



Systemic Kindness.

What we do for the common good.

Text by Mirko Nesurini photos by Masiar Pasquali

GentleBooklets

**#3. SYSTEMIC KINDNESS.
WHAT WE DO FOR THE COMMON
GOOD.**

*Text by Mirko Nesurini
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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 will be provided in the texts written by the authors

SUMMARY

- Introduction
- And so, all is well that ends well!
- My opinion on the subject is that it is important to last through time, it is not impossible to cease to exist.
- Now, I'm going to tell you what happened to BP and so why it is worthwhile to use another filling station.
- Now, I'm going to tell you about kindness.
- This is as though to say that the energy for doing is present, it only must be discovered.
- Conclusions.

**SYSTEMIC KINDNESS.
WHAT WE DO FOR THE COMMON GOOD.**

Text by Mirko Nesurini. Photographs by Masiar Pasquali

INTRODUCTION.

I deal with corporate identity, and so I begin telling you a story about one company which has very much to do with kindness, given that it has not considered kindness at all. “Is all well that ends well?” In my book, “Brand Action,” I asked that the question of BP’s involvement in the Gulf of Mexico.

It seemed strange to me, above all, because of the assumption that it is possible to solve a problem by simply paying a massive amount of money.

To BP, it has been enough to spend money in order to solve the problem.

BP caused an enormous environmental disaster for the United States.

At the moment, the company avoids pillory by opening its wallet to distribute \$7.8 billion to around 116,000 people and enterprises.

These are millions which have to be added to the \$8 million used for covering up the initial damages and to the \$14 million for closing down the leak and cleaning out the coast. Total amount: about \$30 million.

After all, in 2011 BP set three priorities for itself: establish

security, win trust back and, above all, recreate value. In fact, in 2011 the company obtained 55 new exploratory permits in nine countries, divested \$38 million and restored stockholders' dividends.

Profit for stockholders has been about \$24 million.

Being careful with expenses, the Gulf of Mexico matter was swept away with, more or less, one year's earnings. Not bad!

AND SO, ALL IS WELL THAT ENDS WELL!

For sure, a few stains remained on BP's flag. For example, its brand left the best global brand names' list and it is difficult to say when it will return.

