

The Radical Kindness Warrior Handbook

What to Do

When You DON'T Know What to Do

And You Know You Should Do

SOMETHING

Because

CRUELTY
is NOT COOL

by Vicki Hannah Lein

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Radical Kindness Warrior

Cardinal Rules

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1. Never, never, never
Do anything to put yourself
in jeopardy or to make
the situation worse.</p> | <p>2. Always, always, always
do something to
make the situation better.</p> |
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Preface

The Radical Kindness Warrior Handbook takes on this question:

What do you do when you don't know what to do but know you should do something because cruelty is not cool?

Here is my answer: You make it up. You stay brave and creative and try as hard as you can to take a stand for justice while never returning evil for evil, anger for anger, insult for insult.

Easy? No. Worthy? Absolutely.

Setting the Bar High: The Golden Rule

I am action oriented. Theory is great, but I want to put ideas into practice. I want to know what to do when the rubber hits the road. I like it even better when the rubber chicken meets the road less traveled.

Growing up, I wanted to be a good person and do the right thing. When I was a child and dinosaurs roamed the land, I was taught the Golden Rule: do unto others as you would have them do unto you. That made sense to me. Treat other people the way you want to be treated.

Putting the Golden Rule into action did not seem too complicated: Go first. Be polite. Help someone up when they fall. Offer a tissue to someone who is crying. Make sure you do not leave the house with broccoli in your teeth.

What do you do, though, when your middle school girlfriends decide that one of the girls in your group is now not worth speaking to? Do you risk being ostracized yourself to stand by your friend?

What do you do when someone makes a joke at your friend's expense. Do you laugh along so no one makes a joke about you?

What do you do when a fight is breaking out and you are a lowly cocktail waitress? Do you wait for the big, burly male bartender to take care of it or do as I did and watch impotently as a drunk man knocks his friend over the hood of a car?

I call this lack of action that haunts you for decades a "Cowardice Hangover," but more about that later.

Thirty years ago my dad called me and started telling me a racist joke. How could I listen to such a joke and maintain any self-respect? My dad was a violent alcoholic, and I had been afraid of him my whole life. What would someone who practiced the Golden Rule do?

Should I listen politely, so as not to damage our already strained relationship?

Should I confront him aggressively about his racism? Standing up to my father usually led to some kind of violence and no resolution. Been there. Seen that. Traumatized by that.

With my heart pounding and my hand shaking as I held the receiver to my ear, I said, “Dad, I don’t listen to those kinds of jokes.”

Thus ended my relationship with my father.

A Kindness Warrior is Born

That day I decided to leave behind forever my practice of being a coward. Feeling the sweet taste of courage coursing through my body, I made a vow to get a little braver every day.

I started being more honest about how I felt and what I wanted. I decided I would never make a decision based on fear. I would feel fear and I would do whatever I thought was right.

When you practice something, you get good at it. I’ve had decades now of practicing being a little braver. My courage muscle is much stronger today than it was when I stood up to my father.

My strong courage muscle came in handy when I lost my central vision due to a rare genetic disorder in my early forties. Would I practice being afraid and shrink from challenges or would I take that one next brave step in front of me?

I grabbed my rubber chicken and chose the road less traveled, and I have never regretted it for one moment. I’m still getting a little braver every day. I still feel fear and do it anyway. I am able to find the humor in a situation almost immediately, most of the time.

Joining the Radical Kindness Warrior Tribe

I am guessing you are reading this book because you want some help putting the Golden Rule into practice. You are interested in where the rubber chicken meets the road less traveled, at least I hope you are. Having a sense of humor makes this journey much more interesting and fun.

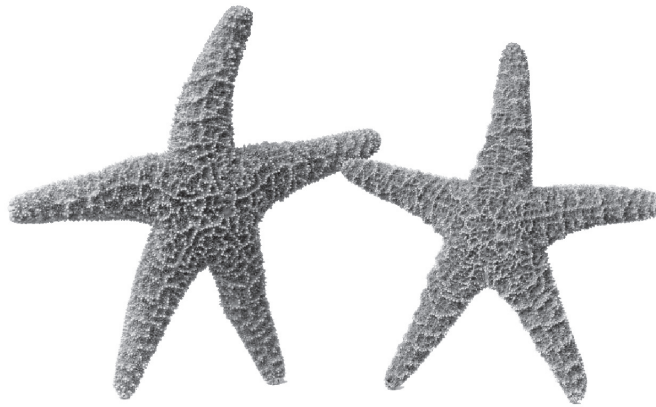
Join hands with me and millions of others as we attempt to do the right thing for the right reasons. Trust that the right results will happen in their own time. (Paraphrased from my dear friend, Freebo, the sexiest 70 year old rock star you will ever meet.)

Vicki Hannah Lein,

Radical Kindness Warrior for over 50 years

***“Never look down on anybody unless
you’re helping him up.”***

—Jesse Jackson



Introduction

***“The smallest act of kindness is worth more than the
grandest intention.”***

— Oscar Wilde

In case you are ever forced to write a book report on this book, here is the theme: Cruelty is not cool and kindness is the balm.

Whew! You get an A! Yahoo! Now, on to the serious stuff.

I’m ROCKIN’



**this extra
chromosome!**

How Did this Radical Kindness Warrior Campaign Get Started?

My grandson Carter has Down Syndrome. A few months ago my son-in-law sent me a link to a video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=oc_K9c24R5o, (you can also Google “What Would You Do with Down Syndrome” to find it.)

This video shows a young man with Down’s bagging groceries and getting insulted by customers. Watching this video was deeply distressing. Even when I found out the young man was an actor and the purpose of the video was to see what people would do, I was still

so upset I was moved to take action.

