

Episode 66: The Kindness Cure (for when you're feeling meh)

Mandy: It was World Kindness Day a couple of days ago, and I want to bring more kindness into day to day life in general. And you might agree with me when you hear the benefits. Research at the University of British Columbia found that kind people have, wait for it, 23 percent less of the stress hormone cortisol.

And they age slower than average. So this research involved a group of highly anxious people who were asked to do at least six acts of kindness in a week. And after a month, there was a significant increase in the positive moods of the people in the study, their relationships with others improved, and they avoided social situations way less.

Even if you're not highly anxious, kindness can still decrease pain and stress and anxiety and depression. It can lower blood pressure, increase energy, happiness, pleasure, serotonin levels, and even increase your lifespan. I mean, what's not to love? In my own unscientific research as an executive coach, 15 years into my career, I've also seen kindness work as a great recalibrating tool for any feelings of not enoughness. So when your lens is focused too tightly on your own "flaws", and I'm using air quotes here, an act of kindness can be this great way to pull yourself out of yourself and remind you that you're part of something bigger.

Before we kick off, welcome to Enough, the podcast, a show for high achievers whose lives look shiny on the outside, but inside they're secretly exhausted, a bit jaded, and wondering, is this all there is? I see you because I've been there too. Maybe you struggle with workaholism or perfectionism or people pleasing.

Welcome, you're in the right place. I'm repurposing a kindness episode from 2021 and I love this one so much I'm bringing it back. Back then, I brought together some previous guests, and I asked them to share some moments of kindness, big, small, and even life saving. And this is what they're going to tell you about today.

So I hope by the end of the episode, you're going to feel uplifted and hopeful and having all the good feels. And I also hope that this is a, an encouragement to start adding more kindness into your day to day life. Especially in those moments when you feel crotchety and self-critical and you feel like, "Oh, I suck. I don't know what I'm doing with my life", that is exactly when it's great to do an act of kindness. So we kick off with Mark Silverman from episode 19. I know many of you love this episode. Ready? Let's dive in.

Mark: Way back in 1989, when I first got sober in AA, I had been homeless before that and really roughed up and I was sober for about six months, maybe more. And I was really miserable. I was complainy and whiny, and even though things had turned around, I just wasn't part of it. It was really kind of bad to be around me.

And I was living with my brother at the time who was also in the program, he's the one who got me sober. And he said first after, after admonishing me for just being a pain in the ass said, "Go out and do something kind for someone anonymously. Every day, go out and find something really cool to do for someone. Every day, and don't let them know it was you." So I took that to heart, and I would buy a bag of M&Ms and leave it on somebody's desk. I would write a card about how somebody's wonderful they are without signing it and leave it in the car, and every day I went out and did something kind.

Sometimes it was just a phone call to tell someone they were amazing. And then they knew it was me, but I went, I wound up, and it took about a week and after about a week, my mood lightened. And it's become a practice of mine for the last 30 some odd years of sobriety is to find something.

If I'm in a bad mood and even if I'm not a bad mood to go find something kind to do for someone, even if it's really small, it could be a kind word. It could be paying for someone's coffee. It could be sending a card. It could be anything. So if your act of kindness can be anything, get creative.

So maybe you have a friend who has everything, and birthdays are a nightmare, right? So I have a friend who has anything he could ever want, and he also happens to be brilliant at talking to and helping strangers. A lightbulb went off in my head. Instead of sending my friend another trinket that he didn't need for his birthday, I got out the cash that I would have used to buy him something, and I went to the homeless woman selling the big issue outside of my local supermarket.

I explained to her that I was honoring my friend's birthday, and I talked about how rad he was and all the good things that he does in the world, and I said that instead of buying this gift that he doesn't need, I wanted to give the money to her instead. And, I asked if it would be okay if we took a selfie together, me and her, she agreed, and we sent it to my friend, who was absolutely elated. Plus, I win, because now I'm more inspired to see conversations with strangers as an act of kindness, whether or not I give them anything material.

Mandy: David Vaux from episode one discovered something really beautiful when he struck up a conversation with a stranger at an airport.

David: So I was at this airport in New York at JFK and I had a few hours delay, so I was sort of walking back and forward at my terminal and I see this beautiful nun sitting at one of the benches.