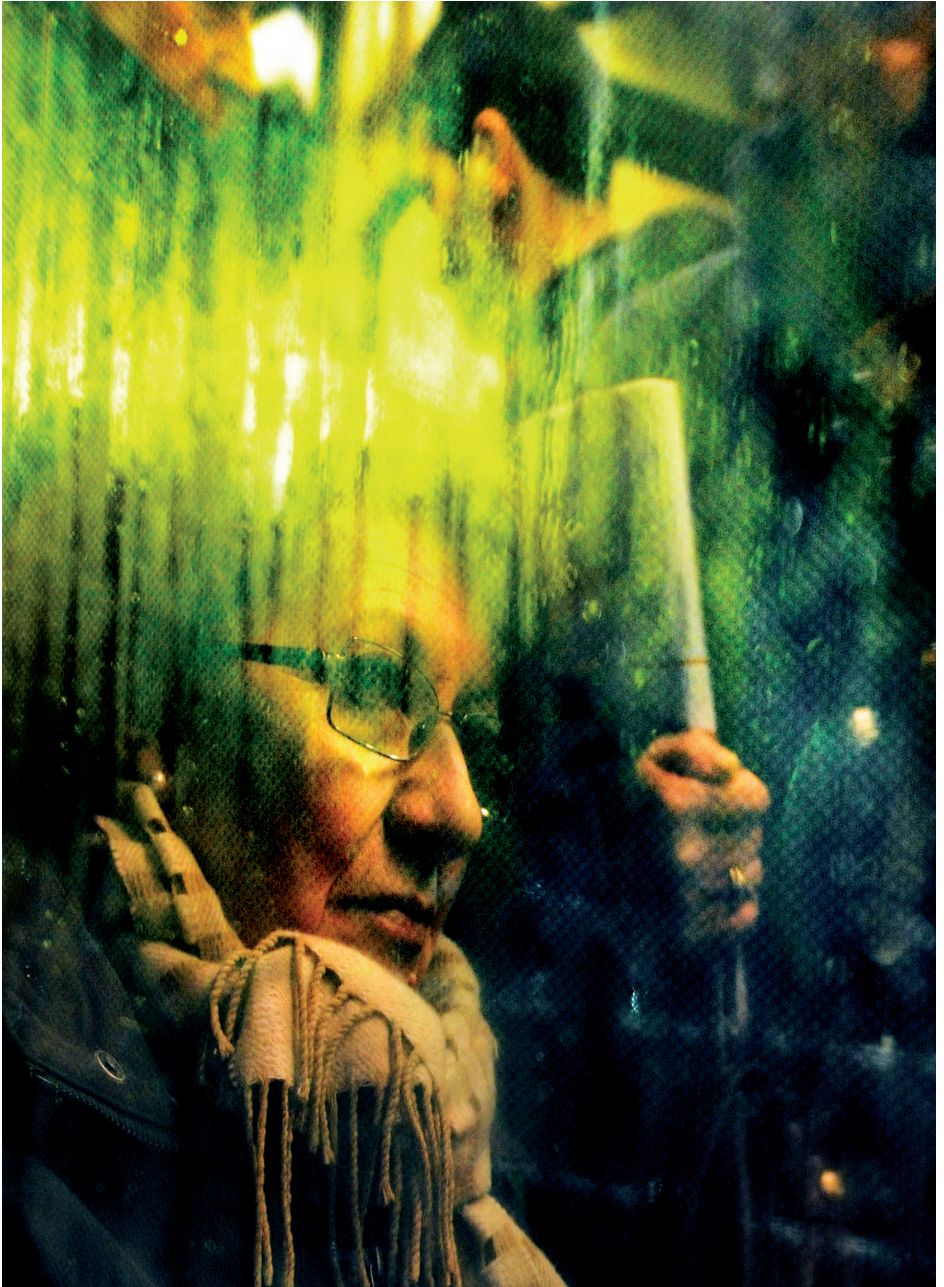
What rotten luck! Only few years ago, BP declared its aim to be "Beyond Petroleum," a new take on its original name, "British Petroleum."

Let's call it one of those commendations that barkers love so much.

The factory system -- any factory system and not only BP's -- strives to solve problems; otherwise what system would it be?

The company unable to solve matters is a company unable to do things, and therefore unable to exist.

A company, in fact, in order to exist has to produce and for producing has to create intelligence in the form of ideas and applicative solutions; ultimately, it has to be able to realize them.



The same subject is worthwhile to consider for public institutions.

Someone once defined a capable government as a “government of action.”

I don’t know what such a government really did, but the idea conveyed through this definition was clear.

Now, doing things is one of the factors of a company’s longevity. It is the capacity to solve some problems and to renew itself; therefore, it is the ability to still be there tomorrow.

An element shared by experts in crisis management is that “what has to be done, has to be done fast” in the moment wherein companies enter deep water, as difficult or painful as the decisions will be.

To remain in waiting, hoping that the wave of economic events change the crisis is an illusion which too often brings negative epilogues.

In crisis circumstances, it is necessary to get out of the way so that the problems, one by one, begin to float again in the shortest time possible.

I affirm that there are seven longevity ingredients for a historical company, a company that generally went through the mill.

These are the ingredients I analyzed in the book “Re-Brand”:

- Quality of product and services
- Capacity to understand the market

- To innovate, with care
- Chance and capability in the choice of people
- Strong ethical rules
- Power and decision-making assigned to a business leader involved in the property
- Continuous adaptation, in order to improve

Any of these factors involve the ability to problem-solve. Many of the historical companies that got through wars, crises and technological innovations are still in existence today.

MY OPINION ON THE SUBJECT IS THAT IT IS IMPORTANT TO LAST THROUGH TIME, IT IS NOT IMPOSSIBLE TO CEASE TO EXIT.

After the initial shake that swept away Arthur Andersen and was colluded with Enron, it seems to me that the world, and auditors too, continue to exist.

Some banks went up again in 2008, but the system continues to be there.