Most people did nothing to stop the abuse. One woman justified her inaction by saying, “Well, I didn’t want to get involved. Some people just need to blow off steam.”

“Blowing off steam” sounds harmless and it probably is most of the time. Steam is hot, however, and it burns. If you have a wound in you that causes a lot of steam to build up in you, heal it. Otherwise, you will be leaking your pain onto innocent victims, such as the young man bagging groceries.

Could this be my precious grandson someday? Would people just stand around and let him be called dummy? Would people stand and do nothing and allow people to talk about how “those slow retards” didn’t deserve jobs because “we normal people” were in such a hurry?

I know I can’t get everyone to understand how much these “small” acts of cruelty diminish all of us, but I can sure try.

The “Cruelty is Not Cool Campaign” is Born

I believe most people would like to do something when they see cruelty at work, but they do not know what to do. They don’t want to get attacked themselves, they don’t know what to say, yet they are uncomfortable with their inaction.

Though the emotional debris of the incident may stay with them for days or even years, though they may regret their decision to observe passively, still the abuse is allowed to go mostly unchallenged.

Abuse must not go unchallenged. I am writing this book to change all that.

I want to give people something they can do in any abusive situation. I want everyone to walk confidently in the world, knowing they can take care of themselves and others while retaining their serenity, integrity, and their sense of humor.

Note to anyone writing a book report: I just listed my intention. You might want to include that in your report. You may use the photo of my darling grandson if you wish.

Spread the Word: Cruelty is Not Cool

What if people knew in their bones that cruelty was not cool? What if everyone, the 97% of us who have a conscience anyway, all “got” that.

What if we all knew for sure that a joke is not a joke if someone has to pay? What if we did not feel overwhelmed with emotion and doubt when we met cruelty? What if our brains kept working, we felt confident, and we had some ideas ready to try?

The world would change in a heartbeat—that’s what would happen. There is nothing trivial about taking a stand to spread the word that cruelty is not cool.

The World is Ripe for Change

I've been figuring out how to take a stand for justice while preserving my physical and emotional safety for over 50 years now. I'm good at it. I've been a teacher, an elementary school counselor, an educational consultant, and an international speaker for decades. This is what I do and what I have done my whole life.

In this book I share a few of the techniques I have gathered over the years that have served me well. These little tricks have helped children and adults all over the planet make their piece of the world a better place, a place safe to learn and make mistakes and be different.

This is Not Just About Stopping Those Bullies Out There

You could call this an anti-bullying program, but it is much more than that. First, calling someone a bully is shaming. You've glued their cruel behavior to "them." And, by the way, we are all "them." We have all been bullied and we all have bullied others. Calling people names adds cruelty to the mix and inadvertently perpetuates the problem.

Some people believe the only thing they are really good at is being bad. Confirming their "badness" invites them to commit to being even "badder." "Okay," they say to themselves, "you think I'm bad now? Watch and see how bad I can get!"

We are all innocent and we are all guilty.

I will return to this theme many times in this book. We need to understand how important it is to take action every time we feel someone's dignity or emotional or physical safety is at risk.

We need to stand up, speak up, and never strike back.

Note: A good quote for your book report.

If we observe abuse and do nothing, we are silently saying we condone the behavior. Neutrality is an illusion and a cop out. If I allow someone to tell a racist joke and I do nothing, I am saying I agree with racism and the appropriateness of telling such jokes. I am modeling for all to see, and the children are always watching, that abuse is just fine with me.

Why We are Struck Dumb in the Face of Cruelty

When you are the target of cruelty or a bystander, you don't always know what to do. How could you? We get precious little examples of what to do when cruelty is taking over our environment.

We often remain mute because all we can think to do is yell right back, making the situation worse and risking our own safety. It is much better to do nothing than put ourselves at risk.

I agree. It is much better to do nothing than put ourselves at risk. Doing “nothing,” however, is actually doing something: condoning the abuse.

I give you 21 suggestions you can do besides doing nothing or making the situation worse. Will they all work perfectly every time? Sure, and while we are at it, I have a bridge to sell you.

Of course these suggestions do not work perfectly every time. Nothing works perfectly every time. Even simple, old aspirin kills people sometimes. We still use aspirin, though, and it saves lives. We need to be wise when using aspirin, and we need to be wise when choosing how we will respond to cruelty.

Respond every time you see cruelty in action? Yes. Respond with a magic potion, something unexpected, radical, and often humorous: Radical Kindness.

What is Radical Kindness?

“Kindness is the most powerful force on earth.”

—Father Greg Boyle, author of *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion*

Radical Kindness is not wimpy. It is not tepid or apologetic. When you decide to take a stand for Radical Kindness, you become a Radical Kindness Warrior.

Radical Kindness (RK) Warriors do not hang their heads, hoping that hateful, hurtful behavior will stop on its own. As an RK Warrior, you will take action every time, every time you feel action is required.

Avoiding the Cowardice Hangover

RK Warriors are action oriented. Most if not all of us have experienced situations in the past where we failed to take action and still regret our lack of courage.

We know what it is like to live with a “Cowardice Hangover,” and we’ve committed to never standing by and allowing hurtful behavior to go unremarked again. We will have the courage to be silly, be misunderstood, and pretend to lose contacts we do not wear, but we will never, never, never allow our fear to stop us from doing what is right.

We are all harmed by cruelty, even when we are not the target. It is a cosmic joke to think that we can choose to be neutral. Not choosing to act is still choosing to act.

Choosing to play it safe turns out to not be safe either. Observing cruel behavior, even if you are not the target, is a form of abuse called secondary abuse.

