

“IT'S MORE THAN A SHOE SHINE—YOU'RE TOUCHING LIVES”

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*****Note: Figures may be missing from this format of the document**

You never know who will inspire you or where you will find inspiration. For me, inspiration comes from interactions with people and often occurs in unusual circumstances, during seemingly random encounters with strangers—in the cashier's check-out line at the grocery store, while waiting for the next available stall in a public restroom, or most recently, while getting my shoes shined at the Piedmont Triad International airport (in Greensboro, NC, USA). That is where I met Horace. In my short time with him, I learned that he had worked at the shoe shine stand for over 20 years, in the business his father started 40 years ago; I experienced his positive outlook on life and found his approach inspiring.

I knew that day that I would at some point write about him and the attitude on life he so simply and effortlessly dispensed. As I started to think about this column, I contacted Horace (through the airport authority) and we scheduled a meeting.

We met over lunch at a diner where I had never been and where he was well known. During this hour, Horace told me that he always tries to display a positive attitude because of the example set by his father and his faith in God. He exudes responsibility, optimism, kindness, and appreciation.

Horace understands what it is like to “swim upstream”—ten years ago, he was homeless. He is proud of the fact that he took responsibility for the financial mismanagement that led to his homelessness and also for his financial recovery. Although he has had difficult experiences, he has an exceptionally optimistic outlook on life. He shares this optimism with his customers because he hopes to make a difference in their lives. He “throws out a positive vibe,” especially to those who seem unhappy. He is kind to everyone, even when it is not easy—as when one angry customer screamed at him, complaining that his prices were too high (his fee is \$3.00). He said he always “overshadows that negativity with kindness” because “God wants me to be sweet in a bitter world.”

Horace strives to lift the spirits of those around him and to live by the example set by his father (who was a preacher in addition to being a shoe shine entrepreneur). He is also humble, admitting that sometimes he falls short. Horace appreciates many things, and as he said, “As long as you are above ground, you have something to be thankful for.” This thankfulness shows in his work and in his interactions with others.

I was inspired by Horace's perspective on life—his ideas about responsibility, optimism, kindness, and appreciation—and by his efforts to make a difference in the lives of others. Not everyone will have the opportunity to meet Horace; nonetheless, inspiring people like Horace exist and can be found in everyday interactions with everyday people, if you are open to them.

Just remember, it's more than a shoe shine.