

A photograph of a woman from the waist down, wearing a long, patterned dress with a dense floral and vine motif. The dress has a wide, ornate lace-like border at the hem. She is holding a large, dark-colored stuffed animal, possibly a bear or a dog, with a light-colored face. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Gentle Mind.

Small handy diary to be happy.

Text by Alessandro Benetti

Photos by Dawn D. Hanna

GentleBooklets

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GentleBooklets It is a series of long-form articles written by different authors. The booklets, designed for a quick read, feature texts and images. We have kindly asked to the authors to comment on the term “kindness.” Authors and photographers have donated their work.

The motivations behind the project are the same as those of Gentletude, the desire to spread awareness about the need for “kindness” in our society, a society too focused on personal success to remember the basics of everyday living and respect for the environment that hosts us.

Our decision to present these ideas in a series of publications is due to the awareness that, in order to stimulate people to think about these issues, it is necessary to present some concrete examples. In this case, the examples are provided in the texts written by the authors.

Welcome gentle reader

I would like to share the joy and also the respect I feel preparing myself to write about such a special and important topic as kindness, wishing that you as well will care about what you will find.

When someone asks me to put on paper concepts and ideas that will be read by other people, I feel bound to be clear and at the same time to convey to them the same energy that would flow if we were looking at each other straight in the eye while talking. During the drafting of this little book, I'll be careful to preserve that energy, that communicative power. Since this book is an exchange between us, I would also like to directly involve you and, as I do in coaching, to share some basic questions which are very useful for our journey to be effective, albeit brief.

Kindness in words creates confidence.

Kindness in thinking creates profoundness.

Kindness in giving creates love.

Lao Tzu

The Treccani Encyclopedia describes kindness as *Nobility, both hereditary or acquired through the exercise of virtue and the loftiness of sentiment.*

In the *Dolce Stil Novo* Guido Guinizelli thus penned: [...] *love takes place in kindness as properly as heat in the firelight*. (Love takes its place in the kind heart with the same ease as heat takes place in the light of a burning fire).

Each of us has to deal with kindness sometimes and, as indicated in the Treccani Encyclopedia, we decide whether to increase it with the exercise of virtue. We are called somehow by events to choose if and how to spread kindness, depending on our life experiences. The same is true in the working environment. I was given the opportunity to write about it in my coaching job and this is a special chance for me to reflect and analyze not only the method I use, but also my way of being in assisting people in such an important and intense path.

In the first place, what is meant by kindness in coaching?

Coaching is a process through which you help people expressing their abilities at the highest level potential, overcoming their limitations and barriers, in order to achieve specific objectives and create a future of success and well-being. In this process the coach is a help, a guide, a support, but also a

contributor. Over the years I applied my coaching techniques both in one to one and group meetings: life coaching, business coaching, team coaching, personal coaching, mental coaching; every time it has been a challenge to overcome, a path to set, a strategy to create in order to achieve the goal. Whatever the context I was acting in and whatever the longed-for result, the secret was always the same: working on harmony among body, mind and spirit. With regard to kindness, the matter is broader. Since the goal of these pages is, starting from my observations, to share them so that they can be inspiring for new ideas, I focused on what I really mean by kindness. As philosophers Renato Lavarini and Leslie Cameron Curry wrote (Dictionary of kindness, in collaboration with Società Filosofica Italiana - Torino - Vercelli and Gruppo del Cerchio - Festival per sentieri e remiganti) *Kindness as the theme of our work opens to us a wide world, varied and complex, typical of a word which represents a quality, an ethical feature, a concept on which you can base a philosophical reflection aimed at determining behaviors and judgments peculiar to the individual and some defined social groups.*

Kindness is actually a simple word, but we need to think carefully about the role we allow it to cover; in fact, despite its immediate recognition, it conveys a





deep meaning with such important implications that the Harvard University, the most ancient in the US, in 2011 introduced an “oath”, engaging its students to make the promise of acting *with respect, and industry, and to sustain a community characterized by inclusiveness and civility.* (www.corriere.it)

Pledge or not, it is certain that kindness plays - or should play - an essential role in an age like ours which would require so many changes and improvements.