In some ways, it is almost worse to observe abuse and do nothing about it than to be the target. I say this as the only member of my family my father did not hit or scream obscenities

at. For many years, I thought I had not been abused. I imagined I had gotten off “lucky.”

It took many self help books and a few years in therapy for me to realize that the powerlessness I felt watching my father beat my mother, sister, and brother was compounded by the guilt I felt because I was the only member of my family with no bruises on my body. I hadn’t realized the bruises that did the most damage were the ones no one could see.

If I had been hit, I would have been clear that, Yes, I was abused. Watching the hitting and listening to the verbal violence was the birth of decades of timidity. I was terrified of awakening the beast, as it were, by doing anything that would direct the violence toward me.

This is why I am adamant about the **FIRST** Cardinal Rule of a Radical Kindness Warrior:

Never, never, never do anything to put yourself in jeopardy or make the situation worse.

This is also why I feel so strongly about the **SECOND** Cardinal Rule:

Always, always, always do something to make the situation better.

Ready to sign on and give this Cruelty is Not Cool Campaign a try? Great. You can start by practicing the qualities of a Radical Kindness Warrior.



The Qualities of a Radical Kindness Warrior

- K Kinesthetic.** Action is necessary to shift the situation
- I Inspiring.** Your bravery will help other people be braver.
- N Necessary.** If you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem.
- D Determined.** RK Warriors never give up.
- N Nuanced.** Subtlety is often required.
- E Energy.** RK Warriors shift the energy, never adding anger or retaliation to the fire.
- S Simple.** It is not difficult to remember to sing “Happy Birthday.”
- S Surprising.** Shifting the energy often involves engaging our biological startle reflex. RK Warriors are smart cookies, indeed.

Radical Kindness Warriors know how to keep their brains working and bring out the best in themselves and those around them. We rock! Let’s take over the world, shall we?

A Note on the Use of the term “Warrior”

“What this world needs is a new kind of army — the army of the kind.”

—Cleveland Amory

Perhaps there is a better word and I may have already found it by the time you read this book. Warrior, of course, is someone who is good at war. I believe in kindness, in the magical power of kindness, so why am I invoking an image of war? Who am I suggesting we are at war with?

Well, if pushed, I would say I am at war with apathy, inaction, injustice, bigotry, hatefulness, cruelty, and cowardice. I am not at war with any person. I’m not even at war with these behaviors. I do know that to stand up to injustice and cruelty in my life, I’ve had to create some major moxie. I had to stand up on my hind legs and make fierce energy.

The Tibetan word for warrior means the one who cultivates courage. Warriors are gentle, aware, open-hearted, and, I would say, possesses a sense of humor. This is how I am using the term “warrior.”

Overcoming Accommodation, Aggression, and Avoidance

For the first thirty years of my life, when it came to dealing with conflict I suffered from the 3 A's: Accommodation, Aggression, and Avoidance, as William Ury writes about in his book, The Power of a Positive No: How to Say No and Still Get to Yes.

I learned to accommodate, also known as groveling, from my mother. She learned to do this when she was a girl trying to survive living with her alcoholic abusive father. She called this accommodating “keeping the peace.”

I learned from my sister that aggression made a bad situation more dangerous. When my father was enraged, she would call him an asshole. He would beat her with a belt. As she screamed, I stood by silent and ashamed of my silence. I wrote an invisible note to self: “don’t talk back to anyone who is angry.”

I learned to avoid confrontation whenever possible. Groveling felt bad, but aggression for me was not an option, so I learned to go numb and avoid. My avoidance came back to me in the middle of the night as anxiety. I would grind my teeth and wake up as if I had been chased by a monster.

I was being chased by a monster and its name was cowardice.

In his marvelous book, Ury suggests we need to find our “Yes” to say a kind and firm “No”. We say “Yes” to our right to be treated respectfully always. We say “Yes” to our stand for social justice. We say “Yes” to the right of others to make mistakes without being ridiculed. We say “Yes” to the fact that we are Sacred Space.

Once we say this “Yes”, we can find the strength to say a kind and firm “No” to cruel behavior.

For me, taking a stand for my “Yes” involves a heartiness, a determination, and a fierceness of purpose that requires creating an energy field different from my normal, walk around the planet energy field. For now I’m calling this warrior energy. If you have a better term, I would love to hear from you. We could have a lively conversation I would thoroughly enjoy. We both might be changed forever after our commingling of molecules and ideas.



Getting Ready to be a Warrior: Radical Kindness Starts with You

What if every day without fail you immersed yourself in extraordinary kindness? What if every morning you wrote or sang or danced yourself into a being your own best friend? What if, instead of bludgeoning yourself with your failures and disappointments, you bathed yourself with appreciation for your courage and service to others?

Here is the answer: Science tells us you will live longer and healthier, and your brain will work better if you are happy. You will be able to love others better because you will love from fullness rather than need. You will be able to deal with daily frustrations with aplomb and be harder when the big challenges come along, as they most assuredly will.

Why are so many of us chronic givers, so generous with others, yet so stingy with ourselves?

Two answers:

ONE, when we give we are in control. We feel more powerful when we are giving rather than receiving. Receiving, even from ourselves, makes us feel vulnerable because we have to open up to receive.

I learned about this big time when I lost my vision and had to ask for help. I was humbled and healed of my arrogant belief that I had somehow been appointed “Helper” and the rest of the world were “Recipients”. You don’t have to go blind to learn to ask for help, but it helps.

SECOND, knee-jerk givers often define self-care as selfish. To a self-appointed Helper, being selfish is the gravest of all sins. Our fear of being selfish stops us before we let ourselves entertain a self-nourishing idea. We cannot even take a deep breath because we do not deserve all that oxygen. We absolutely can never, never, never be guilty of being selfish.