And I'm so curious because I never had a real conversation with a nun. So I sit down to her, sit down next to her and she says, hello, son. And I'm like, Oh, cool. And I start talking to her and this is like the coolest nun ever. She's on her first international journey. She's going to Italy to the Vatican state because, and I didn't know this in America, they have something called the nun lottery.

So every year, one monk and one nun get to travel to the Vatican State to meet the Pope in person, but only one, and this was like the gift of a lifetime, and she's so proud, but she doesn't have like no Facebook to share this with all her friends it's just me and her cherishing this moment. So the gift that she received, I get emotional even now.

I get to participate in that. I almost felt like I also won and I got to see the Pope. And this time because there were two Popes, she got two in one and she was so excited. It's like a life of praying and here's the reward. And it can be such a beautiful gift opening up and being curious about someone you don't know.

Mandy: One of the reasons that acts of kindness feels so good is in the willingness to really see others. And on the receiving end, it's about really feeling seen. Shelly Paxton from episode 12 shares a really beautiful act of kindness that she's currently working on, made all the more beautiful because it helped to pull her out of a funk.

So one of her family members got COVID recently, and Thanksgiving was cancelled. So Shelly was alone in her apartment feeling, understandably, sorry for herself. And here's what she did about it.

Shelley: I've started assembling the goods for care packages. Even if it's like in my own little neighborhood, I can have an impact to share with people who don't have a home some love and caring and generosity and just kindness. Honestly, true kindness, which is what this is about, right? So I'm starting to pull together.

I mean everything from socks to hand and foot warmers because I'm in Chicago and it's freaking cold right now to, beef jerky and water and mouthwash and hand sanitizer and granola bars or energy bars. Like I'm gathering all these things so that I can literally put a note in there that says, I see you.

I see you because I think the hardest part is sometimes we avert our eyes. When we see homelessness in our own neighborhood and we recognize our own privilege and I want to be able to say, I see you. And in deciding to do this, like I'm not patting myself on the back, but what I recognize is it just got me outside of my own little spiral of like my own self-love, pity and I was able to focus on how can I be in service of others and so I'm creating these little care packages and goodie bags and hoping to make a little tiny impact in my little tiny, corner of the world.

Mandy: Okay, so a few more ideas. Apparently. The fashion designer icon of the wrap dress, Diane von Furstenberg.

She apparently starts her day every day by sending one email to someone that's helpful. So it might be encouragement, or appreciation, or gratitude. It might be a link to something of interest. It could be a connection. I love this idea. And I got it from a list compiled by the brilliant Alexandra Franzen, so if you want more of her ideas, check out the link in my show notes.

Another idea? Leave a review for a podcast that you love. The creator of that show will be so darn grateful because reviews are hard to come by. It takes effort for somebody to sit there and click and make the effort to do it instead of just going on with their day at the end of a show. So if there's a podcast that you know and love, I would be grateful, and any other podcaster would be grateful for your act of kindness.

Or, this idea that I did recently in Starbucks. I was waiting to pay for my flat white and there were these two giggling teenage girls behind me in the line. And they were cobbling their coins together from their fuzzy pencil cases to try to pay for a drink and I think a brownie. So I happened to have ten pounds in my wallet, which I know is a privilege.

And anyway, the idea came to me, that I could offer that 10 pounds to the barista and say whatever they want to order, use this money and if there's any change left over, give it to them. So I did that and I shuffled along to the end of the counter waiting for my order to be fulfilled and when my flat white and my name were called, off I went back to my real life and those girls I turned around and looked at their gobsmacked faces as they were dumping their coins back into their pencil case, that gave me the feels for the rest of the day.

Another brilliant act of kindness, it's free, is giving compliments. So Dr. Vanessa Bonds is a social psychologist at Cornell University and is the author of *You Have More Influence Than You Think*. She says in this book that we underestimate the impact of a sincere compliment.

And, we might hold ourselves back from offering it because it can feel awkward and cringy and uncomfortable. And it might feel weird speaking to a stranger, but Dr. Bond says we needn't worry. The compliment doesn't have to be flawlessly delivered, although it should be sincere and it should be in context.

