



Small Actions Can Make a Big Difference

A column by Circle Pines Mayor Dave Bartholomay for the Quad Community Press Newspaper (February 5, 2019)

Think about how difficult it is to make the changes necessary to improve your life, your work, and your community. If you're like me, sometimes you know what you need to do regarding your diet and exercise, or the way you spend your money, or the bad habits you should drop, or the new habits you should start. But it seems like when we try to make that big change, we too often fail and are left in the same old condition, with no real improvement accomplished.

There might be a different way to approach this challenge. I recently finished reading a fascinating book called 'The Compound Effect' by Darren Hardy. It is like the idea of compound interest – where if you save money early in your life your money will grow and grow and you'll have a much bigger savings account than if you put the same amount into the bank later in life. The main conclusion of the book - that a series of smaller actions can actually work together to create a larger impact than one might think. That idea can be a game changer for how we look to improve our lives and our communities!

Think of your New Year's resolutions. Going for the home run by pledging to do intense workouts every day of the week, or to lose 20 pounds within a few months, etc. For many of these well-intentioned goals, you may actually be setting yourself up to fail. When after a couple of 'good' weeks you start missing workouts, or your diet doesn't change enough to lose the weight you want, you feel you have failed. And instead of a 'success story' that you can feel good about and upon which you can build, you are left once again with a sense of defeat.

Perhaps, instead, the compounding and building effect of small improvements can lead to that big difference in your life. And when you add in the momentum that comes from having one small success and then another, pretty soon you are on a roll.

What does this mean for you, your family, your life at work, and your neighbors and community?

What if you're a young person in school. What if you and your classmates took small actions like befriending a kid who doesn't seem to have many friends. Or not picking on someone when everyone else is joining in. Or doing your homework in small chunks rather than just cramming the night before the test. Or saying thanks to a cook or a janitor or a teacher at school for helping you out during the day. Small, easy wins.

Or in your community, where you might smile just a bit more - or open a door for someone to come in from the cold, like my friend Chuck does at church. Or give a slow driver a break rather than honking the horn, or be a better spectator at a youth sporting event and not complain about the ref or a coach.

Imagine how small acts such as these, done by you and perhaps noticed by many others in school or in the community, could start to inspire more people to try the same thing. And then momentum kicks in and you start to notice a real difference.

In the end, changing a habit is hard and takes real discipline. Failing at unrealistic goals isn't going to get us to where we want to go. So maybe we should start with small and important steps at building a better life, and see where that takes us and our community!