All differences considered, my opinion is that the media, politicians and, above all, customers could have had the power to wipe out BP, for the same reasons that they had against Arthur Andersen and Lehman Brothers -- i.e. because they didn't fulfill some of their essential duties. BP simply didn't practice what preached.

But there are still people who refuel their cars at BP's stations.

The so-called “crowd” didn’t rise against BP, as they did some years ago against Shell and Esso by making a mess. That was an example of boycott against the two filling stations, spread through an e-mail that circulated in May 2008. I mention the e-mail with some insignificant edits: [...] it is of utmost importance to weaken these damned companies that continuously raise prices!! [...]

The rallying cry is to hit the portfolio of the companies without injuring ourselves. [...]

Customers can extremely affect enterprises’ choices: we have to use our power. [...]

The proposal is for us to no longer purchase fuel from the bigger companies, Shell and Esso, until the end of the year. [...]

When this message arrives to the “seventh” generation, we will have reached and informed 30 million customers!” But here the matter was the customers’ wallet, and we know that it is a sensible question, as shows a research study conducted by Archè between July and the beginning of September 2010, on a representative sample of the Italian population, with the purpose of identifying brand value. Italians berate enterprises that offer products not up to standard quality (14.3%), that treat employees badly (7.9%), that do not have correct behaviors (7.9%) or that show themselves as not serious (7.1%).

The last three mentioned elements, added to the entry “ethical behaviors,” constitute around 21-24% of the sum-

mons. This means that one Italian in five becomes indignant about non-ethical company's behaviors.

Archè continued by asking to people who took part in the survey to name industries of which they disapproved.

The sectors were: food (23.9%), telephone operators (15.2%) and car industries (6.6%). All are consumer goods which are extensively advertised.

The reasons were the products' poor quality (17.5%), the quality of service (10.9%), behavior consumers considered unethical (10.8%) and manufacturing faults (6.6%).

This is to say that "the crowd" criticizes all things that touch the wallet.

This is to say – also – that the Gulf of Mexico is far, and that trouble that is far away is felt less sharply, and so the opinion-making consumers (the richer North America – i.e. the two coasts far from the South where the disaster happened) and Europe, didn't care so much of this.

And after some weeks of indignation, journalists focused on other matters. Cars are still running on BP's fuel.

If that is how things are, the attack through class actions on companies that are mistaken (as in the case of BP) have an explanation.

Class action is a collective legal action for solving a common matter.

Generally, class actions aim at economic compensation for victims of smoke, asbestos, poisoning, victims of a disaster, of a financial robbery or of something else which



several people ran up against which they could not defend themselves against (or whose defense would have been inadequate).

Generally, there are also the lawyers who earn in these situations, as for Ribbeck Law Chartered of Chicago, which over the past year is also running after Toyota. But there is not only that.

The Ribbeck firm obtained, for itself and for its clients, multimillionaire refunds from the more famous airline companies of the world, such as Singapore Airlines and Swissair. There's nothing further to say, obviously.

Whoever is wrong pays, but, as in the BP's case, it pays and then continues to operate.

For BP the refund is like a slap (or, more accurately, the reproach) for a child who steals candy. When the pain is gone the gluttony prevails.

**NOW, I'M GOING TO TELL YOU WHAT
HAPPENED TO BP AND SO WHY IT IS WORTH
WILE TO USE ANOTHER FILLING STATION.**

A platform explodes. Three months later, the CEO of the company that owns the platform is relocated to Siberia.

It seems like a movie, with a plot that relies on a series of communication blunders.

The result: BP's brand is worth much less than before and Mr. Hayward has to put his swimsuit away in a drawer for an indeterminate period.

On April 20, 2010, the BP's oil-plant "Deepwater Horizon" explodes and catches on fire in the Gulf of Mexico. Two days later, the platform sinks.

Petroleum spreads in the sea. On the 27th of April, BP announces that it is doing its utmost to keep the environmental consequences to a minimum.

The day after, the company declares that its submarine robots failed to stop the oil blowout.

On the 30th of April, Tony Hayward, the company's CEO, states that BP will clean and pay for the damages.

