

Start the new year with a new take on helping others

By Julie Janovsky, Tribune – Mesa, Arizona

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The ushering in of a new year often brings about reflection and resolutions on how to make our lives better. It's also an ideal time to lend a hand and improve the life of a stranger.

A random act of kindness, however small, can go a long way, says Craig Kielburger, co-author of "Me to We: Finding Meaning in a Material World."

"I got involved when I was 12 and read about child labor, an issue I didn't know existed at the time but one that was affecting so many children my age," says Kielburger, who in 1995 founded Free the Children, an organization benefiting children around the world.

The book features a series of essays from Kielburger and his brother, Marc, on human rights lessons learned from their worldwide travels, along with reflections from people like Oprah Winfrey, Richard Gere and Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

Kielburger says reaching out to others is simple. He offers the following ways to get started:

Create a "good deed plan."

Read the morning newspaper with your spouse, friends or children, Kielburger suggests. Discuss the articles that catch your attention, choose an issue you feel drawn to and list ways you can make a difference. Clean for a good cause. Go through your home and collect clothing and toys your family no longer uses. Donate them to a women's shelter or another service organization.

Wear your words. "Many of us wear T-shirts that advertise brand names. Why not wear one that conveys a positive social message, such as 'Stop HIV/AIDS' or 'We are all one human race'?"

Don't buy for a week. Commit to going an entire week without buying anything that you don't absolutely need. By relying your own resources, says Kielburger, you can celebrate how much you are already blessed.

Give an extra tip. In the service industry, almost all the customer feedback is negative. One nice comment can go a long way.

'Me to We: Finding Meaning in a Material World'
By Craig and Marc Kielburger. Wiley. \$23.