But kindness is also a beautiful word and I find myself writing it several times in order to read and re-read it, as if I wanted to explore all its meanings, fields of action and consequences. I also listen attentively to the sound when it is pronounced. If we were in a classroom, during one of my workshops I would ask you to pronounce it more and more and, since this is a dialogue, I encourage you to do so. Wherever you are, possibly in a quiet place, get comfortable. Say the word kindness over and over again. You will hear that it has a wide, but also fast sound; it has in itself almost a double nature: one is slow, soft, and the other one is urgent, straight. Kindness is a word which softly gathers itself around the “n” and then quickly runs away from the next vowel. It is like that “i” had the urge to run, to go. In actual fact, I believe this urgency

truly exists. Kindness is a word which needs to be translated and expressed in concrete actions. And its consequences may contribute to the fulfillment of a gentler world, making people involved and in turn inclined to goodness, in a positive contamination from who is kind to those receiving kindness and so on. In everyday life it is necessary to be practical in kindness and this little book may just be a useful object which from my hands, from my experiences, goes into your hands to speak to you and your experiences. Then I ask you to turn it into your own book, your diary, the place in which to think and write. For this reason, from now on there are some empty spaces where you can write down your thoughts. First, we should dwell upon our values - what we consider basic in life - which can be translated into practical attitudes. In my life and my coaching job I commit myself to act according to principles such as respect, passion, enthusiasm and free will.

The team: aggregation towards individualism

Please take a few minutes and think: what are your values? What is important to you?

Our set of values shapes our behavior and the actions which derive from that contribute to mould the world where we live. Therefore I keep saying that if life today is not as we wish it, instead of complaining or blaming ourselves, we can be gentle to ourselves and assume responsibility for making something new, for doing what it takes to improve it.

What is kindness?

During a scientific conference Dr. Stefano Caracciolo, Professor of Clinical Psychology at the University of Ferrara, Faculty of Medicine and Surgery, stressed *the great importance of the role that kindness plays in all types of human interactions, in*

every social or occupational field, but also in the affective and emotional ones. It finds its roots in one's personality, but it can be properly cultivated in professional training. Because kindness is the only thing that redoubles when given to other people and it has a useful impact also on those who give: being kind is worthwhile. (www.unife.it)

So Kindness is a triple-effect value: it is useful for making the life of those who practice it light; it is helpful because, generating spin-off, it spreads a wonderful sense of harmony in the community; it is fruitful because that sense of harmony gives its benefits back to those who have been kind.

