

[Sun](https://www.flickr.com/photos/abesselink/46875978435)  When life talks, listen. When a theme makes itself apparent repeatedly, take note. When the universe has something to say to you, offer it the microphone and pay attention.

Over the past few months, I would say that I have been listening to the universe and attempting to derive a message from its mutterings at that very microphone. I try to embrace the concept of *seek first to understand, then to be understood* - but sometimes, that premise can be a little unruly and difficult.

It all starts with the general tenor of the world around us. There seems to be a lot of negativity and drama floating around and there is plenty of blame to go around. However, the struggle is real; none of that jives very well with my internal milieu. As I reflect on this, this real-world conundrum stems from two things: simplicity and civility. The two go hand in hand.

Life, for all its complexities, is pretty simple. If we treat people with respect and fairness, if we act with goodwill, and if we take ownership of our actions, good things will happen. If we can find the inner strength to embrace openness and transparency, we are going to establish rapport and promote trust. If we can advocate for civil rights and fairness, then we lay a foundation for community. Civility is pretty simple.

However, over the past few months, I have watched our civility fail us. The story line all too often revolves around someone that deserves something, is entitled to something, or is blaming someone. Being inconsiderate seems to have become the norm. We have become a society that admires the courage gained in anonymity behind the computer screen. We have become a society that celebrates Twitter retweets and sarcastic memes more than intellectual discourse. There is a whole lot of anger, entitlement, blame, and disrespect. It is everywhere - and it is toxic and counter-productive to building something truly great.

Although I haven't walked a mile in your shoes, I can seek to understand what that journey has been like for you. I want to build bridges and not walls. Sadly, I've also learned that building bridges demands the presence of two parties to build it; nothing good comes from one party building a bridge while the other attempts mightily to tear it down. In the same breath, you can't build greatness on the backs of others or in spite of them.

If we can't even get to the point of letting bygones be bygones, or simply being respectful of one another, then how are we ever going to transcend the truly important challenges we face?

Here's a thought, and a simple one at that. How about you take care of being the best you that you can be, and I will do the same? Just let me be me, and I will let you be you. Seek first to understand, then to be understood. Take a moment to consider the miles walked by someone else, their experiences, and their journey as a whole - regardless of race, gender, economic status, religion, or favorite hockey team. Sit down with me. Talk to me. Engage me. But in the end, be respectful of me - and I will do the same.

I think we'd all be pretty amazed at what we'd find if we did. I don't think we are past the point of no return. Why? It's really quite - simple.

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Written by Allan Besselink
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