Being ‘selfish’ is exactly what pathological volunteers and chronic givers need to practice. They need to risk been called “selfish” and “self-indulgent” by themselves or others. To learn how to help more and better, we first need to help others less and help ourselves first.

Yikes! This might turn your world on its head! Actually, there is no “might” about it. Loving yourself first will absolutely turn your world on its head and open your heart and imagination in ways you could never have predicted.

Good. Great. This is a revolution! Radical! Try loving yourself first and you will be set free to love others better as well. It’s magic!

Yahoo!

About the 21 Suggestions

This book offers 21 suggestions of Radical Kindness interventions. They are creative, courageous, and caring. Sometimes they are ironic or even slightly wicked.

Every single one of these suggestions will appeal to every one of you. Just kidding. Some of you will not want to sing “Happy Birthday” or throw your underwear at people who are mocking mimes. Just kidding about throwing underwear, but I do wonder why so many people feel compelled to mock mimes.

I doubt very much that all 21 suggestions will appeal to everyone. Some of us are introverts. Some of us believe we can’t sing. We are all different and honoring our differences is one of the main points of this book.

After you read all of the suggestions, I am hoping your imagination will sparkle with ideas. I’m hoping you will say to yourself, “Well, I would never do that ridiculous suggestion., but I might make fart noises with my arm instead.”

I will convince you that action is necessary every time someone is being diminished, and that you have some ideas of what to do.

Vicki Loves Science

The Radical Kindness responses suggested in this book are based on neuroscience, which is why they work. In the Resource section at the end of the book, you will find many fascinating books to read if you are interested in learning more about our amazing brains.

The suggestions in this book will help you move out of being the victim of cruel behavior while remaining kind and firm yourself. They are a bit magical, if I don’t say so myself.

There is no one right response for every situation. If there were, I would not need to write this book for you would already be confident, creative, caring, and courageous in all of your interactions.

Knowing what to do in any given situation is tricky.

Your RK Warrior response will depend on:

- **The situation**
- **Your relationship with the person or people involved**
- **How you feel in that moment.**

When applying any of these suggestions, remember the Cardinal Rules:

1. Never, never, never do anything to put yourself in jeopardy or make the situation worse.
2. Always, always, always do something to make the situation better.

Unmasking Cruelty

Behind Cruelty is a Wound and Kindness is the Balm

Before responding to any hurtful comment or event, know these three truths:

FIRST, behind the mask of cruelty is a wound. People who feel good about themselves, people who are comfortable in their own skin, never make racial, sexist, or homophobic slurs. People who know they are smart never call anyone a Retard.

Men who are secure in their own masculinity do not fear other men's sexual orientation. Secure men do not feel the need to dominate other men, women, or children. They use their strength to take a stand for social justice. Like Gandhi, they speak their truth and never return evil for evil. It is a tall order, to be sure, this being a man grounded in his integrity and courage. The world needs more of them.

People who have had their boundaries respected, do not barge through other people's boundaries with comments about their bodies, their potential, their abilities, or their worthiness to occupy space on the planet. If we have not tended to our own wounds, we will pass them on. We all tend to do what has been done to us unless we wake up to our own behavior and work diligently to change it.

We Are ALL Innocent, and We Are ALL Guilty.

SECOND, we need to admit we have all called other people names, and when we did this we were never at our best. Understand this deeply and you will be free: No bad guys, just wounded guys. We are all innocent and deserve to be treated with respect always, and we are all guilty of hurting others as we have been hurt.

Remembering the wound behind the mask of cruelty will keep your brain working. You won't strike out and make the situation worse. You won't "eat the slug" you are being offered, and you won't try to pretend nothing has happened.

Radical Kindness is the Only Cure: It's the Balm.

THIRD, the only deep cure for cruelty is radical kindness. We need to be brave, creative, and never, never return evil for evil or give pain when we are hurt. We are all born as sacred space. Let's find a way to stand our ground with grace.

Taking a stand for kindness does not mean putting a target on your chest for abuse, quite the opposite. When we take a stand for kindness, we take a stand for treating everyone with respect, including ourselves.



Whatever we Practice we Get Good at, and we are always Practicing Something.

We do not want to practice being abused, nor do we want people to practice being abusive. We teach people how to treat us. When we respect ourselves, we demand respect from others and we treat everyone with respect always. That does not mean we tolerate bad behavior. Just the opposite is true. We don't practice treating ourselves or anyone else disrespectfully. RK Warriors walk through the world with confidence because they know they will do something if they run into a cruel situation. The point is you will have several kindness arrows in your quiver. There will be no need to shiver or slither away.



Always Remember:

- We are all born as sacred space and deserve to be treated with respect at all times.
- Allowing people to practice abusing you or anyone else is not respectful or kind. It is cowardly.
- It is impossible to do nothing when dealing with abuse. You are either taking action to shift the situation, or you are condoning the behavior. Neutrality is an illusion.
- Not taking action will result in a “Cowardice Hangover” that might last a lifetime.
- We are all innocent and we are all guilty.
- Radical kindness, creativity, courage, and caring, take practice.
- Whatever we practice we get good at, and we are always practicing something.
- What we do matters, and we are always doing something.
- No intervention works perfectly all the time in every situation.
- You have to be present to win.
- Kindness is the most powerful force on earth. Believe that, trust that, walk tall with a smile on your face, and you will heal the bit of planet you occupy.
- Cruelty is contagious, but so is kindness, and being kind is more fun and takes more creativity and courage.
- **Cruelty is not cool, Radical Kindness Warriors are hot!**

Try being a Radical Kindness Warrior. You'll like it. You will get hooked on it, and you will invite people to join you as you rampage around, respecting everyone all the time.