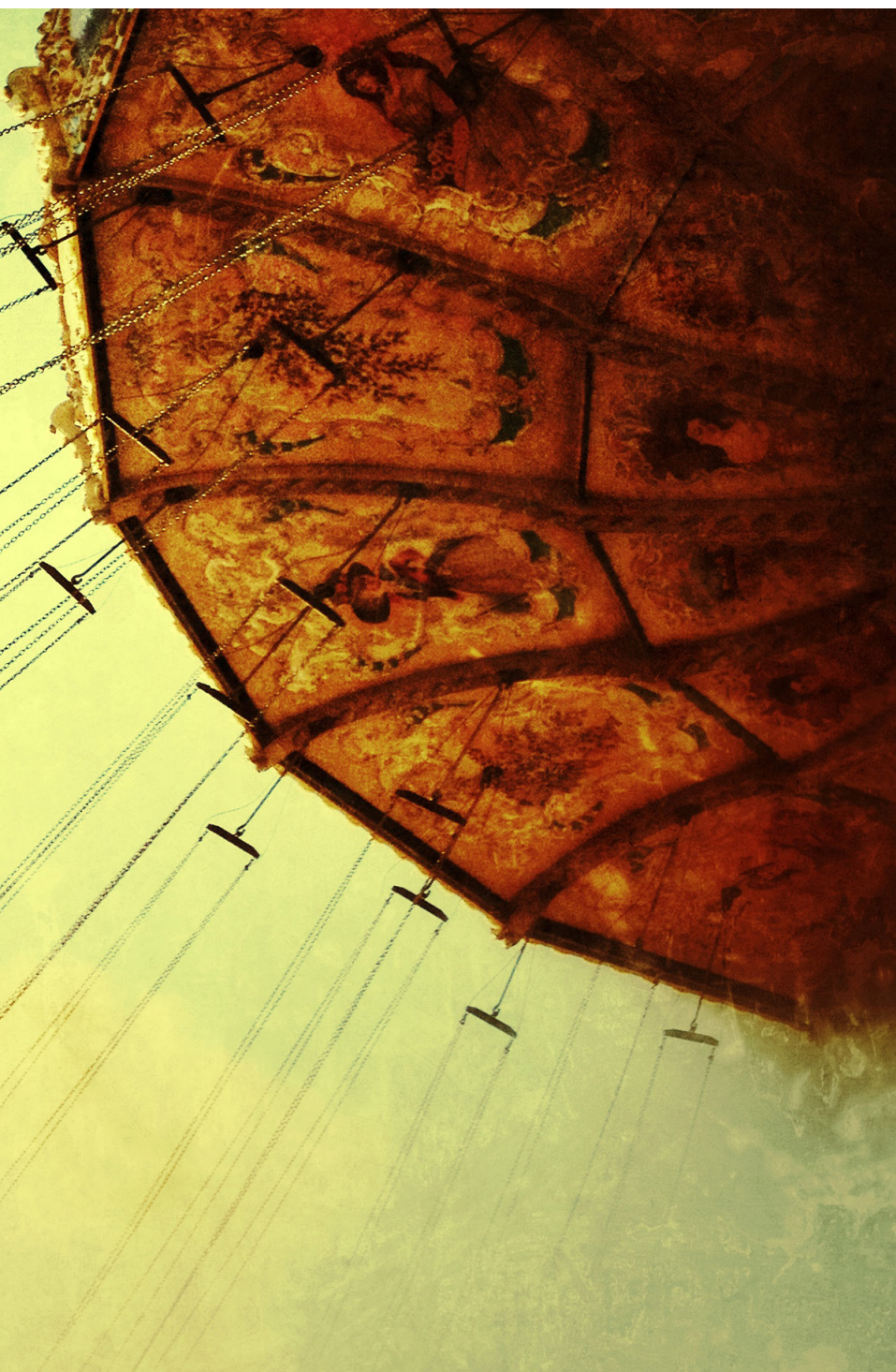
In coaching, kindness is nothing but the representation of an authentic human relationship based on the values and behaviors shared by the people involved.

Fulfilling simple acts of kindness toward the others, we can not do less than raise ourselves.

Anthony Robbins

In practical terms, what can you do to be kind?





It is fair to say that when we talk about kindness we are inclined to bring attention to the outside, to analyze our behavior towards other people, but we need to take a step back.

To be polite in our relationships we first need to be gentle with ourselves, in other words to create a state of harmony consisting in respect and care for our own body, mind and emotions. This harmony will help us maintaining our balance. Usually we tend to look and think about ourselves in a selective way, to separate our inner nature from exteriority, our mind from the body: in a coaching program we talk, reflect and write both with reason and emotion, with our body and mind. My experience in the world of sport and physical activity led me to include the aspect of wellness, which indeed harmonizes body and mind, in my personal coach job supporting both men and women, managers and athletes, in the path to achieve their goals.

As Nerio Alessandri, the president of Technogym® who coined the term Wellness, once said: *it is a lifestyle oriented to improve its quality and it is achieved*

through customary physical activity education, a balanced diet and a positive mental approach.

Paying attention to these aspects, all basic, allows you to create a level of health such as to enjoy the right satisfaction in all areas of your life. In a coaching program in fact, we focus a lot on the mental aspects, devoting ourselves to obtain and maintain a positive attitude, strengthened through conversation, dialogue and practical techniques.

Kindness toward oneself throughout this process is the first important step to live a life full of satisfaction, success and happiness, harmony between one's body, mind and spirit.

You are probably wondering: *But how can I do that?* Before answering, I suggest you some thoughts as I would if we were facing a coaching program together.

How are you ?

How is your life now?

The answers you gave are the starting point, as they represent a tool to become aware of your own reality. They help you see things as they really are: to use a coacher metaphor, this is the starting point to be included in your GPS and then plot the course to your destination.

