

Compassion in Politics

What do you mean by compassion?

It's a word that seems to have a lot of different meanings for different people but we use a quite simple and long-standing definition: having concern for other people and, when required and appropriate, of wanting to do something to help them.

Why does this campaign matter? There are lots of causes out there trying to make the world better

There are and they do incredible and vital work and we've been lucky enough to work with some of them. But our own experience has taught us that while single issue campaigns do make a difference, unless we change the values behind policy making, we will never achieve long-lasting sustainable change.

And you think that current politicians don't have compassion?

Actually our point is that everyone feels compassion but the space for it in our daily lives has become so limited by the power of a political idea that has come to rule our lives: the idea that we are all inherently selfish, that greed is good, that success is measured by income, power and wealth. No corner of society has escaped that power of that idea. Schools have become fixated on exam results. Inequality is rising. Refugees, fleeing war and persecution in their own country, have been left to drown at sea. The disabled and most vulnerable have suffered at the hands of austerity.

Unfortunately, not only is that system making the world more unequal, it's also based on a completely incorrect perception of human nature. We are all so much bigger and so much better than the story we have been told about us. Yes of course we can sometimes be selfish and greedy but we also have capacity for incredible amounts of generosity and compassion and we display that on a daily basis: when we give up our seat on the train, help someone cross the road, give money to charity, help a colleague at work, visit a sick friend, relative, or neighbour. Our lives would be so much happier and rewarding if those values were celebrated and given space to grow.

But there's no room for compassion (or any emotion) in politics, surely

But the way that we operate now *is* built on emotions – an emotional attachment to ideas of greed and selfishness. What if, instead, we opened our minds to other emotions – compassion, empathy and cooperation? We are humans. We cannot escape our emotions. So rather than fixate on just one or two at the detriment of

the wide range of emotions we feel, we believe we should be cultivating and celebrating our innate compassion and empathy and using those emotions to help guide our political decision-making.

But people *are* selfish – they kill, trick the benefits system (and other examples)

As humans we give ourselves a pretty bad rap. Open any newspaper or turn on the TV and you will see images of destruction and hate. What you're not seeing is all the amazing things that people are doing – people like you. That's because it doesn't make dramatic news and it doesn't fit with the narrative that we're all greedy and selfish. Yes, people can do terrible things to one another. Sometimes that's because they are unwell or they come under a lot of psychological pressure. And actually we think they are much more likely to in a world where politicians and the media spout so much hatred and pretend that as humans we can do nothing other than act selfishly. But those kinds of behaviour only represent a very small sample of human nature. Building a political system and society on that small example is highly irresponsible and damaging.

Isn't compassion just weakness?

We believe that calling for a world of compassion when every powerful person seems to tell you to be otherwise is actually very brave.

What do you hope this campaign will achieve?

In the short term it will put compassion back on the political agenda which will make it possible for leaders, politicians and policy makers to talk about compassion without appearing weak or soft. In the long-term there's a number of things about our political system we'd like to change, including introducing a compassion test into the political process.

What would be the principles of a compassion test?

That all policies must meet these standards:

- That no policy should adversely affect future generations - in fact it should enhance their wellbeing
- That the most vulnerable and needy must be helped and we all agree to look after those who have fallen on hard times.
- That policies should make life better for people, not just the economy.

What else do you want to see happen?

- Reforms to the process by which policies are made to make it far more collegiate and cooperative including allowing proxy voting, changes to the hours MPs have to debate to, and introducing parental leave.
- Creating a compassionate code of conduct for newspapers which they will be asked to sign up to so that they commit never to vilify, stereotype or personally attack individuals or groups.