

Think Tank: Pay it forward

Speakers:

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Amy Hopkins: They say kindness is like a boomerang. It always returns. If you're looking for a way to make a difference, big or small, you're in the right place. Welcome to the Think Tank podcast. Hi everyone. This is Amy Hopkins. I'm a licensed clinical social worker and I'm here with Angee Bell communications manager and Lynn Borteck, an LCSW as well. Ladies, I cannot believe we're in September and the holidays are just around the corner. I've only got a couple of months before I have to start stressing about how to make the perfect turkey. How are you guys feeling about time flying by so quickly?

Lynn Borteck: Personally, I am starting to feel really, really sad as the summer is winding down and kids are getting ready to go back to school. Summer is my very favorite time of the year and I live for it and I'm sad to see it go.

Angee Bell: Oh, yeah summer's been good. I usually like it a lot and we get out and do a lot of things. This year we haven't really done hardly anything. Everything's gone so fast. Work is busy. Life is busy. It's funny. I'm actually really grateful to be on the podcast today and talking with you guys because it's like a moment for me to slow down.

Amy Hopkins: Yeah. It's definitely nice to have a little bit of quiet during your week. And this, I think we all enjoy the podcast and spending time together and talking about these things. And the good thing, I love the end of summer because it's hotter than Hades here right now. So Lynn, I'm sorry that you're sad, but I'm ready for it to move on. I'm ready for fall. The good thing about this time of year is it tends to be, when we start thinking about service projects and charitable work and giving back to our communities, this is the time that we get inspired to spread some joy. And our hope today is to give you some ideas that you can do now, and maybe some things that you can do all year long. So Angee,

I'm going to turn this to you first. What are some ways to give back all year long?

Angee Bell:

I think there's so many ways to give back and they don't have to involve a ton of effort on your part, but they can make a big difference in people's every day. I've read a lot of posts about people paying for the cart behind them in the grocery store line and the checkout line, or even through a drive-through. That's always a nice surprise. You can't always do that, but sometimes it's pretty fun to do that and look back. Even you don't look back, just move forward and just know that you helped somebody out is it's a nice little surprise. I know a colleague at work who mentioned a neat way to give back. She carries small care packets in her car with small items like packets of tissue, Band-Aids, small water bottles, and a granola bar. And then when she sees someone who would appear to be homeless or has a sign out asking for help on the side of the road, she pulls over and gives them one of those packets.

And I think that's such a neat little way to do that. You're giving them things that they probably need and they can use right then. So it's a really neat little idea that she had. Or if you see someone older or someone who needs help carrying groceries or something heavy, ask them if they could use a hand, it's nice to always help people out. I always think it's nice when people hold a door open for someone when they have a lot of things in their hands or have kids they're managing and trying to get under control, it's nice to just hold the door open for a minute. And lastly, this may not seem like giving back, but I think that thanking people and recognizing their work or something that they did can really go a long way. It doesn't have to be something in the job. It could be in your life, but just thanking people for things. Those little nuggets of recognition and gratitude can really be a big inspiration in someone's day.

Amy Hopkins:

So Angee, a lot of what you talked about was kindness to strangers, like people that you don't know, the person behind you in line, or seeing someone carrying a lot of bags. And I think that takes a lot of courage and it just is that thing about you send somebody off with something great. And you hope that they'll do something nice like that for them in the future. So Lynn, your turn. What would you say are some simple acts of kindness that you can do for people that you know to pay it forward?

Lynn Borteck: I think going back to what Angee said, I think a really overlooked little piece of kindness about thanking people and recognizing things that they do is really an important thing. And I have found in my own family, actually my own spouse, that he reacts really, really positively when I recognize his having done something. Even if it's something pretty routine like remembering to take the trash out or something, if I just say, "Hey, thanks for remembering to take the trash out" or something, it really lights him up and it makes a difference.

I find then that he also returns that to me and it makes us more appreciative on an everyday basis. So I love those ideas, Angee. I think my neighbor, in fact, does a simple act of kindness for me many times, which is that he brings my ... I hate to be talking about trash again, but sometimes I see when I'm looking at my window, that he just brings in my trash can for no particular reason, which is really nice. You could offer to babysit for a new mom or somebody who's having a hard time getting everything to work out in terms of having kids and having a job or going to the grocery store or whatever, taking meals to someone who is sick or disabled or whatever. I think that there are so many really simple things that we might overlook every day that we can do.

Angee Bell: Yeah. It's funny, you mentioned that bringing your trashcan thing in, because our neighbor sometimes has mowed our lawn, like parts of our lawn for us if we haven't gotten to it. I think it's so nice.

