

* * *

Beliefs are choices. No one has authority over your personal beliefs. Your beliefs are in jeopardy only when you don't know what they are.

Understanding your own beliefs, and those of others, comes through focused thought and discussion. Most public dialogue is now propelled by media outlets owned by a dwindling number of multinational corporations. A healthy democracy needs ways to bypass gatekeepers so we can communicate with one another directly, and perhaps even find common ground. *This I Believe* is an exercise in philosophical self-examination in a public context. It rises from the grass roots, where people can begin to listen to each other, one at a time.

My own *This I Believe* essay begins, "I believe in listening . . ." This is no surprise, coming from one who works in radio, and public radio at that. At the station in my hometown, it's our motto, and the first word ever spoken on the air when we signed on. *Listen*. If there is a testament to a belief in listening, it will be found in these essays.

Take a moment, then, to consider the beliefs that guide the lives of others, beliefs that may confirm your own, or challenge them, or even open your mind to something new.

When you are done, think about this: What would *you* say?

Be Cool to the Pizza Dude



SARAH ADAMS

IF I HAVE ONE OPERATING PHILOSOPHY ABOUT LIFE, it is this: "Be cool to the pizza delivery dude; it's good luck." Four principles guide the pizza dude philosophy.

Principle 1: Coolness to the pizza delivery dude is a practice in humility and forgiveness. I let him cut me off in traffic, let him safely hit the exit ramp from the left lane, let him forget to use his blinker without extending any of my digits out the window or toward my horn because there should be one moment in my harried life when a car may encroach or cut off or pass and I let it go. Sometimes when I have become so certain of my ownership of my lane, dar-

ing anyone to challenge me, the pizza dude speeds by in his rusted Chevette. His pizza light atop his car glowing like a beacon reminds me to check myself as I flow through the world. After all, the dude is delivering pizza to young and old, families and singletons, gays and straights, blacks, whites, and browns, rich and poor, and vegetarians and meat lovers alike. As he journeys, I give safe passage, practice restraint, show courtesy, and contain my anger.

Principle 2: Coolness to the pizza delivery dude is a practice in empathy. Let's face it: We've all taken jobs just to have a job because some money is better than none. I've held an assortment of these jobs and was grateful for the paycheck that meant I didn't have to share my Cheerios with my cats. In the big pizza wheel of life, sometimes you're the hot bubbly cheese and sometimes you're the burnt crust. It's good to remember the fickle spinning of that wheel.

Principle 3: Coolness to the pizza delivery dude is a practice in honor, and it reminds me to honor honest work. Let me tell you something about these dudes: They never took over a company and, as CEO, artificially inflated the value of the stock and cashed out their own shares, bringing the company to the brink of bankruptcy, resulting in twenty thousand people losing their jobs while the CEO builds a home the size of a luxury hotel. Rather, the dudes sleep the sleep of the just.

Principle 4: Coolness to the pizza delivery dude is a practice in equality. My measurement as a human being, my worth, is the pride I take in performing my job—any job—and the respect with which I treat others. I am the equal of the world not because of the car I drive, the size of the TV I own, the weight I can bench-press, or the calculus equations I can solve. I am the equal to all I meet because of the kindness in my heart. And it all starts here—with the pizza delivery dude.

Tip him well, friends and brethren, for that which you bestow freely and willingly will bring you all the happy luck that a grateful universe knows how to return.

SARAH ADAMS has held many jobs in her life, including telemarketer, factory worker, hotel clerk, and flower shop cashier, but she has never delivered pizzas. Raised in Wisconsin, Adams is now an English professor at Olympic College in Washington.