And this is the next question:

How do you wish your life to be?

What is the purpose of your life? What is the deep reason that drives you to do what you do?

Now that we are ready to turn the word kindness into a practical and effective tool to support us in our self-fulfillment, here is the ultimate question:

In which way can you be kind to yourself?

The kind relationship between coach and coachee

As we said, kindness in coaching is nothing but the representation of a human relationship based on the values and behaviors of the people involved.

At this point, the two of us can say that we created a





form of relationship and, even if in an unusual way, we shared a little coaching experience.

In technical terms, the initial phase of the program consists in the intake, or preliminary encounter between two people, the professional and the one who wishes to be supported, the coacher and the coachee. During the intake, they have a small talk to know, and possibly like, each other. Both of them have to find common ground to choose each other, to decide to take up an intense working journey together. By all means this might also not happen and the two people involved will freely continue each on their own way.

When the meeting between coacher and coachee is positive, a professional relationship designed to get some specific results begins and the coacher's role is to accompany and lead the coachee to succeed. During the first meeting the person's requirements are defined and clarified and along they choose together the path to follow, planning duration and frequency of sessions. It is important to remember that every individual is unique and so it is also his way towards the expression of his or her full potential. There are no standard routes: each trip is organized around the travelers and their characteristics.

This way between coacher and coachee is born a professional relationship marked by needs, skills,

practicality, frankness and above all the relationship is kind. By that I mean a relationship in which respect for people and their specificities reigns, but also the right pace, confidentiality and the chosen option is *do to be* rather than *do to have*.

How to build a good relationship between coacher and coachee?

From my point of view, as well as in every relationship in order to have an effective coaching relationship the people involved should both contribute to the bond enrichment.

A professional interaction develops from their meeting in which the coacher's experience and tool box are made available and the coachees accept responsibility for themselves and work with commitment to gain experience and actively create what they wish for.

Coaching is unlocking a person's potential to maximize their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them.

John Whitmore

The approach

My motto is *move yourself first*, where by “move” I mean “put in transformation” both your body and your mind so that you can create and / or get what you want, contributing to your wellness and others. In this regard, I always like mentioning the Star Wars movie where Master Yoda says: *Do or do not. There is no try* .In a coaching program in fact one becomes aware of the person’s purpose and values starting from the existing situation; secondly, objectives are clarified by analyzing them in depth; finally, the practical experience journey begins. This will lead to find out about your limitations, the resources you own and those to be developed through concrete actions which can eventually make clear your own potential.

Achieving your own objectives involves passion, confidence in your abilities and constant efforts.

Alessandro Benetti

Some practical ideas

Which actions bring improvement to your life and interpersonal relationships? To answer this question, I drew on an article I wrote a while ago on my blog (www.alessandrobenetti.com/blog), when

I had just returned from the first gathering for the Festival dei Viaggiatori Extra-Ordinari per Sentieri e Remiganti 2012 (Festival of extra-ordinary travelers for paths and rowers 2012). The theme was, by coincidence, *Kindness, living with light steps* and on that occasion I wrote down a good and practical idea which now I like to remember.

Tonight Lama Shartrul Rinpoche explained the concepts of kindness, love and compassion from the Tibetan Buddhist point of view emphasizing the three mental poisons that prevent us from being happy: Ignorance, Adversity, Attachment. What caught my attention was the phrase "to create causes of happiness." Lama Rinpoche indeed gave prominence to the way every human being aspires to create happiness by eliminating the suffering. He also underlined that, to be able to attain it, awareness and global thinking oriented towards the happiness of all living beings around us are important. In order to reach one's own happiness a trip including attention outwards as well as towards other people is therefore necessary for love and compassion to kindly spread and consequently create happiness.

At this point it would be good to make a little digression on Tibetan Buddhism and to do that I rely on the words of Lama Kienrab Tenzin Rinpoche from the Tenzin Chö Ling Tibetan Studies Centre.





To explain how a fully altruistic mind develops, the Venerable indicates two techniques: the first one is called *exchanging oneself with the others* and implies to take the same care of them that we address to ourselves; the second technique, starting from reincarnation, invites to *recognize all human beings as our mothers* rediscovering kindness, beyond any outward manifestation, and repaying it to develop compassion and love and nurture the *wonderful thought* till reaching the Awakening.