Amy Hopkins: Wow, that is incredibly kind and it makes it like a huge difference. That's like one less thing you have to do. And I'm sure Angee, that probably makes you want to do something nice for them too.

Angee Bell: Yeah. Sometimes we'll do the same thing. We'll just continue a little more on this way in the front yard and mow their front yard.

Lynn Borteck: Well, the other thing that it does is it really helps create a sense of community as well because when people in your neighborhood do little things to help you out without even being asked, it really creates a really nice sense of community, I think.

Amy Hopkins: Yeah. Which is exactly what I was just going to say, Lynn, so that couldn't have been any more perfect, because Angee talked about paying the kindness forward to strangers, people that aren't in your every day. And you talked a lot about talking about your husband and your neighbors, and the people that you do know. And then there's

really that third layer, building your community, giving back to your community. So this can be big or small too. This could be volunteering your time or donating to a cause you feel strongly about. This could be picking up trash as you're walking your dog and you see trash on the sidewalk. This could be waving at a neighbor that you may not know. So those little things can make a really big difference into how your community feels and how welcoming it feels.

I really think that when it comes to community causes, it's like, find something that you're passionate about, that you really love. For me and my family, with our four dogs, we're kind of overzealous when it comes to the animals. And so when the shelter here looks for volunteers to spend time with the dogs or take the dogs for walks, that's something that we love to do. So it doesn't feel like I'm doing something uncomfortable or unwanted. I am actually enjoying what I'm doing and I'm helping them out. So it really, it comes back to if we all do little things in our community, great things can happen. So Lynn, I hate to put you on the spot, but I know something that you do that is really incredible. Would you be willing to share your little thing that you do for your community?

Lynn Borteck:

Sure. We have a really active community in terms of larger community, not just my own town, but I belong to an organization where they're always doing amazing things, like they're looking for donations of shoes or they're looking for donations of clothing, and I do a ton of that. And really, I think my favorite thing is that on the Sabbath for Jewish people, which I am, I deliver meals to elderly people who celebrate the Sabbath and who don't have a way to get out to get a meal. And I bring them ... Really, I don't make them, I don't create them, we have a caterer, but I pick up a bunch of bags of a full meal, like a really full meal and deliver them to seniors who are home bound and also to elderly Holocaust survivors. And I just find that they're so appreciative. People basically, I think, are so appreciative when you do something for them. And it's not a lot for me to do, but it means a lot to them.

Angee Bell:

Wow, that is so nice. I know a friend that does Meals on Wheels and she tells me that the elders that she's delivering the food to, they really look forward to her coming because they sit down and they talk and they have a nice little conversation. And a lot of the time people who are having meals delivered might be lonely and just need that social companionship. So I'm sure you're bringing a lot of that as well. So this may not sound like much compared to what Lynn was just

talking about, but I give back in a different kind of way. I offer my design skills for different projects that people are working on. So for example, I've made a logo for a t-shirt for a family of friends that were supporting their son and a baseball finals game. They all wanted to wear the same t-shirt and have the logo.

So that was fun. I created a video of pictures of a home for a friend that was selling a house after a divorce and she had to sell her house. So that was a hard time for her. I've got those skills, so I feel like it's the least I can do to help people out from time to time. I really think that everyone has different types of skills and can help out friends and family that they know. And it doesn't always have to be a more traditional way of giving back or helping out. Even if you're helping a local community center, sometimes they need help in those different types of ways, right? You may not be the one delivering the meals, but maybe you're making a flyer or maybe you're helping with some of the administrative work that they have to do. So there's a lot of different ways that you can get back utilizing the skills that you have to the best of your ability.

Lynn Borteck: I was just thinking that all of those are such creative ways to give back. And I was just thinking that supporting people is also a kindness. I have a really close friend who lost a loved one at the beginning of the summer, and I've been making a point of calling her at least twice a week to check up on her. She lives far away from me, so I can't visit her, but I know that she has really appreciated it. And I'm not only doing it because I want to be kind, it's because I am supportive and loving towards her. But those kinds of things I think can get overlooked. Just being there for someone is a kindness.

Angee Bell: That's a great example. I know when a friend of mine calls me out of the blue, it's always like brightens up my day and I'm like, wow. You know, I might be having a bad day and then I'll get a text from a friend or just a phone call and be like, "Hey, so good to hear from you." And just staying connected like that and reaching out to people, especially in their times of need, is so helpful.

Amy Hopkins: Yeah. It really is. And really it what we're talking about here is being kind in big ways, small ways, and every chance you get. So the three of us asked some of our friends to share things that they do all year long to give back. And here's some things that they spoke of.

