

# How the GPLs Helped Bring Calm to a Grocery Store Parking Lot

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For those readers who may not know me, my name is Dan Hanson and I work at Thiele Technologies in Minneapolis. I've been involved with supporting the GPL's and encouraging people to 'live' the GPLs for over a year now.

My story really has two parts. The first part is about how listening to a radio program got me thinking about understanding and communication. The second part of my story focuses on how I used what I learned and then applied to a real-life situation the very next day.

## ***PART I: Listening & Learning About Another Kind of Positive, Insightful Communication***

The first part of my story begins this way; it was Sunday evening around 7:00 and I was lying down and listening to a talk radio program. I wasn't feeling well and this show just happened to be on and besides, the topic kind of interested me. The program featured a Zen Buddhist monk named Thich Naht Hanh. I am not real familiar with Buddhism and I had never heard of this monk before; but the more I listened to the program the more I was impressed with Thich Naht Hanh's work and teachings.



Thich Naht Hanh

The beginning of the show featured a police officer who had Thich Naht Hanh come to her precinct and teach the officers there how to cope with the stress and violence they face on their jobs. The show also gave some biographical info on this monk. I learned that in the 1960's, when he first came to the US, Thich Naht Hanh spoke with the likes of **Robert McNamara**, the presiding Secretary of Defense, and talked with **Martin Luther King, Jr.** (King nominated Hanh for the Nobel Peace Prize.) He has led meditations for members of the **US Congress** as well as leaders of **Fortune 500** companies. I was really impressed with what this monk was doing. His story and this program I listened to are compelling and I would encourage everyone to give it a listen. Check it out at:

<http://speakingoffaith.publicradio.org/programs/thichnhathanh/>

As the show continued, Thich Naht Hanh talked about the key to helping others. This key, he said, is **compassion**. We should have compassion for our family members, our friends, and even those who might disagree with us or dislike us. Hanh was saying that if a problem arises and you want to help solve the problem, you must be a leader with compassion and make an effort to understand another's perspective and appreciate their concerns about a problem. The way we do this he said is through **communication**. When he said this, I thought of the GPLs and how we talk about **positive, insightful communication that empowers individuals and teams along the journey**. It was really interesting for me to see the similarities between the GPLs and what Hanh was saying about how to solve problems through communication and understanding. I really enjoyed the show and thought about what I had learned that evening.

## ***PART II: Applying What I Learned***

The next day, Monday, I had to stop by the grocery store to pick up some things after work. I was driving around looking for a parking spot and finally found one someone was vacating—close to the door—perfect on a day when the store and the lot were VERY busy. This guy just happened to be backing out of this spot in such a way that I was able to nose my car right in and take it.

Then things changed. In very short order, I figured out this guy was not pulling out of the space; he



was actually trying to get his massive, super-extended, work van into this prime space.

So there I was, sitting in his spot. He was now fully backed out of the parking place and he looked at me, screaming and waving his middle finger at me. I felt awful and he immediately started pulling away.

What could I do? I took the spot and got out of my car. What should I do? I watched the van cruising down the lane away from me and it came to a stop about 75 yards away. I saw this guy jump out. I waited for a moment and sized up the situation. I did not want to duck into the store and avoid a confrontation. I thought this guy, who was obviously upset, might damage my car—but again, I did not want to pull out and park somewhere else. I thought to myself; 'I'm going to give this guy an apology and let him know it was a mistake.'

As I stood there, the guy eventually made eye-contact with me. There was silence at first, but then the expletives started coming at me from about 65 yards out. Everyone heard what he was screaming and they looked at him. Then they looked at me, the object of his anger. The foulness of his language was incredible; I hoped there were no children nearby. Did I make a mistake by standing here? He was coming closer.

I was silent and I remained still. I tried smiling—not smirking—just trying my best to give this guy a genuine smile. Quickly drawing on what I had heard the night before, I was resolved to be compassionate parking place thief who wished to communicate positively with one of the angriest people I had dealt with in a long time.

As he drew closer—I started apologizing and my smile faded a bit—I was a little worried about this guy; if he wanted to, he do a little damage to me. He walked right by me, yelling at me.

I turned as he went by and started walking behind him. I picked up my pace, but kept a safe distance. We walked together for another 50 yards and for the first 25 of them, he was out in front of me, waving his arms (trying to get rid of me, I presume) but I kept talking to him, as calmly as I could and with respect.

Eventually he slowed down. He glanced at me. He stopped yelling, too. Then he looked at me a couple more times and I realized that maybe he was beginning to listen to me. Was I gaining his [trust](#)?

I noticed the crimson was fading in his face and as we approached the grocery store entrance, he turned to me and said he was sorry. He apologized for what he said. Then he told me that he was up at 6:00 AM and had a terrible day at work. Then he said that he felt bad for reacting the way he did and that he should learn to control his temper; especially in public. All of this information, just started pouring from this stranger.

What started as an explosive issue, was unfolding as one the neatest experiences anyone could imagine to happen in a Rainbow Foods parking lot in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

My adversary-turned-ally eventually extended his hand (He wanted to shake my hand!?! ) and said, one last time that he was sorry. I told him I would have been upset too, if someone took my

parking place the way I took his. Then he said; “I forgot my list. I have to go back to my van.” He laughed and then I smiled and patted him on the shoulder (I didn’t feel like giving him a hug at this point) and I told him to have a good evening. We were friends now and he went back to his van happier than as he had left it and I headed into the store.

When my shopping was done, I was putting my groceries in the trunk and I looked at the van across the lot. I thought that if I had reacted the way I often do to anonymous people who yell at me and curse at me, I would have had a totally different experience. More importantly, that guy would still be angry and so would I—and over what? A parking place?

Call it what you will. Buddhism, the Golden Rule, the GPLs, or simply being nice to other people. It doesn’t need a name or a label—it’s just positive, insightful communication and most importantly it takes one person to get it going. I decided to approach this problem, on this particular evening, a little differently and I realized that the GPLs call all of us to be compassionate with those we love, are friends with, work with, and those we meet in parking lots.

*“One person sitting, walking, eating, and breathing as a free person can make an impact on the whole environment around him.”*

*Thich Nhat Hanh*