As any Buddhist teacher, during Festival per Sentieri e Remiganti the Venerable Shartrul Rinpoche too suggested a practical part after his theoretical considerations. In fact, he ended the meeting by leading a mettā meditation (a term meaning unconditional love-kindness), which he defined as *an exercise/a mental training based on the Tong-Len method, meaning to give and receive. It is about-taking upon yourself both the physical and mental pain of the person you come in contact with and turn it into joy, openness and healing. The immediate effect for the meditator is to destroy his or her ego attachment and selfish affection which are the cause of all our suffering, closing, insensitivity and intolerance towards other people. This valuable method is used to develop love and compassion within us.* If also you have the pleasure of making

this wonderful experience and would like to try a little meditation to eliminate the poisons that prevent us from fully create happiness causes, then look for a quiet place and sit in a relaxed position.

Close your eyes and imagine breathing in a black smoke representing misery, ignorance, adversity, all living beings attachment and within you, in your heart, it arrives to meet even your poisons “cleaning up” inside you. Now exhale and imagine a white smoke, a white light that gently leads love and compassion outside of you, around the world. Continue to breathe slowly, visualize the black and white smoke as long as you want.

One year later I was called to participate in the above-mentioned Festival, this time as a guest. The theme of the new edition was “Strength”. I borrow the organizers’ words to share a beautiful message: *This year’s theme, Strength, is the natural consequence of the two previous editions: first we wondered about the importance of an ecological thinking, then about the need for kindness to live with light steps. In 2013 we are focusing on strength, as the push to face life, adversities and difficulties. After looking at and accepting ourselves, we experience a condition of kindness within us and the others and at this point - far from being fragile - the spirit is strengthened and becomes the revolution*

that allows to change the world, starting from ourselves. (www.persentierieremiganti.it)

I was invited due to my way of representing strength and kindness in the 2013 wellnessrunning project with the message “move yourself first”. Long story short, as written on my website (www.alessandrobenetti.com)

From September 10 to 19 2013 I ran the Wellness Running: 10 marathons in 10 days from Turin to Cesena, with the aim of showing that if you really believe, you can do anything. Just begin to “move” yourself. Eight months of preparation, commitment, communication, dialogue, interviews; 10 days of running and activities on the territory and 420 km of passion, participation, sweat, effort, support, happiness. It can be called a successful event for many reasons: because I crossed the finishing line and I’ve reached my goal; we were able to organize a great event for charity and with Zero Impact ® on the environment; so many have chosen to come with me on this travel, friends and colleagues, passers-by and athletes, celebrities and common people, school children and teachers.

From this experience we can work some useful insights out. In January I started from scratch to get to run 42 km a day for 10 days in September of the same year. During this training I asked my body to

adapt to the demand and I put in place a strong and, at the same time, gentle path. A target to centre of many we dream of in life. Dreams that can stay in a drawer or turn into goals and practical actions to achieve them if we choose to truly commit. Testing myself in that physical experience last year, I was able to directly find out the great potential each of us has: as months went by, I could notice my health improving and my mental clarity going hand in hand with it. How did I do that? I acted on physical activity, positive mental attitude and diet: the basic elements of wellness.

A kind act: taking care of yourself

Or rather, to create our own personal program for taking care of ourselves. If you were an athlete I would say: create your own workout plan to achieve your maximum potential, remembering that physical training, technical-tactical and mental preparation are your top performance pillars.

Then I would ask you to imagine yourself being able to live your life to the fullest potential, expressing yourself, your talents, your unique being, getting the results you want, surrounded by people you love and who love you. It would be nice, right? Well, know that all this beauty does not happen by





chance but it is necessary for you to engage in order to accomplish it. Be gentle with yourself and all of us: realize yourself. This way you will be happy and the contribution of happiness you bring into the world will be great. Maybe I get carried away, but I sincerely want you and me to realize ourselves and to do so we need to take responsibility for what we are and what we do and we have to do it for us, for the kids that we were and for children who we will leave this planet to.

