



In my opinion...

DEAN SAYS:

Where have all the smiles gone?

My ace Training Center technician, George Bernard Sanders, often greets me at the breakfast table, "Well Sunshine, what mood are you in today?"

I hate to admit it, but George is right. Far too often I'm grumpy by the time I fight the incoming morning traffic and expend tremendous effort trying to drive my car, and everyone else's, the five miles in from Bloomfield to Hartford. Yet, I don't really enjoy being grumpy. And, I certainly don't like grumpiness in others!

I decided, just the other day, to paste as genuine a smile as I could on my face and greet everyone who crossed my path during the day with a cheery, "Hi. How are you?" I must confess that I chuckled as I remembered more than a dozen years ago when one of my "lost-in-space" co-workers greeted me, "How ya doin'?"

I replied, "Well, I'm really not too bad today, considering the hepatitis has spread to both of my legs."

"That's great!" he rejoined, as he dashed down the hall. I determined that my greeting would be a lot more genuine

than his.

So off I started on a trek through the halls. I smiled. I greeted. I listened. I watched. Wow! Only about 4 in 10 returned my greeting at first. But then they caught a glimpse of my smile. Out of 56 people, 55 lit up, said "Hi," and seemed



just a little bit happier as they proceeded on down the hall. Could a smile really make all that much difference?

Since that day, teenagers have become a favorite target of my new found tactic. They're tough nuts to crack. I don't have any kids of my own, but it seems to me as if most young people between 13 and 18 are ready to draw an automatic weapon and start shooting. They seem so cynical, and appear to be so bitter—except with each other, of course. Girls seem to be a little bit worse than boys; at least until each one's special boy shows up. Then their smiles would illuminate the universe.



So far, I'm not fairing very well with teaggers: only about 2 in 10 return my smile. Most respond to my greeting with a put-down curse of some kind. Yes, I realize that I'm bald and fat and old, but hey, I'm a nice guy. Just ask

good old George Bernard Sanders.

Now I want to be very clear. I'm not suggesting that we all put on a mask of false cheerfulness. There certainly are times when we have a right to be a bit gloomy. When your boss chews you out, for example, I would say that you and I could probably get away with at least fifteen minutes of being a "grumpy gus."

Or, if your best girl or guy just told you he or she is leaving you for that Sutherland guy—you know the one, Keeper or Leaper or Whatever-his-name-is—I would think that you might squeeze in at least an hour or two of real gloom.

Certainly, there are those times in our lives when genuine mourning is appropriate. Diagnosis of a serious disease, death of a loved one, or similar occurrences need to have the healing that only real grief can bring. Why, my parents have been dead for awhile—Dad for over ten years and Mom for over six—but I still have those unusually tender moments when something triggers a memory and grief washes over me, bringing those refreshing tears.

But what about the rest of the time? If we focus on making an attempt to spread a little good cheer, it might be that we will actually begin to feel more cheerful ourselves. And, what an even better contribution we will make if our smile encourages someone else to smile in return.

A preacher friend of mine weighs every one of life's little inconveniences against this test: "When I'm turning somersaults up in heaven on those streets of gold, will this incident spoil my fun?" If the answer is "yes," then he takes the event seriously. If the answer is "no," then he does his best to put his negative feelings about what's happened aside. That doesn't mean he ignores the circumstances, just that he keeps his view of the event in a proper balance.

I guess my message is clear: let's smile a little more. Let's be just a little less self-concerned. Let's focus on what is good, and pure, and pleasant around us. Let's decide to make our corner of the world a little brighter.

You know what I think? I think if we work at it, we can even start winning over some of those teenagers. □

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