

Embracing

to Build

BY TOM TAIT



Kindness

Stronger Communities

Kindness. It's a big, powerful word.

It means doing something for someone else with no expectation of anything in return. It's much more than simply being nice – kindness is an action word. You can be compassionate, empathetic and respectful sitting on your couch, but being kind requires you to get off the couch and help someone.

So where does government come in?

Imagine a city where everyone is just a little kinder. When that happens, the number of issues we work on as local leaders start to decrease, including rates of crime, drug addiction, elder abuse, graffiti, bullying and school dropouts. Cities address these issues every day through police, code enforcement and other responsive actions. These are essential city services.

But kindness recognizes a difference between treating symptoms and healing our cities from within.

In 2004, I began to notice banners displayed around our city that read, "Make Kindness Contagious." The man behind them, Edward Jaievsky, shared with me what inspired this campaign. He lost his daughter Natasha in a car accident while on a family vacation. Upon returning home, friends and neighbors

remembered how 6-year-old Natasha always wrote and talked about kindness. Jaievsky went on to find heartfelt drawings and inspiring words about kindness tucked away in his daughter's bedroom closet and drawers.

Then Jaievsky told me something profound, "In medicine, you can either treat the symptoms or you can stimulate the body to heal from within. The same applies to a city," he said. "You can either treat the symptoms or you can stimulate the city to heal from within. And I think that has something to do with kindness."

A light snapped on for me. Maybe I knew he was right because I had spent years attempting to treat Anaheim's symptoms. There was a better way to fix our problems: creating a culture of kindness. It's our long game. Just like holistic medicine, it's not a short-term solution, but it has the potential to change our cities for the better — for generations to come.

continued

LEFT In Dharamshala, India, His Holiness the Dalai Lama presents Anaheim Mayor Tom Tait, *RIGHT*, with a Dharma Wheel statue that represents never-ending continuity, as Anglican Archbishop and Nobel Peace Prize awardee Desmond Tutu, *CENTER*, looks on.

Tom Tait is mayor of the City of Anaheim and can be reached at ttait@anaheim.net.

This is not just a feel-good thing. Kindness actually is serious business. It builds social muscle — the ability of a community to rally in the face of disaster and rebound even stronger.

As we have seen this year in Houston, Florida, Puerto Rico and Mexico and the Northern California wildfires, our first responders are often stretched beyond their limits in a major disaster. Neighbors connected will be there for each other with boats and food or to dig others out of the rubble. The ability to foster community resiliency is one of the most important benefits of promoting kindness.

One Million Acts of Kindness

In Anaheim, a culture of kindness is building a stronger city.

Since 2015, Anaheim students have completed more than 1 million acts of kindness, from helping their parents with the dishes to asking a kid sitting alone to play.

What's happening here hasn't gone unnoticed. In 2015, His Holiness the Dalai Lama came to Anaheim to celebrate his 80th birthday and talk about instilling kindness in communities. A year later, the Dalai Lama joined entertainer Lady Gaga and businessman and philanthropist Phil Anschutz at the U.S. Conference of Mayors in Indianapolis.

Their message inspired city leaders from throughout our country to pass the 100 Billion Acts of Kindness Resolution, challenging residents, businesses and schools to achieve 100 billion acts of kindness nationwide.

They are now over 504 million and counting. You can track their progress at CityofKindness.org, which also offers inspiring stories and ways to implement kindness in your community.

At its core, kindness is about culture. It is a way of thinking and acting. Chief executives and other leaders can change the cultures of their organizations, so why can't mayors or other community leaders change the culture of their cities?



LEFT Anaheim volunteers and city staff plant a “kindness garden”; Anaheim Mayor Tom Tait joins students to talk about kindness at an after-school program sponsored by Higher Ground Anaheim, a nonprofit that mentors at-risk youth, ABOVE.



And in our budget-strapped cities, the best thing is that kindness really doesn't cost anything.

Here are practical steps to implement kindness in your city.

Have a Champion

Because kindness is about establishing a culture, the first step is to have someone espouse its importance at every opportunity. In Anaheim, I do this in my role as mayor. In nearly every speech I give or meeting I attend, I try to talk about kindness.

Now, there clearly are times when talking about kindness is out of place. But you'd be surprised by how often it fits in with things I do every day as mayor.

Partner With Schools

Schools are critically important in this effort. Start by getting superintendents, principals and teachers on board. Kindness is a long-term investment that seeks to change culture for decades to come. So students are our core audience, and the best part is they get it.

