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# Why Assuming the Best in People Benefits You

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podcast

WITH THERAPIST  
Amy Morin

THE  
friday  
fix

Welcome to *The Verywell Mind Podcast*. I'm Amy Morin, the editor-in-chief of Verywell Mind. I'm also a psychotherapist and a best-selling author of four books on mental strength.

You're listening to the Friday Fix. Every Friday, I share a quick mental strength strategy that can help fix the thoughts, feelings, and actions that can hold you back in life.

And the fun part is, we record the show from a sailboat in the Florida Keys.

Now, let's dive in to today's episode!

Today, I'm talking about a simple but effective mental strength strategy that can help you get through the day feeling less stressed and less annoyed by people around you.

For some people, the struggle isn't necessarily new. But, I've heard from a lot of you who say that you're feeling more frustrated lately with how impatient and rude people have become since COVID.

When society started to open up, you might have hoped that people were going to be a little more grateful to be out of the house, happy to be around each other and that everyone would be a little kinder. Our experience in fighting a global pandemic together might help us treat one another with more compassion.

But, that wasn't necessarily what happened. When people stepped out of their homes, a lot of them found that the world had grown a little more cynical and a lot less patient.

You might find that you too are feeling more stressed, more overwhelmed and you might be tempted to take your frustration out on the grocery store clerk...or that shopper who stands in the middle of the aisle forever trying to decide which flavor of Jello to buy.

There are several reasons why people are short on patience right now. Many people—in fact it's probably accurate to say most people—are experiencing worse mental health than usual.

There's a lot of stress, a high degree of uncertainty, and the news for the past two years has been horrible. We've been hearing about death tolls and information about how to protect ourselves. And that information has changed over time.

So, it's safe to say our nerves are frayed. Not to mention that being out in public again can be stressful. No matter how you feel about vaccines, masks, and social distancing, safety measures are inconvenient for all of us.

You can't control how other people behave, but you can control how you respond to them. The way you respond to people who cuts in front of you, someone who's ignoring safety rules, or someone who's rushing to get ahead of everyone else, makes a huge difference to *your* well-being.

By respond, I don't just mean the way that you act. The way you behave matters. Giving someone a dirty look or calling them out for being rude might relieve a tiny bit of stress for a second but ultimately it gets you ramped up and it fuels your anger.

There's also response in your head. Even if you don't act on it, you're drawing conclusions about other people's behavior.

You might think, "That person is a jerk! Don't they know everyone else is in a hurry too?" Of course, what you say about that person might be much worse than that—we're censoring this since it's a family-friendly podcast.

But whatever conclusion you draw about that other person and their behavior might reflect how you're feeling, which right now might be stressed out and overwhelmed. So you might assume the worst in others by thinking they're acting in a certain way because they're entitled or because they're taking advantage of other people's kindness.

Thinking those types of thoughts, however, fuels your stress. A helpful strategy to break this cycle is to assume the best in others.

If you see someone squeezing through a crowd of people in a complete rush, remind yourself that they might be in a hurry to pick up a sick child, or maybe they're going to visit a sick relative who might not have much time left.

After all, you don't know why they're in a rush. Assuming the best about them doesn't hurt anything. But it can help you cultivate some compassion. Feeling compassion for them will reduce your stress level.

It might allow you to treat them with some kindness—maybe you might shoot them an understanding smile as opposed to an eye roll. Putting a little good energy out into the world never hurt anyone.

But it will also stop the flood of stress hormones that get released into your body when you think thoughts like, "That's not fair! People shouldn't get away with being so rude all the time."

Remember, it's not your job to teach people to be less rude. And when you think about it, when is the last time you saw a situation end well when a rude person got schooled by a stranger?

Kindness is what helps people change—not a public lecture.

But your goal of assuming the best in others doesn't have to be about changing their behavior or even influencing them. Assuming the best is a strategy that can be used to simply preserve your own mental health.

It's not something you need to reserve for strangers. It's a helpful strategy that you could use with your friends, your family, and your colleagues too.

When your friend cancels your dinner plans at the last minute, you might be quick to assume that they're not making you a big enough priority in their life. But you could also remind yourself that maybe they're taking care of themselves or maybe they're addressing an important family issue right now.

When you have a family member who asks for a lot of favors, you might find yourself thinking that they always take advantage of your kindness. But you can assume the best by reminding yourself that they're willing to be vulnerable, and they trust that they can turn to you to ask for help.

You don't have to allow yourself to be treated poorly though just because you assume the best in others. If you're dating someone who doesn't follow through with the promises they make over and over again, don't assume that they're just busy. A pattern of behavior is evidence of what's going on with them.

You can still assume the best—you might decide that they're doing the best they can with what they have while also deciding that their best isn't something you're going to incorporate into your life. Establishing clear boundaries about what you're willing to tolerate is key to keeping yourself healthy. Just because someone is doing their best doesn't mean you need to put up with mistreatment.

Someone could be a good person and still be overcommitted to so many things that they can't follow through with spending quality time with you. You can assume that they mean to spend time with you—but just aren't in a place where they're able to do it. You can draw the line by saying, "This doesn't work for me."

You don't need to look at the world through rose-colored glasses and dismiss bad behavior by saying "well, at least they meant well." But you can assume the best in people without excusing their behavior. Set boundaries—just make sure your boundaries are about preserving your mental health and not about punishing other people or forcing them to change.

And if right about now you find yourself thinking, "Ugh, but I don't want to assume the best in people. People aren't great!" Think about what happens when you choose to

hold onto that belief. If you conclude that other people are always selfish, always rude, and always entitled, you'll go around looking for evidence that proves it's true.

Your brain will work really hard to find proof that other people are bad. You'll overlook most good things in the world. And even when someone is kind, you'll find yourself suspicious of their motives. Constantly looking for the negative will take a toll on your mental health. It will reinforce to you that the world is a bad place and the worse you feel, the more negative your thoughts will become.

This approach is much better for your mental health than concluding that no one else is putting in any effort or thinking that everyone else is lazy or mean. Instead, assume that people are doing the best that they can with what they have and establish boundaries when you need to draw the line about what isn't working for you.

You can choose to see other people in a more positive light by assuming the best in others. Try it for one week. I suspect you'll feel happier, you'll feel less stressed, and you'll feel less anxious right away. And when you feel better, your interactions with other people are more likely to be positive.

If you know someone who could benefit from hearing this message, share it with them. Simply sharing a link to this episode could help someone feel better and grow stronger. And if you like the show, make sure to subscribe to us on your favorite platform.

Do you want free access to my online mental strength course? It's called "10 Mental Strength Exercises That Will Help You Reach Your Greatest Potential." To get your free pass, just leave us a review on Apple Podcasts. Take a screenshot of your review, and email it to us. Our address is [podcast@verywell.com](mailto:podcast@verywell.com). We'll reply with your all-access pass to the course.

Thank you for hanging out with me today and listening to *The Verywell Mind Podcast!*

And as always, a big thank you to my show's producer (who is really good at assuming the best), Nick Valentin.