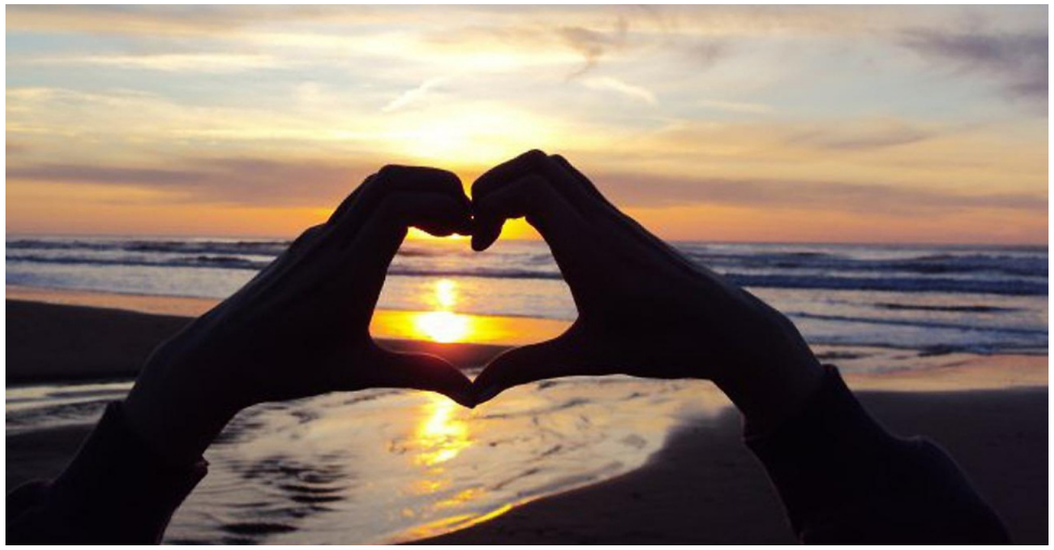
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ADDING A LITTLE BIT OF **'KINDNESS'** TO THE PHUKET **'LIFESTYLE'**

Perhaps like you, I have not always been as kind as I should have been. Sometimes, I have forgotten to reflect on why a reaction or interaction was more negative than I expected. It happens that some people are highly negative, hostile or disagreeable, but there are also many who can simply find themselves nudged towards being 'nicer' or 'kinder' as a reflection of kindness given to them. Phuket is a fast-paced, developing urban island and it needs a healthy dose of daily kindness from the majority to keep it safe as a place we want to continue to live in.

Warren Buffet, 95 years old and one of the 'richest' people on this planet (fifth, to be precise), has recently announced as CEO of Berkshire Hathaway that he is "going quiet" (see "Warren Buffet says he is 'going quiet'", Amelia Pollard – Financial Times Online, 11 November 2025: https://www.ft.com/content/b862426a-955e-4ef5-a116-31dbe1f6e35e) – that is, he will step aside from his primary role and allow others to take on more of his day-to-day responsibilities. In his comments to shareholders he has warned about corporate greed and has called for more kindness. He has also criticized 'look-at-me-rich' people, amongst other things. I also noted that he has set up foundations/charities for each of his children to manage and further he plans to donate US$ 1.3 billion worth of his Berkshire Hathaway shares to those foundations (he is worth around US$ 169 billion).

We can all see Phuket is beginning to magnify the 'look-at-me-rich' approach. **This has some benefits:**

Businesses start to thrive from increased consumerism, new businesses catering to the whims and nuances of people with a lot of free time and spare cash rise up and the number of gainfully employed persons also increases. Money flows faster and perhaps some of that money is channeled back into the tax revenue system which after 'deductions for inefficiency' is, or is supposed to be, spent on improvements. Luxury cars need 'special wraps'. Sour dough has to be 'just so'. Health drinks must be curated. Gyms by themselves are old hat, and recovery centres and medical services now align with the strive for better health which, for some, is centered around perceived visual appearance improvement.

This also has some drawbacks:

Focus on 'niche' products for the wealthy might mean generic services for middle and working class people deteriorate. Ostentatious displays can cause envy and widen the 'gap' between haves and have nots, resulting in crime or social discontent. Money can become the 'dominant' factor in service levels with a level of V.I.P. treatment only accessible to the few. The use of money can become a substitute for kindness, instead of a supplement, causing damage to the social network and fabric that binds persons of diverse backgrounds… together. Enclaves and private groups can foster separatism.

I tried a recent mental health experiment with my weekly routine to see how it might improve my week. This experiment was made in the context of great pressure from others or situations comprising family in Thailand, children, work and the usual strains of ageing parents outside of the country.

When driving to my padel games, work, recovery sauna/steam/ice bath, Central and sometimes some more nature-oriented destinations, I have practiced letting people who are trying to turn out of a side road go first even when I am being stalked/tailgated. I also stop as many times as I can when I see a pedestrian even thinking about crossing the road, particularly the disoriented Burmese construction workers tired from their day's toil who simply wish to visit an eaterie on the other side of a very busy road or highway.

On bypasses and faster roads, even with a reasonably fast vehicle, I have taken to retreating to the slower inside lane, watching now with amusement and out-loud-jokes alone in my car about the human tendency to wish to destroy things, the pointlessness of the 'time-saving bias' and how getting somewhere five mins later, but still in one piece, is a smart policy.

Whilst this isn't world game changing stuff, I have noticed myself feeling overall much better about navigating around Phuket. It has taken 23 years for this dawn of realisation to assist me – and I admit sometimes, I am a slow learner.

Another experiment for a naturally introverted person battered by an unsuccessful first marriage and the advent of 'Single Fatherdom', has been that of simply saying hello and striking up small conversations in places where I feel a bit of tension or reluctance of engagement. Sitting in the Banya steamhouse, not understanding the conversation, sometimes just a polite interaction can completely change the mood for those receptive to kindness and politeness. Yes, sometimes attempts to be nice can backfire with no reciprocity, but I have found the positive results outweigh the negative.

Finally, for the sake of length of this article, I have tried hard to identify the nationalities and diversity of those I interact with in restaurants and other service or consumer-based businesses. I do not assume that the staff in a place are Thai or any other nationality and I ask first. I have even learnt how to say thank you in Burmese and exchange other pleasantries. I have seen some of the living quarters of Burmese migrants and can see it would be quite difficult to remain positive and smiley throughout the long working day without some kind interaction with others.

Despite being nice to others, I have recently been threatened in my gym by someone as high as a kite who looked like he was about to violently assault just about anyone he didn't like the look of (this time it was me). I've been insulted for being a foreigner by a couple at a cinema who got into a lift post-movie and thought I couldn't understand Thai, and like everyone, can feel the 'road rage' undercurrent – and have to very carefully try to keep cool in a variety of situations.

Kindness is not a perfect scientific antidote for all societies' ills, that is for sure.

Do us invested Phuketians and Phuket residents want Phuket to be a 'bling bling' dog-eat-dog society, where only the perceived richest show-offs prevail? Or do we want a balanced mix of celebrating success with caring for others? Do we want Phuket to retain its Thainess, its respectfulness, tolerance and history of entrepreneurship?

Personally, I am relieved to see many kind people 'out there' – particularly when my firm does its humbly small bit of 'Corporate Social Responsibility'. Realising that there are people being kind day in day out without virtue signaling is indeed very humbling. We can all, me included, definitely work on our daily 'kindness output' in addition to counting our steps and calorific intake. There is as yet no 'kindness' function on a smartwatch, but perhaps there should be…



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