*We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors,
we borrow it from our children.*

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Let's see now what the practical steps for oneself are and later bring outside, in the world, a true spirit of kindness. To do this, we draw on those three topics mentioned above and discuss them in their practical meaning.

Physical activity or exercise

Already the ancient Romans stated *mens sana in corpore sano* proving to know well the mind-body connection importance. Today I would add the importance of having a functional body to develop

and maintain an active mind. We need the right exercise since this is the tool that creates and maintains the body healthy, strong and flexible but it is also our direct, immediate mean to learn how to live, manage and transform emotions.

Physical activities like walking, running, bike riding and dancing benefit our body and mood. The new guidelines of the Ministry of Health (www.salute.gov.it) and the European Food Information Council (www.eufic.org) point out with growing frequency how movement improves mood, reduces the risk of developing cardiovascular diseases, boosts energies, thwarts stress and anxiety, adjusts the weight, enhances sleep quality, and ultimately increases clarity and mental lucidity. The research published by ScienceDaily (www.sciencedaily.com) and conducted by Saint Leo University (United States) - in collaboration with Saint Louis University, the University of Houston-Victoria and Illinois State University - shows that physical exercise strengthens our skills on the job. In this regard, Technogym® (www.technogym.com) emphasizes that the American College of Sports Medicine and the American Medical Association gave birth to a major international campaign called Exercise is Medicine which intends to make the benefits of physical activity on people's health known and consequently aims to the recognition of exercise as a new and powerful drug

capable of preventing most of the chronic diseases of our time and to enhance traditional treatments' effects. In essence, all these realities mean that exercise is a medicine to keep active and healthy, with no unpleasant side effects as long as it is performed following proper instructions.

For my specific goal to run the 10 wellnessrunning marathons I trusted to a team of experts who helped training not only my legs and breath, but also my core stability (abdomen and back) and arms muscles, giving me certainty of a high-level health and performance.

To ensure you good health, what type of physical activity do/will you do?

Positive mental approach

It is the tool to thoroughly discover and use our resources. It helps us maintain our lucidity and clear thinking about our purpose and it is indispensable in creating solutions to oppose what happens in life. This does not allow you to simplify and just say: *Ok, everything is fine* when instead we are in a lot of trouble. On the contrary, keeping a positive mental attitude means to tell the truth about how things are going, looking at the problem in full and choosing a way of thinking which has the power to analyze the situation and get an adequate response in order to always find positive implications. To do this we need to acquire a real self-awareness and the ability to listen to your body, thoughts and emotions to realize where you are and what you can actually do. As part of meditation, it is emphasized for example the importance of being *here and now* which means to live fully in the present moment, without taking refuge in the past but not even in the future; this is the awareness. Our thoughts, in fact, significantly affect our attitude and therefore our actions and their effects.

We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.

Albert Einstein





Even in the most difficult times of our lives a positive attitude - which now we can call kind - is essential, as a matter of fact it is often crucial to solve problems at our best. But frequently we waste our energies and strength thinking that other people are able to accomplish things we do not have the ability to obtain and at the the same time we give little value to the results we have already established.

What about you? How do you foster and train your positive mental attitude?

In this context, I have a very good exercise to suggest. It was proposed by coach Claudio Belotti, one of my mentors and trainers in the field of coaching and Neuro Linguistic Programming.

Here are some words from his blog: *A guest on the Oprah Winfrey show said he keeps a diary of Gratitude: every night before going to bed he writes 5 things about that day which he is grateful for. Not general stuff like life, children etc. but about that very*

day. They can be small things like a good cup of coffee or as big as a promotion but must have happened that day. In order to have 5 every day he has to be careful and look for them even after a bad day. If you do this even your life changes. (www.claudiobelotti.it) Similarly, in an article published in 2005 on Panorama, Michael D. Lemonick reports that *In a series of experiments begun in 1998, Robert Emmons, professor of psychology at the University of California, Davis, found further evidence that happy people remain in better health. [...] Emmons divided one thousand adults into three random groups; the first group was asked to keep a daily mood journal, assigning a rating from 1 to 6 to each sensation; people from the second one kept a diary of things that annoyed or irritated them the most during the day and the third group wrote a diary as well, but to record every day [...] the things to be grateful for. Despite the random division into groups, the last one not only jotted the expected improvement in terms of generic well-being, but they also were the people doing more exercise, undergoing medical checkups more often and usually adopting a series of prevention behaviors, such as protecting from UV rays. In general, the “gratitude” group acted in any way to ensure itself a state of better health.* Keeping the Gratitude Diary contributed to those people’s physical and emotional wellbeing.

