This gift of ideas was co-created by the contributors to RISING TO THE MOMENT, an online event held September 24, 2020, to focus on leading and working with compassion.

We thank the Center for Positive Organizations at the University of Michigan’s Stephen M. Ross School of Business for hosting this event. You can view the event at their website: positiveorgs.bus.umich.edu.

Each contributor offered a story to illuminate what compassion looks like in 2020. These stories are fuel for the imagination, just as they are active ingredients for change.

Each contributor also used a story to illustrate small moves that awaken compassion now. They are captured here, available to anyone, and ready to be put to use. While easy to underestimate, the power of small moves is in their ability to adapt to any context, expanding our repertoire of possibility. Naming these small moves helps elaborate the deep skills involved in rehumanizing one another as we face such widespread and unprecedented suffering.

THESE WORDS ARE INTERPRETATIONS OF THE STORIES TOLD BY THE CONTRIBUTORS AND HOW THEY MIGHT SOUND IF THEY WERE TO SUDDENLY COME TO LIFE.

LED BY MONICA WORLINE, EACH OF THE CONTRIBUTORS CO-AUTHORED THESE EMBODIMENTS OF THEIR WISDOM AS OUR GIFT TO YOU.

THIS FORM OF EMBODIED LANGUAGE WAS INSPIRED BY THE POET AND AUTHOR RUTH GENDLER, WHOSE BOOK OF QUALITIES DELIGHTFULLY BRINGS VIRTUES TO LIFE.
Turn the corner and who will you see? The person in the lobby needs your smiling hi. Open the door. The person sweeping the floor needs your eyes to meet his howdy with your howdy. Walk up the stairs. The executive needs your nod of recognition. Step into the garden. The mother picking up her small one needs your gentle word of compliment. Round the bend of this human life. Another human life needs your joyful greeting. The everyday life of compassion is created bit by bit every day. Remember this: human beings exist in the eyes of other human beings. Enter this life with me. Bring justice and joy in your bounding hello.

- ANNE BIRGITTA PESSI
  PROFESSOR OF SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION, DOCENT IN WELLBEING SOCIOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI AND COHUMANS.
RECOGNIZE HUMANITY

Shadows befall us, no matter who we are. A doctor rushes to save a life. A mother rushes to rescue a child. Sometimes shadows linger. The doctor’s actions seem in vain. The mother’s rush does not prevent the child’s fall. And yet, with shadows must be light. The doctor’s words give meaning, a calm amid the storm. The mother’s embrace catches the child tears, a softness in the rough world. All of us are doctors; our heroics are not what everyone remembers. All of us are mothers; our rushing cannot prevent the fall. The wonder is this: it is also true that all of us are patients, listening for some kindness in the haze of our worry. All of us are children, injured and crying, in need of a gentle touch. So just do this: when you see the doctor rushing, say thank you for the effort. When you see the mother rushing, say thank you for the urgent care you feel. When you see the doctor failing, say thank you for the humanity that shines in you. When you see the mother despairing, say thank you for the humanity that shines in you. When each of us can see ourselves as a doctor and a patient, as a mother and a child, we recognize our common humanity.

- AL’AI (LA) ALVAREZ, M.D.
  CLINICAL ASSISTANT PROFESSOR AND
  ASSISTANT RESIDENCY PROGRAM DIRECTOR OF EMERGENCY MEDICINE,
  STANFORD UNIVERSITY
Time will pressure us into ignoring ourselves and one another if we allow its unrelenting push. So pause. Use a moment for the space of breath. Use a moment for the wisdom of stillness. Inside the pause you will find more than you can imagine. Inside the pause you will see the face of grief and suddenly know its name. On the other side of the pause, you will be able to describe the face of grief and share its name so that it flows like water, washing away what needs to be washed. On the other side of the pause, we will find reflections, feelings, sensations that allow us to be with ourselves. Here is the transformative moment of stillness that brings us back to ourselves, without which we cannot be with others.

