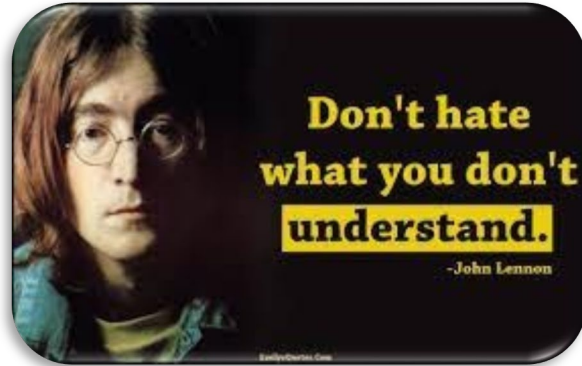


# COMPASSION

Compassion is one of the most important qualities we can practice. It connects us to the basic human experience, enabling vicarious learning and enhancing understanding. When we put ourselves in others' shoes, we live their stories, their emotions, and their struggles from *their* unique point of view. Hence, compassion allows us to see the world through the eyes of others. This is critical; without empathic consciousness, we would interpret everything that happens around us, to us, and to other people from our own (limited) frame of reference. At the extreme, failure to be compassionate yields biased and irrational thinking, sexism/racism, and hatred...but these things all begin with a basic lack of understanding, or compassion. To quote John Lennon: "Don't hate what you don't understand."



At the same time, we must be compassionate with ourselves, as well. Many of us are harder on ourselves than we are with others, creating unreasonably high expectations that set us up for feeling grief and shame when we inevitably fall short. Self-compassion begins with accepting that we are human, we *will* make mistakes, and we *will* fail from time to time—and that's okay! Perfection is an unnecessary standard that can only lead to chronic discontent. You can still keep the bar high, but know when you've reached the point of "enough." And once you've begun to practice compassion with yourself, you'll find it's easier to bestow upon others.

- **Empathize first, respond second.** When someone says or does something with which we disagree (especially in online forums) our first reaction—spurred on by the strong emotions that accompany their perceived transgression—is often to call them out, and not always in polite terms. Instead, take a moment to put yourself in their shoes, and try to *feel* what they do. If you can understand their perspective, perhaps you won't feel as strongly as before.
- **Reserve judgment.** Nobody's perfect; we all make mistakes. It's easy to discern wrong mistakes of others' words or actions, but a lot more difficult to show compassion. More often than not, people know when they've screwed up; by showing them compassion and understanding, you can help them heal.
- **Investigate the other side.** Everyone you meet has a different set of life experiences, which has bestowed them with their unique worldview. Take the time to get to know people who are different from you: learn their challenges, their triumphs, and what's truly important to them. try intentional research about what/why another person or a group feel a certain way towards something or believe in something. when we are better informed we are likely to have better interactions and better compassion.

For Questions contact the ART @ [363ISRW.ART.363ISRW@us.af.mil](mailto:363ISRW.ART.363ISRW@us.af.mil) or 757-764-9316