Now, let's fill our Radical Kindness Warrior quiver full of Intervention Arrows.

Radical Kindness Warrior

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Preface

The Radical Kindness Warrior Handbook takes on this question:

What do you do when you don't know what to do but know you should do something because cruelty is not cool?

Here is my answer: You make it up. You stay brave and creative and try as hard as you can to take a stand for justice while never returning evil for evil, anger for anger, insult for insult.

Easy? No. Worthy? Absolutely.

Setting the Bar High: The Golden Rule

I am action oriented. Theory is great, but I want to put ideas into practice. I want to know what to do when the rubber hits the road. I like it even better when the rubber chicken meets the road less traveled.

Growing up, I wanted to be a good person and do the right thing. When I was a child and dinosaurs roamed the land, I was taught the Golden Rule: do unto others as you would have them do unto you. That made sense to me. Treat other people the way you want to be treated.

Putting the Golden Rule into action did not seem too complicated: Go first. Be polite. Help someone up when they fall. Offer a tissue to someone who is crying. Make sure you do not leave the house with broccoli in your teeth.

What do you do, though, when your middle school girlfriends decide that one of the girls in your group is now not worth speaking to? Do you risk being ostracized yourself to stand by your friend?

What do you do when someone makes a joke at your friend's expense. Do you laugh along so no one makes a joke about you?

What do you do when a fight is breaking out and you are a lowly cocktail waitress? Do you wait for the big, burly male bartender to take care of it or do as I did and watch impotently as a drunk man knocks his friend over the hood of a car?

I call this lack of action that haunts you for decades a "Cowardice Hangover," but more about that later.

Thirty years ago my dad called me and started telling me a racist joke. How could I listen to such a joke and maintain any self-respect? My dad was a violent alcoholic, and I had been afraid of him my whole life. What would someone who practiced the Golden Rule do?

Should I listen politely, so as not to damage our already strained relationship?

Should I confront him aggressively about his racism? Standing up to my father usually led to some kind of violence and no resolution. Been there. Seen that. Traumatized by that.

With my heart pounding and my hand shaking as I held the receiver to my ear, I said, “Dad, I don’t listen to those kinds of jokes.”

Thus ended my relationship with my father.

A Kindness Warrior is Born

That day I decided to leave behind forever my practice of being a coward. Feeling the sweet taste of courage coursing through my body, I made a vow to get a little braver every day.

I started being more honest about how I felt and what I wanted. I decided I would never make a decision based on fear. I would feel fear and I would do whatever I thought was right.

When you practice something, you get good at it. I’ve had decades now of practicing being a little braver. My courage muscle is much stronger today than it was when I stood up to my father.

My strong courage muscle came in handy when I lost my central vision due to a rare genetic disorder in my early forties. Would I practice being afraid and shrink from challenges or would I take that one next brave step in front of me?

I grabbed my rubber chicken and chose the road less traveled, and I have never regretted it for one moment. I’m still getting a little braver every day. I still feel fear and do it anyway. I am able to find the humor in a situation almost immediately, most of the time.

Joining the Radical Kindness Warrior Tribe

I am guessing you are reading this book because you want some help putting the Golden Rule into practice. You are interested in where the rubber chicken meets the road less traveled, at least I hope you are. Having a sense of humor makes this journey much more interesting and fun.

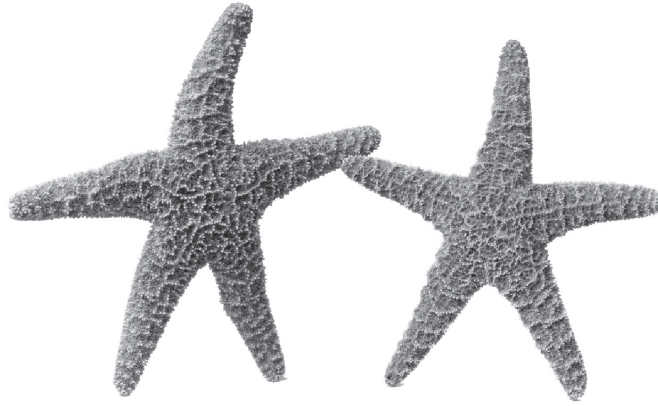
Join hands with me and millions of others as we attempt to do the right thing for the right reasons. Trust that the right results will happen in their own time. (Paraphrased from my dear friend, Freebo, the sexiest 70 year old rock star you will ever meet.)

Vicki Hannah Lein,

Radical Kindness Warrior for over 50 years

***“Never look down on anybody unless
you’re helping him up.”***

—Jesse Jackson



Introduction

***“The smallest act of kindness is worth more than the
grandest intention.”***

— Oscar Wilde

In case you are ever forced to write a book report on this book, here is the theme: Cruelty is not cool and kindness is the balm.

Whew! You get an A! Yahoo! Now, on to the serious stuff.

I’m ROCKIN’



**this extra
chromosome!**

How Did this Radical Kindness Warrior Campaign Get Started?

My grandson Carter has Down Syndrome. A few months ago my son-in-law sent me a link to a video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=oc_K9c24R5o, (you can also Google “What Would You Do with Down Syndrome” to find it.)

This video shows a young man with Down’s bagging groceries and getting insulted by customers. Watching this video was deeply distressing. Even when I found out the young man was an actor and the purpose of the video was to see what people would do, I was still

so upset I was moved to take action.

Most people did nothing to stop the abuse. One woman justified her inaction by saying, “Well, I didn’t want to get involved. Some people just need to blow off steam.”

