Why Kindness?

Kindness is a big, powerful word.

Kindness means doing something for someone else with no expectation of return. If you do something expecting a return favor, it is no longer kindness. It is more like a contract.

Kindness is moving beyond yourself. Kindness is much more than being nice. There is a love aspect to kindness.

You can sit on your couch and be nice, respectful, considerate, empathetic and even compassionate. But to be kind, you have to get off of your couch and do something for someone else.

Kindness is an action word. It's a word that can change a family, a neighborhood, a school, a city, a nation and, ultimately, our world.

Mayor Tom Tait

Kindness often requires courage and overcoming fear. Bravery and kindness are closely linked on a deep level.

Making Kindness Contagious

2004 was my last year in a 10-year stint of serving as a city councilman in Anaheim. During my last few months in office, I noticed banners displayed around our city that read, "Make Kindness Contagious."

A friend of mine contacted me and suggested I meet the man putting these signs up. He turned out to be a holistic doctor from Argentina living in Anaheim. His name is Edward Jaievsky.

When we met he told me a story about his daughter, Natasha, who died from a car accident while they were on a family vacation.

Upon returning home Jaievsky said so many friends and neighbors told stories about how 6-year-old Natasha constantly wrote and talked about kindness.

He found beautiful works of art and impactful words about kindness tucked away in her bedroom closet and drawers.

Natasha's wish was for a kinder world.

He then told me something very profound: In medicine, you can either treat the symptoms, or you can stimulate the body to heal from within.

That was what he did as a holistic doctor.

"The same applies to a city," he said. "One can either treat the symptoms or one can stimulate the city to heal from within. And I think that has something to do with kindness."

That's when the light bulb went off in my head. Maybe it was because I had just spent the past 10 years attempting to treat the city's symptoms that I knew he was right — that there was a better way to fix our problems.

City of Kindness

Six years later, that statement was the reason I ran for mayor under a platform of creating a culture of kindness in order to heal our city from within.

Culture is developed by a group of people adhering to specific core values. I know from business that the value of any organization comes from its culture.

The best person to develop a culture in any organization is its leader. In a company, the cultural leader is typically the chief executive officer. So, if a CEO can develop a culture in a company, I thought, why can't a mayor develop a culture in a city?

And if a mayor can develop a culture of kindness, then I believe, everything in that city will get better.

Imagine a city that has a culture of being kind to one another. It's a city where one is expected to do kind acts as a sort of civic duty. It's a city where the chance of everyone doing a kind act is just a little greater than it would have been otherwise. It's a city of kindness.

A More Resilient City

If we can make that a reality, everything gets better. Certainly crime will drop, bullying at schools will drop, senior citizen neglect will drop, alcohol and drug addiction will drop, and so on.

We know kindness has the power to connect people and build community. It is the mortar that connects the blocks that builds a city's social infrastructure.

A community connected by acts of kindness is safer from crime and more prepared for an inevitable disaster, either natural or manmade.

Kindness is what makes a city, a school, a neighborhood, or a family more resilient. It makes us healthier, individually and collectively.

In fact, I think kindness is the antidote to all the bad things going on these days. To quote Lady Gaga when she spoke to the U.S. Conference of Mayors, "Kindness costs nothing but it's priceless."

In Anaheim, we refer to ourselves as a City of Kindness. Not that we are always kind, but that's what we are striving to be. The important thing is that we're getting there, and we're being led by the kids.

Million Acts of Kindness

In 2015, the students of the Anaheim Elementary School District completed 1 million acts of kindness. This has changed our schools. Although there are no academic studies measuring the collateral effects of this effort, we do know that each individual act of kindness has the power to transform a life. And the kids did a million of them.

The 1 million acts of kindness was an organized effort under the City of Kindness umbrella and had a huge positive effect on our city.

However, I believe an even greater impact comes from the countless individual acts of kindness done quietly throughout our city, every day and done when no one is watching.

Whether it's engaging in a conversation with someone who is homeless, or driving a neighbor to the hospital to get her chemotherapy treatment, or simply asking someone in need the question, "How can I help?"

It is those actions that will truly make Anaheim a City of Kindness. And, it is all of those acts of kindness becoming contagious that will ultimately lead to Natasha's dream of a kinder world becoming a reality.