

Two Words That Can Change a Life by Cheryl Rice

Is it possible that two words can change someone's day, someone's life? What if those same two words could change the world? Well, I'm on a quest to find out - and, with your help, this quest will be a success.

This quest inadvertently began last November in a grocery store.

I was standing in the checkout line behind a woman who looked to be in her 60s. When it was her turn to pay, the cashier greeted her by name and asked her how she was doing.

The woman looked down, shook her head and said, "Not so good. My husband just lost his job and my son is up to his old tricks again. The truth is, I don't know how I'm going to get through the holidays."

Then she gave the cashier food stamps.

My heart ached. I wanted to help but didn't know how. Should I offer to pay for her groceries, ask for her husband's resume? I did nothing - yet. And the woman left the store.

As I walked into the parking lot, I spotted the woman returning her shopping cart, and I remembered something in my purse that could help her in a different but hopefully profound way. It wasn't a handful of cash or a lead on a job for her husband, but maybe - just maybe - it would make her life better.

My heart pounded as I approached the woman.

"Excuse me," I said, my voice trembling a bit. "I couldn't help overhearing what you said to the cashier. It sounds like you're going through a really hard time right now. I'm so sorry. I'd like to give you something."

And I handed her a business-sized card.

When the woman read the card's only two words, she began to cry. And through her tears, she said, "You have no idea how much this means to me."

I was a little startled by her reply. Having never done anything like this before, I hadn't anticipated the reaction I might receive. All I could think to respond was, "Oh my. Would it be OK to give you a hug?"

After we embraced, I walked back to my car -- and began to cry too.

The words on the card?

“You Matter.”

A few weeks earlier, a colleague gave me a similar card as encouragement for a project I was working on. When I read the card, I felt a warm glow spread inside of me. Deeply touched, I came home and ordered my own box of You Matter cards and started sharing them.

First, I gave them to family and close friends. Even if they weren't in as dire straits as the woman at the grocery store, their faces lit up and often their eyes moistened when they read those two words.

As I became bolder, I started giving the You Matter cards to people in my community who make my life richer – such as my dry cleaner and the man who sells me fruit at the farmer's market. While the gesture didn't always end in an actual hug, the words were a hug in themselves. The recipients were visibly moved. And I was too.

Then I became a bit mischievous. I began leaving cards in places where I couldn't witness who received them. I tucked one inside the pages of a library book I was returning. I placed another one in the credit card slot at a gas pump.

At the time I met the woman in the grocery store, I was completing a certificate program in Applied Positive Psychology sponsored by the Flourishing Center. I learned the science behind happiness and well-being.

One of the forefathers in the field of positive psychology, Chris Peterson, said that the entire practice boils down to three words: “Other people matter.”

Well, my experience in the grocery store confirmed that telling other people they matter also matters.

People crave connection but feel more isolated than ever. Every one of us is here for a reason. We are all essential. We need, and are needed by, each other.

Always.

Especially now.

That simple encounter in the parking lot has become the You Matter Marathon.

No running required!

The goal is to create and enrich positive connections between individuals and within communities by collectively sharing 10,000 You Matter cards during November, when the holiday season starts and too many people find too many reasons to feel they don't matter.

Together, let's make some magic.

If inspired, you can join the You Matter Marathon here and sign up to receive 30 You Matter cards at no charge! Each week in November, participants will receive an email with card sharing missions, inspiring quotes, and an opportunity to share experiences and

connect with each other online.