

How to Become a Better Person - Transcript

Once we're over about 12 years old, we're seldom encouraged to be nice. We're expected to make efforts in all kinds of areas, chiefly around work. But the idea of expending energy thinking about and then practicing the art of niceness sounds bizarre, even eerie. That's why we've drawn up a checklist of 10 virtues that we think matter more than ever in the modern age.

Resilience

This is the art of keeping going, even when things are looking dark;
of accepting reversals as normal;
of refusing to frighten others with one's own fears;
and of remembering that human nature is, in the end, reassuringly tough.

Empathy

The capacity to connect imaginatively with the sufferings and unique experiences of another person. The courage to become someone else and look back at oneself with honesty.

Patience

We lose our temper because we believe that things should be perfect. We've grown so good in some areas like putting men on the moon, we're ever less able to deal with things that still insist on going wrong: traffic, government, and other people. We should grow calmer and more forgiving by getting more realistic about how things actually tend to go.

Sacrifice

We're hard-wired to seek our own advantage, but also have this miraculous ability, very occasionally, to forego our own satisfactions in the name of someone or something else. We won't ever manage to raise a family, love someone else or save the planet if we don't keep up with the art of sacrifice.

Politeness

Politeness has a bad name. We often assume it's about being fake, which is meant to be bad, as opposed to really ourselves, which is meant to be good. However, given what most of us are really like deep down, we should spare others too much exposure to our deeper selves. We need to learn manners, which aren't evil. They're the necessary internal rules of civilization. Politeness is very linked to tolerance; to a capacity to live alongside people whom one won't necessarily agree with, but at the same time, won't be able to avoid.

Humour

Seeing the funny sides of situations and oneself doesn't sound very serious, but it's integral to wisdom, because it's a sign that one's been able to put a benevolent finger on the gap between what we want to happen and what life can actually provide.

Like anger, humour springs from disappointment, but it's disappointment optimally channelled. It's one of the best things we can do with our sadness.

Self-awareness

To know oneself is to try not to blame others for one's troubles and moods, to have a sense of what's going on inside oneself and what actually belongs to the world.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness means a long memory of all the times when we wouldn't have got through life without someone cutting us some slack.

It's recognizing that living with others isn't possible without excusing errors.

Hope

The way the world is now is only a pale shadow of what it could one day be.

We're still only at the beginning of history.

As you get older, despair becomes far easier, almost reflex, whereas in adolescence it was still cool and adventurous.

Pessimism isn't necessarily deep; nor optimism shallow.

Confidence

The greatest projects and schemes die for no grander reason than that we don't dare.

Confidence isn't arrogance; it's based on a constant awareness of how short life is, and how little we ultimately lose from risking everything.

Let's try to keep these in mind and practice them a little every day.