“Blowing off steam” sounds harmless and it probably is most of the time. Steam is hot, however, and it burns. If you have a wound in you that causes a lot of steam to build up in you, heal it. Otherwise, you will be leaking your pain onto innocent victims, such as the young man bagging groceries.

Could this be my precious grandson someday? Would people just stand around and let him be called dummy? Would people stand and do nothing and allow people to talk about how “those slow retards” didn’t deserve jobs because “we normal people” were in such a hurry?

I know I can’t get everyone to understand how much these “small” acts of cruelty diminish all of us, but I can sure try.

The “Cruelty is Not Cool Campaign” is Born

I believe most people would like to do something when they see cruelty at work, but they do not know what to do. They don’t want to get attacked themselves, they don’t know what to say, yet they are uncomfortable with their inaction.

Though the emotional debris of the incident may stay with them for days or even years, though they may regret their decision to observe passively, still the abuse is allowed to go mostly unchallenged.

Abuse must not go unchallenged. I am writing this book to change all that.

I want to give people something they can do in any abusive situation. I want everyone to walk confidently in the world, knowing they can take care of themselves and others while retaining their serenity, integrity, and their sense of humor.

Note to anyone writing a book report: I just listed my intention. You might want to include that in your report. You may use the photo of my darling grandson if you wish.

Spread the Word: Cruelty is Not Cool

What if people knew in their bones that cruelty was not cool? What if everyone, the 97% of us who have a conscience anyway, all “got” that.

What if we all knew for sure that a joke is not a joke if someone has to pay? What if we did not feel overwhelmed with emotion and doubt when we met cruelty? What if our brains kept working, we felt confident, and we had some ideas ready to try?

The world would change in a heartbeat—that’s what would happen. There is nothing trivial about taking a stand to spread the word that cruelty is not cool.

The World is Ripe for Change

I've been figuring out how to take a stand for justice while preserving my physical and emotional safety for over 50 years now. I'm good at it. I've been a teacher, an elementary school counselor, an educational consultant, and an international speaker for decades. This is what I do and what I have done my whole life.

In this book I share a few of the techniques I have gathered over the years that have served me well. These little tricks have helped children and adults all over the planet make their piece of the world a better place, a place safe to learn and make mistakes and be different.

This is Not Just About Stopping Those Bullies Out There

You could call this an anti-bullying program, but it is much more than that. First, calling someone a bully is shaming. You've glued their cruel behavior to "them." And, by the way, we are all "them." We have all been bullied and we all have bullied others. Calling people names adds cruelty to the mix and inadvertently perpetuates the problem.

Some people believe the only thing they are really good at is being bad. Confirming their "badness" invites them to commit to being even "badder." "Okay," they say to themselves, "you think I'm bad now? Watch and see how bad I can get!"

We are all innocent and we are all guilty.

I will return to this theme many times in this book. We need to understand how important it to take action every time we feel someone's dignity or emotional or physical safety is at risk.

We need to stand up, speak up, and never strike back.

Note: A good quote for your book report.

If we observe abuse and do nothing, we are silently saying we condone the behavior. Neutrality is an illusion and a cop out. If I allow someone to tell a racist joke and I do nothing, I am saying I agree with racism and the appropriateness of telling such jokes. I am modeling for all to see, and the children are always watching, that abuse is just fine with me.

Why We are Struck Dumb in the Face of Cruelty

When you are the target of cruelty or a bystander, you don't always know what to do. How could you? We get precious little examples of what to do when cruelty is taking over our environment.

We often remain mute because all we can think to do is yell right back, making the situation worse and risking our own safety. It is much better to do nothing than put ourselves at risk.

I agree. It is much better to do nothing than put ourselves at risk. Doing “nothing,” however, is actually doing something: condoning the abuse.

I give you 21 suggestions you can do besides doing nothing or making the situation worse. Will they all work perfectly every time? Sure, and while we are at it, I have a bridge to sell you.

Of course these suggestions do not work perfectly every time. Nothing works perfectly every time. Even simple, old aspirin kills people sometimes. We still use aspirin, though, and it saves lives. We need to be wise when using aspirin, and we need to be wise when choosing how we will respond to cruelty.

Respond every time you see cruelty in action? Yes. Respond with a magic potion, something unexpected, radical, and often humorous: Radical Kindness.

What is Radical Kindness?

“Kindness is the most powerful force on earth.”

—Father Greg Boyle, author of *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion*

Radical Kindness is not wimpy. It is not tepid or apologetic. When you decide to take a stand for Radical Kindness, you become a Radical Kindness Warrior.

Radical Kindness (RK) Warriors do not hang their heads, hoping that hateful, hurtful behavior will stop on its own. As an RK Warrior, you will take action every time, every time you feel action is required.

Avoiding the Cowardice Hangover

RK Warriors are action oriented. Most if not all of us have experienced situations in the past where we failed to take action and still regret our lack of courage.

We know what it is like to live with a “Cowardice Hangover,” and we’ve committed to never standing by and allowing hurtful behavior to go unremarked again. We will have the courage to be silly, be misunderstood, and pretend to lose contacts we do not wear, but we will never, never, never allow our fear to stop us from doing what is right.

We are all harmed by cruelty, even when we are not the target. It is a cosmic joke to think that we can choose to be neutral. Not choosing to act is still choosing to act.

Choosing to play it safe turns out to not be safe either. Observing cruel behavior, even if you are not the target, is a form of abuse called secondary abuse.

In some ways, it is almost worse to observe abuse and do nothing about it than to be the target. I say this as the only member of my family my father did not hit or scream obscenities

at. For many years, I thought I had not been abused. I imagined I had gotten off “lucky.”

