

This is Lieutenant Roger McCort of The Salvation Army in Eureka with today's Community Comment.

I'm going to tell you something that I know sounds a little crazy. I am going to live for four-hundred-and-twenty-five years.

Why would I believe a thing like that? Because of a Time Magazine article I saw back in the early 90s that promised – PROMISED! – those born in my generation would benefit from advances in medical science to the tune of three and a half extra centuries of life on top of the 75 years we were expected to live when we were born.

Is my rather light-hearted belief in this fantastic possibility going to change the actual number of days I have left to me? Well, as strange as it sounds, a recent study at Stanford University suggests that my admittedly irrational hope for a longer life could actually be helping me live that life, at least in part.

The study demonstrated a link between the beliefs people have about their health and life expectancy and their actual health and life. The prominent and shocking statistic appearing in that report is that a whopping 71% of study participants who saw themselves as less physically active than their peers died early. So not only does it matter that you get some level of regular exercise, but it matters that you believe you are getting enough to be healthier than your friends.

As crazy as this may seem, there has always been an awareness that belief can form reality, at least in some respects. I'm sure you've heard the phrase "fake it until you make it." While that is definitely not the right attitude for an aspiring brain surgeon, it is a long established fact that you can decide what your attitude will be, even if you have to force it, and that you will conform to that position. Those who choose to start every day with a smile and a decision to look for the good in their life are significantly more likely to reach the end of a day saying how great that day has been. And those who get out of bed reluctantly, expecting the worst, will have a predictably poor day.

In addition to physical and mental health being changeable to some degree by your decision to believe positively or negatively, your compassion level is also affected by what you decide to believe. Community opinion in our area has been swinging towards a more benevolent view of people who are homeless in recent months. This has sprung from an increase in reporting and activities which encouraged us to think of the unhomed community as individuals who needed encouragement and help to find positive alternatives in their lives.

But recently a handful of incidents perpetrated by a small number from that community changed the stories. Suddenly all we hear is how the homeless are violent, thieves who will steal from the very people and agencies intent on helping them. And public compassion took a step backwards. Our community perception shifted from wanting to help to wanting everyone to leave, either by choice or by force of law.

What we believe changes the world around us. I'm committed to spending the next 350 years of my life convincing people to believe that it is better for them to choose compassion than skepticism. Everyone, rich, poor, and in-between, can find it within themselves to wake up choosing to seek out what is good around them.

Grace and peace to you. This has been Lt. Roger McCort with today's KINS Community Comment.