The following day, President Obama visits the accident site. On the 3rd of March, Tony Hayward meets the US public authorities (under the relational aspect, it will be a catastrophe) and in parallel it turns out that BP would have contacted some of Alabama's fishers with the intent to bribe them so that they won't denounce the company.

On the 4th of March, BP is under siege, and on the 5th it is clear that Tony Hayward should refine his diplomatic abilities.

At this stage, politicians decide to hit the gas. Ken Salazar, US Secretary of the Interior, states that "serious mistakes led to the catastrophe," and it turns out that the BP's spending for lobbyists has risen incredibly.

On the 7th of May, Tony Hayward returns to the submarine pit and, two days after, he renews the refund's promise.

Since they failed to patch up the oil spillage, on May 9th BP tries a new approach.

On the 13th of May there is a count of the proceedings initiated against BP: There are 100.

The company's shares plummet. The day after, Obama renews the pressure on BP.

On the 15th of May Tony Hayward diminishes the disaster and on the 17th he declares that the last solution to stop the spillage will succeed.

On the 18th of May, crude oil arrives on the coast of Florida.

On the 20th, BP is accused of attempting to hide the scope of the damage and Alaska's District Attorney starts a legal action against the company.

On the 22nd of May, Obama blames BP for the disaster and appoints an investigative commission.

On the 24th the US government continues to breathe down BP's neck, so much so that the company appoints an independent mediator for managing government's requests on the 26th of May.

On the 27th BP temporarily stops, due to technical problems, the "Top Kill" operation that should have blocked the spillage from the pit.

On the 30th the "Top Kill" operation fails. BP relaunches its quest for a solution and at last on June 5th it is announced that the last efforts are succeeding.

On the 15th of June, Lamar Mckay, Chairman and President of BP America, is called to testify in front of a US Congress commission.

The commission members asked many times for excuses



but it is been difficult to obtain them. June 16th is Hayward's time.

His testimony will not favor BP. The CEO will try again to diminish the accusations and to filibuster.

On the 18th of June he will pass the baton on to Bob Dudley and, on the 27th, Hayward will be sent to Siberia for heading an enterprise of BP's Group.

From the yearly international survey conducted by Edelman, the Trust Barometer, it emerges that the vast majority of people (90% in the 2011 survey) agree that a CEO has to communicate frequently and honestly during a crisis, taking all responsibility upon himself (85% of people think so), in addition to protecting customers and employees. Mistakes to be avoided include trying to minimize damages and to justify oneself.

When I questioned BP about the matter, I received many evasive answers and many doors slammed in my face.

In the end they saw my writing and signaled some inaccuracies, and they specified that, however, they didn't consider opportune to approve my text.

One of my "big" mistakes was the fact that Tony Hayward hasn't been sent to Siberia by BP (... he probably chose that happy destination for the weather).

While my other mistake was related to the certain matter of suspected fishermen's corruption in Alabama (to keep their mouths shut), and in this case BP told me that the fishermen of Alabama haven't been corrupted (I took note

of this). Translation: Nothing substantial!

NOW, I'M GOING TO TELL YOU ABOUT KINDNESS.

Kindness, in my opinion, is a systemic factor. It there is, or it is not.

Where it exists, it permeates an enterprises's initiatives. Kindness is a way to do things politely.

The company which moves itself in the market like a bull in a china shop is not kind, and society doesn't know what to do with these kinds of out-of-range entities.

As I mentioned in the title, I proposed that all is well that ends well. But this is not true.

This detestable phrase is used by those who want to cover problems, not solve them. It is a phrase that justifies gain at all costs because at the end what counts is to make money, and people don't care if, along the way, there is a bundle of mischief.

As Eugen Herrigel wrote in his book, "Zen in the Art of Archery," what counts is the gesture to reach the goal, not the goal itself.

The dynamics of kindness demand exercise to reach perfection, but above all demand an understanding that there are things that can and cannot be done.

I report a passage from Herrigel's essay, in which the author deals with concentration on breathing and the troublesome situation when, while we try to reach inner quiet, centered

on our breath, thousands of thoughts, moods, sensations and other elements emerge and disturb the practice.