So, say one of your colleagues has just done an amazing presentation and you're all shuffling out of the office together. It would be random to say, "Hey, great shoes!" Context, people. Compliments tend to have more impact than we believe and they tend to be less awkward, cringy, and embarrassing than we think they will be to the receiver.

So, get your compliments on, folks. Remember Luisa Milano from episode 18? She shares a recent act of kindness. A compliment And the impact it ended up having on her when she didn't feel good enough.

Luisa: Whenever I catch myself either comparing or competing, and I'll start with comparing. Whenever I catch myself comparing to someone, in that moment, I make a commitment to acknowledge them.

So that's I create kindness from a place that where I'm now, oh crap. I'm kind of in this yucky spot of I'm afraid that I don't have the purse they have or I don't have the shoes they have or look at their car I didn't even want a white Mercedes before but I pull into the restaurant parking lot and all of a sudden I'm like, why don't I have a white Mercedes, but what you've literally never even wanted a white Mercedes.

So, I'll stop and I'll go and I've done this. I was in Scottsdale and I pulled in the mall. It was this beautiful woman and she walked out and she just looked like a million bucks. She had like red bottom shoes. It was this really fancy mall and she came out of a white Mercedes and instantly I look at the car and I look at her and I'm like, I want a white Mercedes.

Mandy: And I'm like, she has red bottom shoes. I don't have red bottom shoes. I should have red bottom shoes. Why don't I have red bottom shoes? Could I afford red bottom shoes? And all of a sudden I'm competing and comparing myself to this woman who 30 seconds ago didn't even exist in my consciousness. And I stopped and I went, I'm in fear.

Luisa: I'm in fear right now. I'm creating from fear and I'm going to shift it by showering kindness on her. So I was like, I went, "Okay, I don't know if you've been told this today, but your car is amazing. And how did you get out of your car in slow mo?" And she just, like, threw her hair back and left, that's what it looked like to me. She, like, opened her car door and it was, like, cue slow mo and she just got out and, like, her hair flipped back. I mean, she just looked like a gazillion bucks. I said, "Your car is beautiful. And how did you get out of your car in slow mo just now?" and she laughed. The valet laughed and she walked off, and the beautiful thing is it's a win win, right? Because she felt complimented.

She has a beautiful car and pristine conditions and her shoes. And she's dressed immaculate and I acknowledged her for it. She woke up going, I look like a million bucks. And I went in and I said, "Hey, you look like a million bucks. Your car is beautiful. And how'd you get out of slow mo?"

So she's got this grin on her face. And now I've shifted my being from I'm not good enough. I'm not working hard enough or doing enough to have the red bottom shoes. Which, by the way, prior to the 30 seconds before I saw her didn't even think about. It weren't even a thought in my mind. And now I'm back to a feeling of, "Ah, there's joy and there's just this sense of peace and it's okay."

Mandy: To be an acts of kindness ninja, it's about reminding yourself to be really present with people. Notice. Pay attention. Listen, clues for ways to be kind are everywhere. It could be something fun and light, like Emma Stroud from Episode 5 shares.

Emma: Something happened. I was recently on a plane going to Switzerland, right?

And we got these little biscuits and myself and my friend who were going to Switzerland got overly excited about these biscuits because we expected there to only be three but actually there was loads in this tiny little packet and they're swiss biscuits right now that within itself we paid for and and then this lovely air hostess obviously noticed how genuinely excited we got.

And then she sort of came back and she just asked a question, right, and she's obviously doing all of the other things that air hostesses have to do. And this woman she came back to us, and she's just like, "Have you been to Switzerland before?" And I was like, "Once but very briefly", and she's like, "Do you like biscuits?", we were like, "You know we do."

She's like, "okay". And then she walked off. To be honest, I thought that was going to be the end of the conversation. And then about 10 minutes later, she came back with a napkin, which I think was the only thing she had to write on, because she's an air hostess and who needs paper. And on the napkin, she'd written out the four best Swiss biscuit brands that you can get, with the recommendation of which type of one we should get, and then the shops where we could get it.

And then she gave it to us and she said, Us Swiss people try and keep this secret. These are the ones that the tourists don't know about. And I just want to give you this. And genuinely, that little extra bit of kind of she was like. So there was that. It was just such a beautiful, random part of human connection.

