

A New Year's Resolution: Giving others the benefit of the doubt

When I was looking ahead to the New Year, I thought I might ask the people around me to suggest my resolutions. I started with our sons. One told me I should buy him more toys, and the other said I should give him more screen time.

Instead, I decided to pick my own goal. This year I am trying to give people the benefit of the doubt. As I encounter people in my daily life—whether those who are close to me or those who are strangers—I am going to try to assume that they are acting with good intentions and their best understanding of situations. Perhaps, just perhaps, they are doing their best and mean well, just as I do.

Maybe that sounds easy to you. But I think in a hurried world, it can be easier for me to assume that the child who threw his coat on the floor did it on purpose to add another chore to my day, that the person who is disagreeing with me is just being difficult rather than having a valid argument, or to believe that the person who cut me off on the road was thinking selfishly of herself.

If I think that way, the focus can be on me—my needs, my interests, my goals, my plans. That is an easier way to react to the things that happen, but it's also self-centered.

Much, much more difficult is assuming that I don't know anyone else's story, that I don't understand another person's burdens and challenges, and that I am not looking outside myself to see others' needs and perspectives.

I cannot ever truly see the world through others' eyes. I can't see what they see. But I can try.

This approach will, of course, require more time and more patience—and if you’ve ever watched me try to get children out the door in the morning or wait 11 months to bring our son home from China, you know that patience is not my strength.



But that’s the joy of a resolution. It has to be a little bit hard or I wouldn’t be making it a priority.

Just for good measure, I’ll also try to drink more water, make sure my husband has all my passwords to any information he might need, and eat more avocado toast.

So far I’m doing best with the avocado toast goal. But the year is young. And our sons are still hoping I’ll do best at overdoing it on the new toys and screen time.

Do you have any goals for 2018?