



EMBODY

By Sossity Chiricuzio

Perspectives

Embody - The Gift Of Service

by Sossity Chiricuzio, PQ Monthly

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I am rarely able to afford eating out, yet I tip 20% or better. I stack my plates when I'm done, make sure not to leave a trail of syrup or ketchup, and don't wad my napkin into my juice glass. I make eye contact with the server, thank them, and possibly even introduce myself.

As many food service workers reading this have already guessed, it's because I've done that job. I've been the interchangeable body that gives and takes and smiles, even in the face of rude or oblivious clients. Who is living on minimum wage and whatever tip those clients feel inclined to leave. Who goes to bed sore and wakes up sore and just keeps going.

There are so many kinds of service workers. The ones offering up courtesy in the face of anger, frustration, pain, sorrow, or indifference. The ones who are paid little to take a lot from those who seem to have it all. The ones who use up their body for the sake of others.

Do you know the name of your barista? The gas station attendant at your regular stop, or the receptionist at your doctor's office? The janitor at your work, or the gardener on your campus? Can you remember what they look like? Have you ever noticed if they seemed to be having a hard day, or a particularly joyful one?

Don't mistake this for encouragement to be creepy and intrusive with that person you think is cute that can't get away from you when you drop by their place of business. Don't assume they want to share personal info with you, or that your opinion has any bearing on their reality. Just note, for at least a moment, their humanity.

The labor they are doing is so often dismissed and belittled as 'dead end jobs' and 'settling,' but can you imagine your world without it?

These are the people who literally carry you across the city; who nourish your body, caretake your children and companions; who make it possible for you to live in (relative) health and joy and comfort. They are the background noise, the behind the scenes, the 'little people' that are sometimes thanked at big awards dinners, but mostly as proof of the largesse or politics of the award recipient.

What if we truly said thank you? What if we acknowledged the sacred of a day spent in service? The fortitude and forgiveness it requires, and the respect it so rarely receives?

So many people are ready to take offense at the slightest break in what they consider proper service; to complain to a manager or employer, putting someone's job at risk for sake of ice or no ice, or failing to smile wide enough. Why is there so much assumption that stroking your ego is part of their job? Why is it so much more rare to give positive feedback to a service worker, or their employer? Why is it so easy to punch down, and so rare to lift up?

I definitely feel words like 'classism' and 'racism' and 'gendered labor' are part of the problem and

need to be part of the conversation, but beyond asking people to be aware of tipping, of intersecting oppressions and quality of life, what if we also added in words like 'gratitude' and 'courtesy' and 'compassion'?

I'm issuing a challenge: the next time another person in the world spends their time and body to benefit yours, take a moment. Check yourself. Did you greet them? Smile for them? Expend your energy in courtesy regardless of whether it would even be acknowledged? Did you note their response and prepare yourself for their displeasure if your approach was not as they prefer? Does this feel like an enormous amount of energy being expended just in case they feel inclined to challenge your approach, or demeanor, or appearance, or existence?

If you can't imagine spending a day at work like this, think I'm being dramatic, that there's no way every interaction could be that fraught with possible complications and consequences and stress, then I think you haven't done service work.

This isn't just about being a more self aware human, but also lifting up people who are the most often left behind, and left out. Undocumented workers, people of color, queer and trans folks, people who are disabled--by circumstances of life or the very job they do for you--and people who don't have other options, or can't afford the education that is supposed to get you farther. Though in these days of crumbling capitalist infrastructure, there's likely more than a few Ph.d.'s reading this who are trying to pay off student loans with a combination of food service and Lyft shifts.

Here's the other thing: we all need service. We need more touch, help, compassion, health, sustenance, knowledge, joy. If you have well paid skills: find a population who needs them urgently, and give what you can, sustainably. Try barter, or sliding scale, or pro bono. If you have the time and means to donate, pick something humble. Think less about gold stars, and more about the golden rule. Leave your ego out of it. Lay aside concepts of hero. Make room for grace.

The gift of service--whether it's breakfast or sex work served to order, transportation or agriculture to

get you through your day, calm competence in the face of your frustration or pain, clean surfaces, groomed bodies, or systems navigated--should be recognized as the treasure that it is. Learn how to say thank you, and mean it, or learn how to do it for yourself.

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