Angee Bell: One of the things was helping someone update their resume and find a job. And that seems like a such a simple thing, but that can really make a big difference, especially for younger people who are first getting into a career. It can be really helpful too if you happen to be in a career for a while, you have a circle of contacts in your network that you can refer someone to, or even offer to be a reference for someone.

Lynn Borteck: That's a great idea. The career boost can be great to help somebody network. And also, even selling things online that you don't need anymore and are in good shape and then donating the money to your favorite charity, that can help. I know during the pandemic, when things were really tough, my husband and I both made an effort to be very generous tippers and to try to really thank people for the things that they were doing, like in a restaurant or in a takeout or something like that.

Angee Bell: Yeah. Especially during COVID, because it was so hard to be working during that period of time. We're still in COVID, don't get me wrong. But I think it was during 2020, it was such a challenge. Speaking of donations, I think taking lightly used or like new items to donation centers is a great way to give back. I've been doing this for many years now, ever since I was a kid we did it with my mom. She would always, we'd all put our old stuff in a bag and take it down to the Goodwill. And I just carried that on with my kids. You know, it's really good for kids especially because they grow out of clothes so fast.

And if you're like my daughter with her fashion sense that would grow. Every few months she'd want to switch to the latest style and be tired of the latest clothes that she had. So we always had that opportunity. You could also donate furniture too. I know when I moved a few years ago to this house and consolidated some things, I ended up getting rid of a lot of things and I posted them on the local community site and man, boom, they were gone in a matter of days, sometimes a matter of hours and it was really a win-win for me. I got rid of them fast and someone got something new for free. So really turned out pretty nicely.

Amy Hopkins: So yeah, Angee, we do the same thing in my family. We have taken on the domestic violence shelter. And so we will gather clothes from lots of people and find out what they need and then we take that stuff up there to them. I never get to meet these people. I just know that I'm helping. And when they're struggling, it makes a big difference. One of

the people that I surveyed said they write thank you cards. And I know what that feels like. We all love to get something in the mail that's not a bill, and getting a handwritten thank you card or a thank you letter or I'm thinking of you, it means so much. So this is like something that she does. And again, it's not a big thing, but it makes a huge difference.

Lynn Borteck: I think everything has its good side and bad side. One of the good sides of the pandemic was that everybody got out of their house and you got to see everyone. I got to meet neighbors I never knew I had. And it was just fun when I go out and I walk my dog, I always wave, we wave back and forth to other people who are walking and so forth. And it makes the whole place feel like a friendlier ... It feels like a friendlier world. It feels like we're all connected. And I think that connection is something that we all need, especially in these days. So I think that's good. And I think something else that gets overlooked is just saying, I love you to the people in your life who are really close to you and who you do love. And I think it's nice to think about how good it makes you feel to have someone say, I love you. And remember that they're probably going to feel similarly when you say that to them.

Amy Hopkins: Yeah. And again, I think that those three words, they mean something. They're a big deal, and it's important to say them. One of my dearest friends, she volunteers as a crisis counselor for the crisis text line, and helps people during their most vulnerable moments. I look up to her so much for her ability to do that. I think she's incredible.

Lynn Borteck: That's so funny that you mentioned helping people during their most vulnerable moments. I actually took a really bad fall at our supermarket about two weeks ago. Somebody had left something slippery on the floor and boom, down I went. And everything in my arms, I didn't have a cart, but everything in my arms went flying, including a glass jar of spaghetti sauce. So you can just imagine the shape that I was in and you really can't believe how many people stopped to help me. There were so many people who stopped to help me and said, what can I do? Do you want me to pick something up, blah, blah, blah. And it was just like, wow, it's really nice to see people, they're seeing me in a very vulnerable state, which I didn't like too much. It was a little embarrassing and it certainly didn't feel good to flop on the floor, but how nice that people stopped and really wanted to help.

Amy Hopkins: Yeah. It took the steam out of the embarrassment a little bit to have all of that support and kindness around you, I'm sure. So we've given a lot of examples of people that can do big, amazing things and others perform just simple acts of kindness and decency to others, like taking in a meal or buying flowers or going on a walk with someone or just spending time listening. And I think what I've heard from all of this is that both are equally important. The big and the small are equally important. And really, it just all adds up to what's good.

I hope that you feel inspired today to find a way, big or small, to give back. The best part about it, it improves the life of another person and we feel connected to each other and the world. And it makes us feel better. It's that boomerang coming back. When we do good, when we are kind, it multiplies. One little pebble dropped in the water can create a ripple that creates another and another and another. Don't underestimate the power you have to make a difference. Until next time, thanks for joining the Think Tank podcast. Bye everyone.

Angee Bell: Bye.

Lynn Borteck: Bye. Everybody. Be kind.

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