

Just One Thing: See Good Intentions by Rick Hanson

☐Hustling through an airport, I stopped to buy some water. At the shop's refrigerator, a man was bent over, loading bottles into it. I reached past him and pulled out one he'd put in. He looked up, stopped working, got a bottle from another shelf, and held it out to me, saying "This one is cold." I said thanks and took the one he offered.

☐He didn't know me and would never see me again. His job was stocking, not customer service. He was busy and looked tired. But he took the time to register that I'd gotten a warm bottle, and he cared enough to shift gears and get me a cold one. He wished me well.

☐I can see his friendly eyes as I write now, a week later. It was just a bottle of water. But I feel warmed by his kindness and buoyed by his good intentions.

☐Recognizing the positive intentions in others, we feel safer, more supported, and happier. And when others feel that you get their good intentions, they feel seen, appreciated, and more inclined to treat you well.

☐But it can be hard to recognize the goodwill in others. We're busy and distracted and stressed. Positive aims are often buried beneath negative behaviors. The brain's innate negativity bias is continually scanning for bad news, bad intentions. The brain also reacts to novelty, so it tends to ignore the many positive intentions that pervade most daily life while spotlighting the occasional negative ones.

☐So you have to actively look for good intentions. Then you'll find them all around you—a window into the deep goodness in every being, no matter how obscured.

☐How?

☐Take a minute to recognize the many good intentions—aims, purposes, desires—that you have in a typical day.

☐Good intentions don't need to be saintly. Wanting to enjoy a cup of coffee, to eat a decent breakfast, to lock the door behind you, to get to work on time, to be conscientious, to feel safe, to care for a family, to be a decent person, to avoid trouble, to hurt less, to enjoy something sweet, to not quarrel, to live to see the sunrise—these are all good intentions.

☐Most good intentions will be small. But they still matter. Just imagine the disasters if you replaced your good intentions with bad ones! Sure, some intentions aren't so good, such as desires to dominate, act out addictive cravings, or dump negative feelings on others. But for almost everyone, the great majority of intentions are good ones. Let it become a

feeling, a strong sense in your body, that you are someone with good intentions.

☐ Talking with a friend, be aware of his or her positive intentions. How does it feel to see them? Try this routinely with people you care about. I find that doing this helps me understand others better plus opens my heart. As appropriate, tell the other person what you've learned; hearing a recognition of one's good intentions can be a powerful experience.

☐ Try seeing good intentions in strangers walking down the street—or an airport. You'll see lots of courtesies, efforts to do a good job, desires to understand or be understood, loyalty to friends and causes, fair play, and kindnesses. This practice makes me happy, and gives me a stronger sense of our common humanity.

☐ Also try this with people who are difficult for you. This is not to excuse them. But seeing good intentions amidst bad behaviors can, ironically, help you feel less affected—less stressed, irritated, or worried—by other people. You could also ask others to recognize the good intentions in you.

☐ There's an ember of sanctity in each one of us, including the one looking back in the mirror. Recognizing good intentions blows on that ember, adds fuel to it, and helps it grow into a warm and beautiful flame.