I loved it.

Mandy: It could also be something profound and life saving, like Shelley Paxton shares. Her colleague saw through Shelley's bad acting that everything was just fine at a low point in Shelly's life.

Shelley: I was in the midst of an epic, honestly shitstorm, of a divorce. It's 2009. I'm in this, this big sexy job on the, on the outside, my life looked all shiny and glitzy and all the things.

And on the inside, I was. a hundred percent falling apart. And I didn't really know or have the language for like how to manage these things back in those days, certainly not in the way that you and I do today. And I was in a place of, I mean, imagine this. So my world's falling apart. My lawyers are managing a divorce, that's costing me tens of thousands, if not a hundred thousand dollars. My dog is ill. My soon to be ex-husband just up in leaves and I'm trying to manage a global job that has me on the road. Three out of four weeks of every month. And at some point I was just, I was coming undone. And I was investing all of my energy in making sure that the world couldn't see that I was coming undone.

And I know that you know, and that's so many of us who are listening to this know that feeling like we're not working hard to heal ourselves, we're working hard to make sure other people don't know that we need any healing or any help or any support of any kind. The act of kindness that I want to talk about is one of my team at work, truly seeing me, and I didn't have to tell them because they could read between the lines that I was barely holding it all together.

And I wasn't doing as good a job as I thought it was doing. Like we're bad actors at the end of the day, right. Abby Gibb reminds us of that. We're bad actors. And so what I thought was an Oscar worthy performance wasn't, and they sat me down one day after this had gone on for a while and just said, "Shelley, we see you. We're here for you, and we know that you don't want to ask for help, but we see that you need help." And they had literally created this beautiful, I wish I could find it today. I don't know where it went and all the moves, but I would frame it if I could find it this beautiful letter. And it had 10 ways that they were offering their support to me, like handwritten on stationery in such an intimate way that you don't necessarily expect from your team.

And then you realize like they are my family. We spend so much time with the people we work with and what they did for me that day was to help me understand that it's okay to ask for help. And it's okay to fall apart in the midst of a shitstorm because we're human. And it's okay to feel the suck of going through a divorce and dealing with a sick dog and mourning the loss of my marriage and showing up for work and traveling the globe. And so they sat me down and gave me this list of how each and every one of them were going to support me in a different way, in a way where I didn't even know. I'd never felt that scene before, if I'm honest. And the last one on the list was, and we found this woman who has a company at the time it was called Chicago anytime assistance.

She's since blossom into a huge organization business. And they said, we've bought you 10 hours of service from her. She will help you and almost be your personal assistant in any way you need to get through these next couple of months before the divorce is finalized and all the things move on. And it was such a beautiful way of just saying, "You don't have to ask, you don't, we don't want you to ask." It's like when somebody is really struggling, "You don't go, can I bring you something for dinner?" You basically say, "Do you want the hamburger or do you want the pizza? Because I'm bringing you dinner."

And I feel like that's what they did for me. It's like, this isn't an option of whether you're going to accept our help or not. This was sort of this beautiful menu of the ways that they were going to support me in that moment. And honestly, as I've said to you, I mean, this is around the same time that I tried to take my own life and things were epically bad. And I think that honestly, that saved my life. And it helped me to really truly understand that asking for support is a sign of strength and how beautiful if we can all do that for each other, show up and say, this is what support looks like. I'm offering it to you. It's not a yes or a no.

Mandy: I was on the receiving end of an act of kindness when I was recovering from burnout. I had zero stamina for cooking, let alone for going out anywhere fancy, or anywhere for that matter. So a friend texted me one afternoon and said, I'm dropping dinner over for you tonight, don't cook. A few hours later, she turned up with this silky root vegetable soup.

Fajitas with all the trimmings and a honey cake that was still warm. She had even printed a menu in curly calligraphy. So my friend didn't use the token phrase, "Let me know if there's anything I can do." I wouldn't have asked. She decided she was doing something, and of it probably took her the entire morning, and that memory will last my whole life.

I returned the favor when she was going through radiotherapy a few years later. Again, I didn't ask. I took action, and it was gratefully received. The text or WhatsApp message that reads, "I'm bringing dinner tonight at 6pm, don't shop or cook", are some of the kindest, most heartfelt words you can ever read.

