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Make Someone Happy

It doesn't take much to be friendly

The grumps can be infectious. Maybe you're at the car about to drive to work and your next door neighbour is pruning his hedge. You don't really know him, only in passing, and he always seems miserable. Anyway, you give him a friendly smile and wish him a good day. He returns a grunt and a sneer. What you have to do here is remain cheerful and go on your way. Definitely don't take his sour mood with you.

It's rush hour and traffic is grindingly slow. Most drivers are careful and considerate, accepting the delays as normal, but there are always the odd impatient ones who think they own the roads. They dodge and weave putting everyone at risk, changing lanes erratically. One of them cuts in front of you, no warning, unless he or she honks the horn. Your best option is simply be grateful that they didn't clip your vehicle, perhaps let out a quiet sigh; but definitely don't respond in an aggressive animated manner. This is what sparks road rage which you've seen before and you don't need to be a part of that. Just keep driving and watch out for the idiots.

Arriving at work a bit late because of the traffic you extend your usual pleasant greetings to all and sundry. Responses are mixed: some are obviously critical of your tardiness whereas others don't apparently care and seem pleased to see you. Then there's the resident grouch who never has a good word to say about anyone or anything. Same as with your neighbour, refrain from giving back the sour attitude in kind. Merely try to generate a genuine smile and perhaps add: "Good morning Mister Spencer, nice day." He'll probably come back with: "Is it?" to which you ought to reply: "Well, I think so," then carry on to your work station. It is quite possible that this brief encounter will have no lasting effect, but over time by being pleasant to the grump, he may begin to mellow as far as you are concerned. If not, at least you have tried.

I recall an incident many years ago. I was working in auto service stations at the time and we had just moved to a different location. The service station we took over was originally annexed to a car dealership next door and one particular customer gave us the heads-up on a tradition which affected our profitability. This lady had quite an unfriendly attitude and whenever her car drove up to the pumps all our staff would run and hide leaving me to serve her. I adopted my usual 'the customer is always right', greeted her cheerfully, asked if she would like her petrol filled and whether I could check under the hood for her. I did this, also checked the tyres and cleaned her windscreen. This went on a few times and she seemed to be responding pleasantly. One day she said she was taking her car next door for a service, and when I suggested that we could do that for her she informed me that she and her friends always went to the place they had bought their cars. This seemed to be an end to it until at a later date I mentioned her fan belt was fraying and really needed replacing. I told her I could get a mechanic to do that for her right away and surprisingly she agreed. Next week she was in again for fuel and asked if we could service her car for her, so I booked it in and warned the mechanics to make sure they did a good job. It seems they did because before long her friends were also

bringing their cars in for repairs and servicing. It took a long time, but it did prove that being cheery and helpful paid handsomely in the end.

I suppose that living in a country town we get to know some of the locals and it isn't unusual to stop for a chat while out walking. Often we pass complete strangers along the way and exchange a wave and a cheerful G'day. Even in the car other drivers we've never met give us a wave. I recall these pleasantries were rare when we lived in the city. No-one bothered to give anyone else the time of day, but why? It doesn't take much to be friendly; and you never know, it really could make someone's day. Now that's a thought.

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