It took many self help books and a few years in therapy for me to realize that the powerlessness I felt watching my father beat my mother, sister, and brother was compounded by the guilt I felt because I was the only member of my family with no bruises on my body. I hadn’t realized the bruises that did the most damage were the ones no one could see.

If I had been hit, I would have been clear that, Yes, I was abused. Watching the hitting and listening to the verbal violence was the birth of decades of timidity. I was terrified of awakening the beast, as it were, by doing anything that would direct the violence toward me.

This is why I am adamant about the **FIRST** Cardinal Rule of a Radical Kindness Warrior:

Never, never, never do anything to put yourself in jeopardy or make the situation worse.

This is also why I feel so strongly about the **SECOND** Cardinal Rule:

Always, always, always do something to make the situation better.

Ready to sign on and give this Cruelty is Not Cool Campaign a try? Great. You can start by practicing the qualities of a Radical Kindness Warrior.



The Qualities of a Radical Kindness Warrior

- K Kinesthetic.** Action is necessary to shift the situation
- I Inspiring.** Your bravery will help other people be braver.
- N Necessary.** If you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem.
- D Determined.** RK Warriors never give up.
- N Nuanced.** Subtlety is often required.
- E Energy.** RK Warriors shift the energy, never adding anger or retaliation to the fire.
- S Simple.** It is not difficult to remember to sing “Happy Birthday.”
- S Surprising.** Shifting the energy often involves engaging our biological startle reflex. RK Warriors are smart cookies, indeed.

Radical Kindness Warriors know how to keep their brains working and bring out the best in themselves and those around them. We rock! Let’s take over the world, shall we?

A Note on the Use of the term “Warrior”

“What this world needs is a new kind of army — the army of the kind.”

—Cleveland Amory

Perhaps there is a better word and I may have already found it by the time you read this book. Warrior, of course, is someone who is good at war. I believe in kindness, in the magical power of kindness, so why am I invoking an image of war? Who am I suggesting we are at war with?

Well, if pushed, I would say I am at war with apathy, inaction, injustice, bigotry, hatefulness, cruelty, and cowardice. I am not at war with any person. I’m not even at war with these behaviors. I do know that to stand up to injustice and cruelty in my life, I’ve had to create some major moxie. I had to stand up on my hind legs and make fierce energy.

The Tibetan word for warrior means the one who cultivates courage. Warriors are gentle, aware, open-hearted, and, I would say, possesses a sense of humor. This is how I am using the term “warrior.”

Overcoming Accommodation, Aggression, and Avoidance

For the first thirty years of my life, when it came to dealing with conflict I suffered from the 3 A's: Accommodation, Aggression, and Avoidance, as William Ury writes about in his book, The Power of a Positive No: How to Say No and Still Get to Yes.

I learned to accommodate, also known as groveling, from my mother. She learned to do this when she was a girl trying to survive living with her alcoholic abusive father. She called this accommodating “keeping the peace.”

I learned from my sister that aggression made a bad situation more dangerous. When my father was enraged, she would call him an asshole. He would beat her with a belt. As she screamed, I stood by silent and ashamed of my silence. I wrote an invisible note to self: “don’t talk back to anyone who is angry.”

I learned to avoid confrontation whenever possible. Groveling felt bad, but aggression for me was not an option, so I learned to go numb and avoid. My avoidance came back to me in the middle of the night as anxiety. I would grind my teeth and wake up as if I had been chased by a monster.

I was being chased by a monster and its name was cowardice.

In his marvelous book, Ury suggests we need to find our “Yes” to say a kind and firm “No”. We say “Yes” to our right to be treated respectfully always. We say “Yes” to our stand for social justice. We say “Yes” to the right of others to make mistakes without being ridiculed. We say “Yes” to the fact that we are Sacred Space.

Once we say this “Yes”, we can find the strength to say a kind and firm “No” to cruel behavior.

For me, taking a stand for my “Yes” involves a heartiness, a determination, and a fierceness of purpose that requires creating an energy field different from my normal, walk around the planet energy field. For now I’m calling this warrior energy. If you have a better term, I would love to hear from you. We could have a lively conversation I would thoroughly enjoy. We both might be changed forever after our commingling of molecules and ideas.



Getting Ready to be a Warrior: Radical Kindness Starts with You

What if every day without fail you immersed yourself in extraordinary kindness? What if every morning you wrote or sang or danced yourself into a being your own best friend? What if, instead of bludgeoning yourself with your failures and disappointments, you bathed yourself with appreciation for your courage and service to others?

Here is the answer: Science tells us you will live longer and healthier, and your brain will work better if you are happy. You will be able to love others better because you will love from fullness rather than need. You will be able to deal with daily frustrations with aplomb and be harder when the big challenges come along, as they most assuredly will.

Why are so many of us chronic givers, so generous with others, yet so stingy with ourselves?

Two answers:

ONE, when we give we are in control. We feel more powerful when we are giving rather than receiving. Receiving, even from ourselves, makes us feel vulnerable because we have to open up to receive.

I learned about this big time when I lost my vision and had to ask for help. I was humbled and healed of my arrogant belief that I had somehow been appointed “Helper” and the rest of the world were “Recipients”. You don’t have to go blind to learn to ask for help, but it helps.

SECOND, knee-jerk givers often define self-care as selfish. To a self-appointed Helper, being selfish is the gravest of all sins. Our fear of being selfish stops us before we let ourselves entertain a self-nourishing idea. We cannot even take a deep breath because we do not deserve all that oxygen. We absolutely can never, never, never be guilty of being selfish.

Being ‘selfish’ is exactly what pathological volunteers and chronic givers need to practice. They need to risk been called “selfish” and “self-indulgent” by themselves or others. To learn how to help more and better, we first need to help others less and help ourselves first.