But... “[...] If we welcome with serenity what arrives, continuing to quietly breathe we get used to assist it like mere spectators, until we are tired of the show.

And so we gradually reach an abandonment like a person who is half-asleep before falling asleep. It is to avoid sliding in definitely.

And this danger is handled with a peculiar jerk of concentration, similar to a person who pulls himself together because, even if exhausted by a waking night, he knows that his life depends from his vigilance; and if this jerk succeeded even only one time, it will possible to repeat it.”

**THIS IS A THOUGH TO SAY THAT THE
ENERGY FOR DOING IS PRESENT, IT ONLY
MUST BE DISCOVERED.**

Systemic kindness, therefore, in my opinion, is an oily attitude that allows mechanics to work.

When we were little children, kindness was circumscribed to good manners; today it seems to me that it has been joined with other concepts.

It seems the sum of more kindnesses. Perhaps it is the fruit of many doubts and many certitudes that have changed over time.

As you grow up, you become aware of things that you didn't see before, or that were simply outside your visual



and perceptive reach.

You knew intuitively that such things could exist, but you had not visited these territories yet and you couldn't speak of them with a complete consciousness.

The kind society, as I imagine it and as the term suggests to me, is populated by good intentions and optimal practices in relationships among people, companies, between companies and public institutions, and between the third sector and all society.

Society is not immaculate.

There are opportunists and "differently honest" people. Opportunists take advantage of a kind heart.

Differently honest persons steal in general; sometimes, they corrupt.

Opportunists' speeches are apparently kind, but in reality there is nothing behind their words.

The kindness of an opportunist is basic, childlike. It looks like the kindness of certain tailors that, in order to sell you a suit, praise the way you wear it.

"This jacket fits you perfectly!" they say, when in reality it emphasizes your defects -- because not all of us are like George Clooney, who probably wears any suit perfectly. But so it is, the tailor performed his kindness.

Why disappoint a customer!

Translated into a graphic symbol, the society of kindness that I imagine includes immaculate environments and muddy ones; it is similar to the Yin-Yang symbol.

Black and white with two infiltrated dots in order to balance extremes, because too much kindness becomes boring after a little while. In the same way too much opportunism is not credible in the end.

Kindness needs both evidence and its contrary.

Long live the rude people, liars, thieves and corrupters who help us to remember how pleasant is to not to be like them.

I would like to do what we know it is possible to do, without twisting, and with determination.

I would like to delegate the power to do to courageous people who respect freedom.

I would like to rely on someone who fulfills promises and who, when mistaken, formulates new hypotheses.

The kind world I have in mind is simple.

Kindness, according to me, is a systemic ingredient that helps us feel well together.

CONCLUSIONS.

I believe kindness has to occupy the role in society for contributing to the maintenance of two values: doubt and fallibility. What we know may be not true and, probably, to some degree, is false. So it is necessary to continually reconsider a concept's truthfulness. An attitude like this towards things is earnest. Honesty is a great theme in present society.

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AUTHOR

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Mirko Nesurini has worked simultaneously in three continents for a good part of the companies ranked in the global Fortune 500 for the last 15 years. At 30 years old, Time Magazine considered him a leader, and he has been among the younger people to become a part of Visarte and of the Art Directors Club in New York City. He has won worldwide branding and corporate image awards. He inspired and continues to head Work Style, a global thinktank with more than a thousand representatives who work in 35 countries. He has published articles in magazines worldwide and, in the last ten years, five books on branding matters. He loves seals, for their particular courage in throwing themselves into cold water.

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Masiar Pasquali has an Italian father and an Iranian mother, and he grew up in Tuscany. He worked as stage photographer for music, theatre, dance and different events. He has done many personal and collective exhibitions. His photographs have been published in newspapers and international periodicals.

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GENTLETUDE

Gentletude is a neologism, which brings together the word “gentle” with the concept of “attitude.”

It pursues the aims of a better world, purified from violence, arrogance and rudeness. A world where we care and pay attention to the other, and balance good sense and equilibrated competitiveness.

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