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How social media is increasing social good

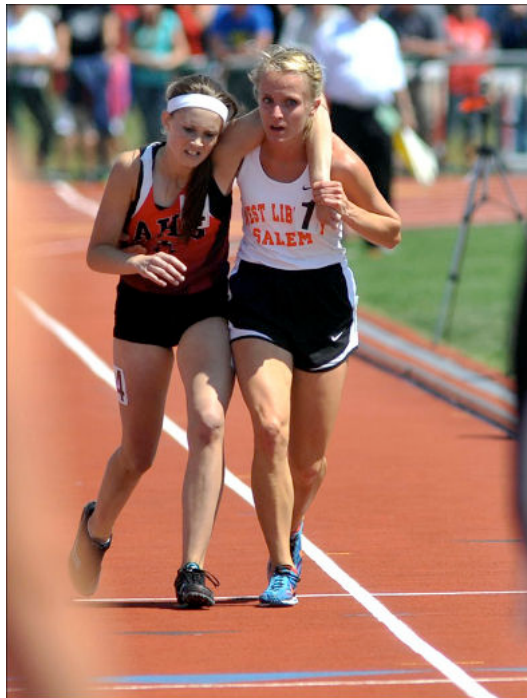


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BuzzFeed's faith-restoring pictures

IMAGE: 1 OF 10



Meghan Vogel (right) was running last in a 3,200-meter run when she'd caught up to Arden McMath who was slowing down because her body was giving out. Vogel, 17, carried her fellow runner and pushed across the finish line before crossing it herself. (BuzzFeed.com)

The birds do it. The bees do it. And now it seems we're doing it too.

It's called swarming (and you should tell your kids all about it): Working together and acting cooperatively without strong leadership, while consistently making decisions that result in the best possible outcome for society. And social media swarming is resulting in social good.

We are so overwhelmed with bad news that we crave and cling to any hope of good. It's no wonder BuzzFeed's "21 Pictures That Will Restore Your Faith In Humanity" recently went viral.

The photographs should get a kickback from Kleenex.

Another incident of humanity just went viral after a group of kids bullied Karen Klein, an elderly bus monitor in New York. Following, Torontonians Max Siderov started an online fund with the goal of \$5000 to give her a vacation. Today that fund

is around \$700,000.

Where does all this good come from?

Richard Janda, a professor at the Faculty of Law of McGill University and co-author of a recent book on corporate social responsibility, says, "The Internet helps us to gauge or measure our reactions relative to those of others. It does this by allowing us to see and count how many others are swarming to what I like.

"We need to know that others are doing so as well, so that my willingness to give gains collective significance."

It's a form of accountability-based influence. The more you can compare yourself to others and see what they're doing, the more you know they can see what you're doing.

There's a new economy emerging and generosity will be one of its currencies.

Soon your social impact score will be measurable and include your generosity. The problem being that generosity could become more disingenuous, but at this point, the world should take any type of consideration it can get.

In the next few years you can expect online algorithms to track your preferences and activities to help influence more positive behaviour. For instance, Mashable explains how cameras in a subway car may use technology to scan the face of a pregnant woman, then send you a text to give her your seat.

But we don't necessarily need technology to be munificent.

In 2010, a joint University of California/Harvard study discovered evidence that kindness is contagious. Those who get it pay it forward.

With people sharing these #randomactsofkindness, the more we see, the more contagious it becomes.

This holds true online and offline.

"The car ahead of us on one of the bridge tolls paid our toll! So we paid it forward to the car behind us," Facebooked Tanya Borsuk of her trip to New Jersey.

Winnipegger Terri Gesualdo took to #eSaidSheSaid's Facebook page to say it makes her day whenever the car ahead buys her coffee at the Tim Hortons' drive thru. So much so that she'll pay for the car behind her.

From sites like Kickstarter to GiftFlow and beyond, there are countless ways to pay it forward. Just know, everything little thing you do still counts.

Hold a door open. Let a car in. Smile.

You can even say it forward: Compliment someone. Say thank you. Ask how are you – and listen for the reply.

Because no matter what currency is used, we can all afford a little kindness.

CONTEST

Win a mini-library of DK good living books valued at more than \$350. To enter share a random act of kindness that you witnessed or experienced on Dahlia's Facebook page, or follow @DahliaKurtz on Twitter and tweet your kindness experience with the hashtag #AKindnessVirus.

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