- TIFFANY JOHNSON
   ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR
   GEORGIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
The haunting fear of not knowing what to say or what to do has the power to silence even the most caring among us. When pain erupts in our midst, it can enter like a volcano; scorching everything in its path. Who can blame us for the desire to run? But stay, and listen. Listen to the flow of lava, listen to the hiss of steam where it hits the sea. Listen for what activates your fear, and stay anyway. For the listening itself is a balm. When you do not know what to say, that is the moment to listen the loudest. In your quiet and steady concern, a question will be resourced from within you. Perhaps it will only say, “tell me more.” It will come to you, full of care, and ready to witness what comes next. And it will not only improve upon the silence, but will create space for healing.

- CHRIS MURCHISON
POSITIVE ORGANIZATION DESIGN AND CULTURE CONSULTANT
Where are you hesitating? Do you trust yourself that it is okay not to know? Inquiry dances on the edges there. Do you find yourself worrying you’ll do more harm than good? Catch that moment, and feel your questions. Do you dare attempt to support others who are dealing with distress unfamiliar to you? Teachers from many traditions tell us that the right hand of compassion is courage. Our research demonstrates that comforting compassion stems from other-focus rather than self focus. Even if you have not endured a specific distress, you are well equipped to offer comfort to others; turn your attention to them and validate their pain. Find your curiosity to guide your inquiry work. Move away from ready-made recipes. Compassion comes in customized responses for each person’s needs. Assume you don’t know, and then you will find the listening that will guide you. This research helps us notice unsung heroes. We can call on the army of listeners to be activated and mobilized to respond to others with compassion. These heroes of not knowing, they invite us to ponder where in our lives have we experienced self doubt. Do not refrain from asking how you can relate with others whose burdens are not familiar to you. Whisper to yourself: “you’ve got this.” Imagine the ripple effects of compassion we can create in our lives, our organizations and communities, if we dare and trust that inquiry will lead us where we need to go. When we learn how not to know, we will find our way together.

- REUT LIVNE-TARANDACH
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF MANAGEMENT, MANHATTAN COLLEGE
RESEARCH FELLOW, INTERNATIONAL HUMANISTIC MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

RISING
TO THE MOMENT
LEADING & WORKING WITH COMPASSION NOW
We see you, staying late to pick up trash and wipe down countertops. We see you, driving through the storm with precious cargo the world needs. We see you, midnight oil burning as you push on. Another analysis. Another program. Another puzzle. Even when the darkness tries to make you invisible, we see you. So pick up your candle. It will show you the beauty around you. Pick up your flashlight. It will flash upon the dignity of the toil. Pick up the beams of headlights and lamps and torches. Shine them toward wonder that we are still going. Pick up your spotlight and let it shine on the work of our community that goes on with meaning, and purpose, and love. Perhaps we cannot turn back the clock or turn back the tide or turn away the endless need, but what we can do is give the comfort of seeing. For you can always shine the light on the helpers. They are always there.

- AMY BUNCH
  SENIOR DIRECTOR OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND STRATEGY FOR THE OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT AND CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER, UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
It is not business as usual. Fires are licking the door frame. No one can come and go as they please. Everyone needs everyone, more obviously than ever. What resources are in your hands? Can you imagine a sky so vast that it would make them useful now? There are communities of plenty everywhere. Can you imagine a sea so vast it carries the plenty to all? Who could your telephone call for the neighbor in need? Where could your car deliver a meal? What fleet of airplanes could fly to the rescue at your command? It does not matter if the basket is empty; perhaps that is so it can become a vessel to hold what needs holding. Imagine what you, all of us together might do. Now, open your eyes to the vast sky, the vast sea. Imagine again.

- ACE SIMPSON
  Reader in Human Resource Management and Organizational Behavior,
  Brunel University London
Yes, we can create the distinctions, the types or the triggers. We can argue this box or that. But wouldn’t we say that suffering is suffering? Who knows what is a little or a lot? Who can say warranted and not? When we open our eyes on a new day of pain, we stretch beyond what can be fixed or even said. Suffering is the inexpressible made evident. Maybe silent witness is our best friend for now, the moment we cannot otherwise bear. Because we cannot turn away. We cannot make it better. Perhaps we can make it bearable? Rising to the moment of compassion isn’t about the hero who conquers or the bitter perseverance who grits her teeth even harder. Rising to the moment of compassion is our imagination in flight, finding a way to be with everything unimaginable, until now.

— JASON KANOV
PROFESSOR OF MANAGEMENT, WESTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY