’m going to invite you to think about that

## WHAT'S RIGHT, NOT WHO'S RIGHT

---

coworker who annoys you or that person down the street who drives you crazy or the neighbor upstairs who won't be quiet—anybody who has something about him or her that bothers you. And just today, just once, instead of judging and belittling and shaming, ask what's that person's story? What is he or she struggling with today? By being more empathetic with others, with taking a moment to see what life is like from their side of the table, our need to be right about things tends to melt away.

Remember—we're all suffering with something. Be kind. Especially to yourself.

### **Questions, Insights, Implications**

1. What might change in your daily life when you have the awareness that each person is struggling with some form of suffering?
2. Are there times and places where a simple act of compassion and empathy (the act of just rubbing someone's feet) has profoundly affected you?

3. Stop, take a moment, and consider someone else's story. What insights can you draw from the past that are related to someone's reaction in a situation?

Again, reflect on these questions, and allow yourself to be wrong and to be open to new perspectives. By doing so, you'll likely find new insights in the most unexpected places.