Yikes! This might turn your world on its head! Actually, there is no “might” about it. Loving yourself first will absolutely turn your world on its head and open your heart and imagination in ways you could never have predicted.

Good. Great. This is a revolution! Radical! Try loving yourself first and you will be set free to love others better as well. It’s magic!

Yahoo!

About the 21 Suggestions

This book offers 21 suggestions of Radical Kindness interventions. They are creative, courageous, and caring. Sometimes they are ironic or even slightly wicked.

Every single one of these suggestions will appeal to every one of you. Just kidding. Some of you will not want to sing “Happy Birthday” or throw your underwear at people who are mocking mimes. Just kidding about throwing underwear, but I do wonder why so many people feel compelled to mock mimes.

I doubt very much that all 21 suggestions will appeal to everyone. Some of us are introverts. Some of us believe we can’t sing. We are all different and honoring our differences is one of the main points of this book.

After you read all of the suggestions, I am hoping your imagination will sparkle with ideas. I’m hoping you will say to yourself, “Well, I would never do that ridiculous suggestion., but I might make fart noises with my arm instead.”

I will convince you that action is necessary every time someone is being diminished, and that you have some ideas of what to do.

Vicki Loves Science

The Radical Kindness responses suggested in this book are based on neuroscience, which is why they work. In the Resource section at the end of the book, you will find many fascinating books to read if you are interested in learning more about our amazing brains.

The suggestions in this book will help you move out of being the victim of cruel behavior while remaining kind and firm yourself. They are a bit magical, if I don’t say so myself.

There is no one right response for every situation. If there were, I would not need to write this book for you would already be confident, creative, caring, and courageous in all of your interactions.

Knowing what to do in any given situation is tricky.

Your RK Warrior response will depend on:

- **The situation**
- **Your relationship with the person or people involved**
- **How you feel in that moment.**

When applying any of these suggestions, remember the Cardinal Rules:

1. Never, never, never do anything to put yourself in jeopardy or make the situation worse.
2. Always, always, always do something to make the situation better.

Unmasking Cruelty

Behind Cruelty is a Wound and Kindness is the Balm

Before responding to any hurtful comment or event, know these three truths:

FIRST, behind the mask of cruelty is a wound. People who feel good about themselves, people who are comfortable in their own skin, never make racial, sexist, or homophobic slurs. People who know they are smart never call anyone a Retard.

Men who are secure in their own masculinity do not fear other men's sexual orientation. Secure men do not feel the need to dominate other men, women, or children. They use their strength to take a stand for social justice. Like Gandhi, they speak their truth and never return evil for evil. It is a tall order, to be sure, this being a man grounded in his integrity and courage. The world needs more of them.

People who have had their boundaries respected, do not barge through other people's boundaries with comments about their bodies, their potential, their abilities, or their worthiness to occupy space on the planet. If we have not tended to our own wounds, we will pass them on. We all tend to do what has been done to us unless we wake up to our own behavior and work diligently to change it.

We Are ALL Innocent, and We Are ALL Guilty.

SECOND, we need to admit we have all called other people names, and when we did this we were never at our best. Understand this deeply and you will be free: No bad guys, just wounded guys. We are all innocent and deserve to be treated with respect always, and we are all guilty of hurting others as we have been hurt.

Remembering the wound behind the mask of cruelty will keep your brain working. You won't strike out and make the situation worse. You won't "eat the slug" you are being offered, and you won't try to pretend nothing has happened.

Radical Kindness is the Only Cure: It's the Balm.

THIRD, the only deep cure for cruelty is radical kindness. We need to be brave, creative, and never, never return evil for evil or give pain when we are hurt. We are all born as sacred space. Let's find a way to stand our ground with grace.

Taking a stand for kindness does not mean putting a target on your chest for abuse, quite the opposite. When we take a stand for kindness, we take a stand for treating everyone with respect, including ourselves.



Whatever we Practice we Get Good at, and we are always Practicing Something.

We do not want to practice being abused, nor do we want people to practice being abusive. We teach people how to treat us. When we respect ourselves, we demand respect from others and we treat everyone with respect always. That does not mean we tolerate bad behavior. Just the opposite is true. We don't practice treating ourselves or anyone else disrespectfully. RK Warriors walk through the world with confidence because they know they will do something if they run into a cruel situation. The point is you will have several kindness arrows in your quiver. There will be no need to shiver or slither away.



Always Remember:

- We are all born as sacred space and deserve to be treated with respect at all times.
- Allowing people to practice abusing you or anyone else is not respectful or kind. It is cowardly.
- It is impossible to do nothing when dealing with abuse. You are either taking action to shift the situation, or you are condoning the behavior. Neutrality is an illusion.
- Not taking action will result in a “Cowardice Hangover” that might last a lifetime.
- We are all innocent and we are all guilty.
- Radical kindness, creativity, courage, and caring, take practice.
- Whatever we practice we get good at, and we are always practicing something.
- What we do matters, and we are always doing something.
- No intervention works perfectly all the time in every situation.
- You have to be present to win.
- Kindness is the most powerful force on earth. Believe that, trust that, walk tall with a smile on your face, and you will heal the bit of planet you occupy.
- Cruelty is contagious, but so is kindness, and being kind is more fun and takes more creativity and courage.
- **Cruelty is not cool, Radical Kindness Warriors are hot!**

Try being a Radical Kindness Warrior. You'll like it. You will get hooked on it, and you will invite people to join you as you rampage around, respecting everyone all the time.

Now, let's fill our Radical Kindness Warrior quiver full of Intervention Arrows.