So, if you are a wizard in the kitchen, a baker, anything to do with food, this is such a beautiful way to share your kindness with people. I wanted to end this feel good episode with David Vaux. His incredibly popular episode one is a gift to yourself, so please go and listen to that if you haven't already.

To close out today's show, David shares the ultimate act of kindness to yourself. The greatest act of kindness that we can give to the world is actually putting up the mirror and reflecting it a little bit back to ourselves.

David: Oh, I think I feel like a nervous just bringing this up. I never spoke about this before. We can almost look at healing and transformation as this Christmas calendar of consciousness. And most of us, we wait until the 24th day, or the 24th process, or the 24th century before we open the most important window, which is the window that I feel takes us straight into our own soul, which is our innocence.

And to reclaim that innocence. And to connect again to that pure, innocent, powerful potential that we all have, we need to go through the process of forgiveness. And I was kicking and screaming madly, I did not want to forgive myself. I could forgive people doing horrific things to me in childhood. I could forgive people bullying me.

I could forgive so many things, but I would never let myself off the hook. I was in a lifelong prison for cheating on my one of my first boyfriends for taking drugs when I was younger, self medicating myself, for starving my body, for overworking 24 hours and not letting myself sleep or eat healthy. And I started entering this process of forgiving myself and it became this gift under the Christmas tree.

It's almost like I transformed that emo elephant that was almost always in the room into this beautiful gift that could just grow and grow and grow because letting yourself, at least, feel that window of opportunity that you can forgive yourself. Maybe you didn't treat your body so well. Maybe you slept with someone where you knew and you felt inside of you, I don't want to do this.

Maybe you drank too much. To go into that process and see forgiveness, not as like an act, I'm going to do it once and I'm never looking at it, look at it again, but as an attitude towards life, as a practice that we bring into every single day. Having a little bit of ceremony, a little bit of Christmas every day is to bring up in our awareness.

What can I forgive inside myself? And if you want to extend that, to practice that, you can also call up someone where you were a douchebag ten years ago in your work. Or oh god, I had these weird phone calls, I had these weird messages to people where I just knew that I said something that they will remember for the rest of their life.

That will always leave them with a bad impression of who I am, and it's not representative of the journey and who I became. And even though not all of those apologies will be accepted, they will be received. They will be a gift that keeps giving. But don't have any expectations with this gift of forgiveness.

Just know that it is much more profound than we can ever comprehend. And maybe it is that part of our tribe, our communities, it's that practice that we really need to get better at, to be able to let everyone connect to their own innocence and to be free of all of this shame and guilt for carrying, because it's not that fun sitting around the Christmas tree if you're full of guilt from what can be released, if you're just willing to go inwards.

Mandy: I hope this episode has left you feeling all the good feels. Consider it an audio hug. And I wonder who needs an audio hug in your life today? Thank you so much in advance for sharing. There's something that I shared with a client recently that really rocked his world, so I'm going to share it here with you too as a kind of dessert to this episode.

I learned this from fellow coach Devin Bandison, so hat tip there. So say you're talking to your partner and you want to be caring and kind but you're finding yourself sliding into fixing mode as they're talking and your partner's getting annoyed with you. Frustrations mount and it's easier for kindness to pop like a soap bubble right in that moment and for tempers to flare.

So if this tends to happen in your personal conversations, try this act of kindness at the beginning when your partner is just about to start sharing. Ask them, so I know what you need. Do you want me to hear, help, or handle? Those are the three H's. Hear, help, or handle. So you might think that sounds really clunky at the beginning of a conversation, but actually it's so helpful.

That act of kindness about inquiring how you're listening might best serve your partner, that was a game changer for my client and his wife, Lee. So I'm going to share it here too, in case that helps you. As ever, thank you so much for listening. Let's do this all again in two weeks.

And I'm like, she has red bottom shoes. I don't have red bottom shoes. I should have red bottom shoes. Why don't I have red bottom shoes? Could I afford red bottom shoes? And all of a sudden I'm competing and comparing myself to this woman who 30 seconds ago didn't even exist in my consciousness. And I stopped and I went, I'm in fear.