Whoever feels full of gratitude is likely to perceive their own body as a part of the mystery of existence. they take life and health as gifts and do anything to keep them. I myself have seen the benefits of this exercise trying it and I noticed the effects on the participants to my courses and coaching sessions during which I proposed it. In light of all this, consequently my suggestion is to perform an act of kindness to yourself devoting the time necessary to write your Gratitude diary. In addition to this wonderful tool for a happy and healthy life, I would still advise some little strategy that can support us in creating an effective mind and a positive mental attitude:

- choose and implement an active meditation technique: we will avoid the mental chatter, creating clarity and greater awareness;
- consciously devote some time to breathe: we will bring a benefit to our body and mind;
- if we have a specific physical goal, our mind's support is crucial.

For example, as well as I did for my wellnessrunning goal, everyone can train their mind through a zen meditation technique. It consists in sitting down with open eyes in front of a white wall and breathe with simple presence and listening.

Diet

Besides the fact that food is our ally in creating energy for our body and mind, I have to say the matter is outside my province but, since the food represents our body's "fuel", it is worth some consideration. Although I think the best way is to talk to an expert who can provide us with wide-ranging information about metabolism, intolerances, cleansing, drainage, etc..

Experimenting proper nutrition with perseverance, however, you will get an increase in your vitality. I myself widely tested it for the wellnessrunning and can confirm that. Last year, in fact, I ate quantitatively less than usual and I run 2500 km more. It sounds incredible, but it is real.

We know many things about food and eating well, but maybe not enough. We need for more accurate and detailed information to understand the both physical and mental significance of diet, in order to learn how to use food as an ally and not as a stop-gap to fight dissatisfactions or to cope with emotions.

Appropriately feeding yourself you get benefits also on stress, insomnia, overweight, poor digestion, fatigue and nutrition combined with physical





exercise and a positive mental attitude form the strong union necessary to create the more suitable lifestyle for us.

How can you improve your nutrition? What will you stop doing and/or what will you begin to do?

Conclusion

More than a conclusion, this is a beginning, a reflection, but also a boost to put kindness into practice in many ways, first to ourselves and, by extension, to the world around us.

This morning, a lady about seventy told me that the feature she considers most important in a man is kindness.

Can't argue with that!

No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.

Aesop

The future depends on what we do in the present.

Mahatma Gandhi





AUTHOR

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Born in 1976, lives in Turin. his commitment is to accompany people to the awareness of themselves in order to obtain successful results. The objective of the Coaching program, which offers to its customers, is to build or find a balance between body, mind and emotions. In 2008, on the hill of Turin, he founded “Alchimia” a Wellness Medical center.

During his training he had the opportunity to meet with several teachers and instructors, learning and experimenting with different techniques: from the NLP to the Meditation, from the visualization and breathing techniques to the Bioenergetics, from the Psychodrama to the Negotiation.

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She has also exhibited her work in North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia and Georgia.

She currently lives on Kerr Lake in North Carolina with her partner Tim, her Corgi, Molly Dodd, her cat, Gracie and many wild deer and birds whom she loves to watch come to her window.

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Gentle Mind.
Small handy diary to be happy.

GENTLETUDE

Gentletude is a neologism composed of the words “gentilezza” (gentleness/kindness) and “attitudine” (attitude). It pursues the aims for a better world without violence, arrogance and rudeness. A world where caring and paying attention to others, common sense and balanced competitiveness are the most important things. The production provided by the association was completely free, based on the Commons Creative Criteria. Gentletude in Italy is a non-profit organization (NPO), and in Switzerland is a non-profit association.

Contact Gentletude on the website: www.gentletude.com

To realize ourselves
we need to take responsibility
for what we are and
what we do and
we have to do it for us,
for the kids that we were and
for children who we will leave
this planet to.