

Making Ripples

by Amanda Bancroft

It's the little things that count. And the big things, those too. Especially the little things which add up to great big things that matter a whole lot. Humans are among these. Seemingly insignificant compared to the size of our planet, people have an above-average impact on the health of the environment and fellow humans worldwide. We have to stop being too arrogant to accept that we are not the most significant things in the universe, and too humble to accept our capacity for doing harm to it.

What we do matters. Our decisions are not meaningless in the world (although the meaning of the world is still open for debate). For example, an election is decided by thousands of votes which all matter because many singular votes were counted. A landfill is made up of comparatively few trash bags from one household combined with countless other trash bags from other households, and each bag matters more than it would by itself because of the cumulative effect. Votes only cease to matter if nobody's votes matter, and trash only ceases to matter if everybody's trash doesn't matter. To put it into perspective: would it matter if not a single person voted or threw anything away ever again? Of course!

Yet as long as we each keep thinking that our own actions are meaningless compared to everyone else's combined action, we'll continue to be blind to the fact that we are "everyone else." We can't change the whole alone, but we're a part of the whole, and therefore part of its problems and solutions.

Believe it or not, people near and far are watching our actions and inaction, in person and online from quite far away thanks to social media. Besides stalkers, most people are not hyper-focusing on you, but thousands are giving you a glance, which is enough to affect them and their behavior if ever so slightly. Some people, however, are learning from you and imitating you, whether you know it or not. Children, neighbors, friends from decades ago, strangers in the supermarket...people all around us are influenced by us.

For example, if people know that a product has sold or a post on social media has already been liked by many other people, studies show that they are more likely to buy that product or like that post. It's the momentum that takes time to get going. Everyone has to decide that they matter, that their actions are worth something today. Right now.

Future generations won't care that you think you're meaningless, because they'll be living through the very meaningful results of our collective decisions. "But why," they might ask, "why didn't more people choose to do the right thing long ago?" Perhaps the greatest hurdle in making a difference is believing that we can.

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