Kindness, at its core, is simple. It's about doing things for others with no expectation of anything in return. In Anaheim, our students have embraced this concept and made kindness happen.

At Baden-Powell Elementary School in west Anaheim, students read *Wonder* by R.J. Palacio, a novel that spawned the phrase “choose kind” — short for “when given the choice between being right or being kind, choose kind.” The Baden-Powell students sold “choose kind”

T-shirts, erasers and “kindness-grams” that could be sent to friends to raise money for kind causes.

After visiting a mountain science camp, they observed that one of their classmates in a wheelchair wasn't able to do everything others could do at the camp. In response, they used the money from their fundraising efforts to buy an all-terrain wheelchair so their classmate could enjoy more of the camp experience.

The students are now raising money to buy another wheelchair that will remain at the camp for anyone who needs it.

Partner With Nonprofits and the Faith Community

In Anaheim, we are blessed with many great nonprofits and faith-based communities that embody the spirit of kindness. One in particular, Love Anaheim, brings together churches, faith groups, other nonprofits and community members to make our city better. Each month, volunteers paint park trash cans, pack and give out care packages, clean up gardens and hold arts and crafts camps for kids.

And now Love Anaheim is helping the city launch an innovative program to provide the dignity of work to those who find themselves homeless and without a job. Named Better Way Anaheim and inspired by a program in Albuquerque, New Mexico, Love Anaheim offers people the chance to earn food and motel vouchers by working to make our community better. They'll also have access to services to help break the cycle of homelessness.

continued on page 23

Instill Kindness in Your Organization

In government, there are a million reasons to say “no.” As leaders, we have to be aware of practical realities. But we all want to live in a city where a call to City Hall is greeted with genuine kindness and the feeling of talking to a neighbor.

As mayor, my job is to set the tone for all those who work in the service of Anaheim. As we face both tough issues and everyday questions from residents, I encourage our leaders and employees to ask, “What would a city of kindness do?”

Imagine a resident calls your city about holding a block party. Instead of starting with insurance and street closure permits, what if the person at City Hall said, “Sounds great, what can I bring?” We all want to live in that city.

Expect some unintentional resistance. As cities, we are good at public safety, building community centers and running libraries. But kindness is a big idea without a specific playbook. And at first, this may be confusing to city employees. Tell them not to overthink it. It is just as simple as it sounds.

Of course, as cities, kindness doesn't mean looking the other way. We need to hold people accountable through public safety and code enforcement and more. While it may not always seem like it, that is also a form of kindness. Our parents



ABOVE Anaheim city officials join Lama Tenzin Dhonden, SECOND FROM LEFT IN BACK ROW, and students at a Million Acts of Kindness event in 2015; a drawing by Natasha Jaievsky, RIGHT; and Love Anaheim community volunteers work on a garden, BELOW.



didn't let us do whatever we wanted when we were kids. They set limits and taught us right and wrong. While it may not have felt like it at the time, this was actually one of the kindest things they did for us.

We don't always hit the mark. In Anaheim, sometimes we fall short of our great aspiration of kindness, and that's OK. Kindness is a constant goal, and the mere pursuit of it alone is a good thing for our communities.

The Dalai Lama told me that the pathway to world peace is creating a culture of kindness in our cities, starting with our schools.

We are happier and healthier when we are kind. With a culture of kindness, our neighborhoods become communities, our schools get better and our cities become stronger and more resilient.



Little Natasha Jaievsky had a vision of a kind, peaceful world. When the Dalai Lama spoke to our Anaheim city and school leaders, he challenged all of us to make that happen. Please join us. ■

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES DIRECTORY

BOB MURRAY & ASSOCIATES
EXPERTS IN EXECUTIVE SEARCH

1544 Eureka Road
Suite 280
Roseville, CA 95661
phone 916•784•9080

www.bobmurrayassoc.com

AVERY ASSOCIATES

William Avery & Associates, Inc.
Labor Relations / Executive Search /
Human Resources Consulting

3 1/2 N. Santa Cruz Ave., Suite A
Los Gatos, CA 95030

408.399.4424
Fax: 408.399.4423
email: jobs@averyassoc.net
www.averyassoc.net

PECKHAM & MCKENNEY
EXECUTIVE SEARCH

Bobbi C. Peckham • Phil McKenney

“All about fit”

www.peckhamandmckenney.com
Roseville, CA 866.912.1919