

Making Ripples

by Amanda Bancroft

It's crunchy-leaf time, when owls call their mates and hikers are bedazzled with trees in peak color. When we gather together for the holiday season to give thanks, it's usually for food and friends, home and family. All good things! But what if we gave our gratitude away like a smile to strangers who influence our lives?

For example, the janitors, waitresses, contractors, farmers, or anyone who makes life as we know it possible. A local farmer may be the source of a sizeable amount of our calories, and you could track their name down at the grocery store. A janitor is responsible for keeping public spaces clean when otherwise they might become unbearably unpleasant – and you probably pass them in the corridors. If not, restaurants and businesses both local and larger are full of employees whose lives are complex and deserving of thanks. Maybe you recently purchased a product or service that really made life easier. Of course we paid for these things and aren't required to give thanks. Yet the folks responsible for delivering our mail, driving our buses and myriad other jobs will never know the quality of their impact unless we tell them!

A little thank-you card or small token gift can uplift someone whose daily job touches our lives. Many already practice this, but if you haven't tried it, I encourage you to begin this Thanksgiving season. It creates a wonderful feeling wherever you go, akin to a trail of perfume but not as overwhelming. Everyone likes to be appreciated, and after all we couldn't live without these beings whom we typically never meet. Friendships may arise from just a grateful note.

Besides doing a small kindness and feeling good about it, the big question is why. Why bother taking the time to do something infinitesimal and a bit socially awkward? Scientists have long encouraged expressions of gratitude for the health benefits these actions bestow upon us. The positive effect on the health of others may be less well-known, but can be intuited. We could even save a life.

No kidding, some people are struggling. They may have a rough family situation or suffer from depression. Because we can't read people's minds, it's difficult to determine if a smiling worker is on cloud nine or contemplating suicide. A little thank-you note can make a bad day better, delay self-harm, or even keep someone's daddy alive longer.

Leave a note in the mailbox, on the counter, at the register. Verbally say thank-you to someone working to improve a public space. Celebrate secretary's day or mail carrier's day (these are two examples of real calendar dates). If you know someone isn't diabetic and doesn't have food allergies, give them a small bag of candy or a treat. Write an email or mail a letter to a local business or company whose product made your life better, thanking them for it even though you may have purchased it. Look up the artist of your favorite mural and tell them how much you enjoy seeing it. Comment on a Facebook page to let someone know they've influenced your life.

There are any number of creative ways to show gratitude this season. The important thing is to show it!

Amanda Bancroft is a writer, artist, and naturalist living in an off-grid tiny house on Kessler Mountain. She and her husband Ryan blog about their adventures and offer tips to those wanting to make a difference at www.MakeRipples.org.