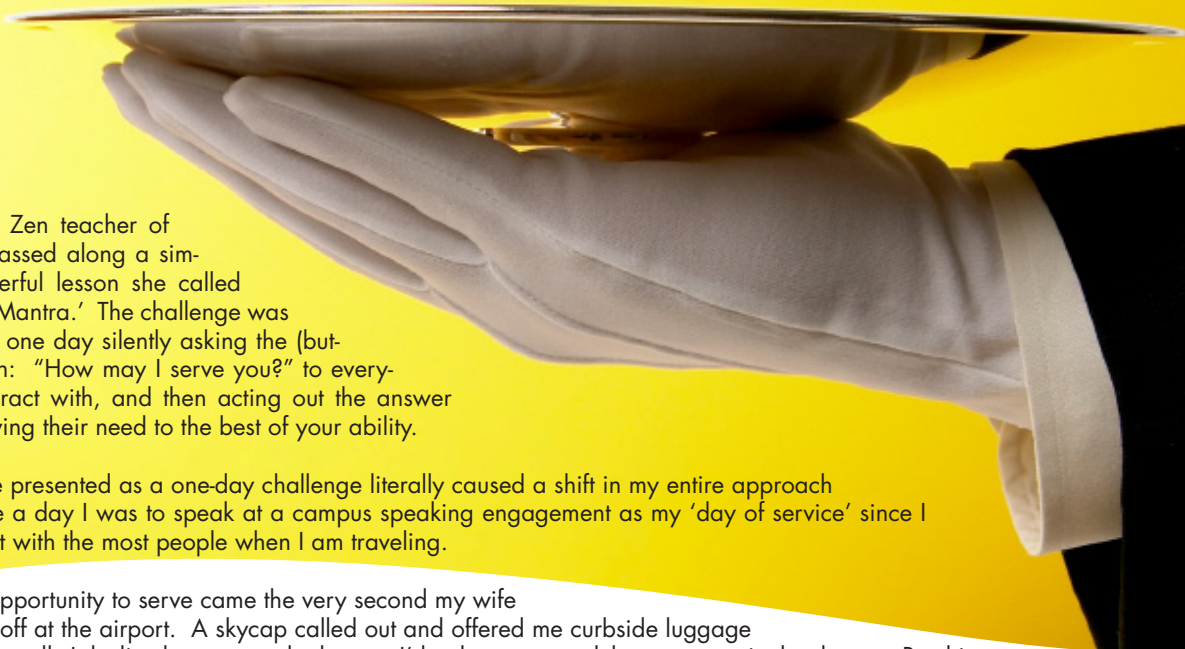


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The Butler's Mantra

By: Tommy Nugent



A former Zen teacher of mine once passed along a simple but powerful lesson she called 'The Butler's Mantra.' The challenge was to spend just one day silently asking the (butler's) question: "How may I serve you?" to everyone you interact with, and then acting out the answer – that is, serving their need to the best of your ability.

What she presented as a one-day challenge literally caused a shift in my entire approach to life. I chose a day I was to speak at a campus speaking engagement as my 'day of service' since I am in contact with the most people when I am traveling.

My first opportunity to serve came the very second my wife dropped me off at the airport. A skycap called out and offered me curbside luggage check-in. Normally I decline because, to be honest, I'd rather not spend the money to tip the skycap. But this was Butler Mantra Day and I knew I could best serve him by letting him serve me (and be compensated for it). He checked me in and I slipped him a couple bucks. I walked into the airport...and it was packed! Those two dollars bought me back at least thirty minutes of my life that I would have lost standing in line; and that led to a smoother, stress-free (priceless!) trip through security and to my gate. (Now, I certainly don't use the Butler's Mantra expecting immediate 'pay-off's' like that, but it was a nice confirmation that my teacher had nudged me onto the right track.)

My second opportunity to practice was a little more challenging, it had no payoff, but still felt 'right.' In-flight I like to read, write or go over my presentation notes. I'm not a big talker, but the woman sitting next to me was. She seemed to be very nervous about the flight and needed to chat to keep her mind off her anxiety. Though, I really wanted to dig into the new book I bought for the flight, I obliged and we were both better off for it. She felt less anxious and I felt good through helping her feel better.

The serving was the payoff. Right feels right. I gave up getting my way, and in that moment, found a new 'way' of interacting with people. A way that sounded like it might be exhausting when my teacher first proposed it, but the more I did it, the more energy and excitement seemed to come back to me.

So much so, that my one day experiment has become a permanent part of my life. Sure, I slip into selfishness way more than I'd like, but when the Mantra comes to mind, I try to live it:

- Can I serve the frazzled store clerk with a joke or a little extra kindness?
- Can I serve my son by accepting his invitation to play a video game with him?
- Do I serve the anonymous driver that just cut me off in traffic by not laying on my horn?
- Do I serve students better by investing a little more prep time in my talks?

Opportunities to serve (big and small) are around us all the time, and taking advantage of those opportunities leads to all kinds of unexpected (and enjoyable!) win-win situations. I'm not sure if it's karma, "give and it shall be given unto you," or what...but my life seems better to me the more I focus on bettering the lives of others. What about you? Will you consider dedicating a day to The Butler's Mantra? If so:

- Select a day and mark your calendar.
- Consider the 'buddy system.' Have a friend join you, and encourage each other throughout the day.
- Begin the day with the intention of offering little bits of silent service to everyone you encounter.
- Set yourself reminders (i.e. phone/email alerts, post-it notes, wear specific jewelry, or write a mark on your hand).
- Live it out. Serve, serve, serve.
- If you like it (and I bet you will!), schedule another day and do it again...and again and again – maybe with more and more friends and fellow members of leadership teams / programming boards.

I think you'll find, like I did, that practicing The Butler's Mantra and constantly living out the answer to the silent question "How may I serve you?" is a great way to spend a day... and an even better way to live a life.

Speaker/performer Tommy Nugent has presented his unique blend of inspiration, instruction and entertainment to more than half a million students on campuses coast to coast. He may be reached through WWW.TOMMYSPEAKS.COM or 1.888.638.6669.

