

The Value of Small Actions

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We live in a world wherein small actions are often overlooked and as a result, hold less meaning and therefore less importance. Most modern day people seem to focus on the overall image - a completed picture or an objective that was met - rather than the individual steps or pieces it took to get to that point. In general, any great achievement is always equal to the sum of its small parts.

A famous Chinese philosopher and speaker named Lao Tzu once said, "*The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.*" I believe this to be so, so true in the case of all great movements. Rather than focus on the weight and entirety of your goals, it's important to remember our own capabilities as people, and break down projects into small manageable compartments of time. When we are able to take a large goal or objective and split it into specific, realistic goals based on priorities due to time, funds, and manpower, sooner or later a pattern begins to emerge. Completing each of these goals and checking them off of the list seems small at first glance, but over time reveals a much larger accomplishment - one that initially seemed massive, and at times unattainable.

This was exactly the case for our group of determined volunteers: a few Canadians, a German, and a French young lady. We were accompanied by local community members as well as the Foundation Montecito NGO staff, a total of 17 or so people, in an effort to make a positive impact on The Paramos de La Sarna area. The area was quite vast and beautiful, filled with luscious and diverse wildlife and nature. Unfortunately, passers by and visitors to the area over the years have abandoned a large mass of garbage in the area, creating polluted waters and damaging the environment for the plants and the animals that inhabited it.

Armed with gloves, bags, packed lunch, and sheer determination, our group showed up early on Sunday morning to do our small part in making the area safer not only for us as humans, but for the wildlife as well. Our mission was simple in practice: we only arrived to clean the garbage in the area; however, this was only a small fraction of the overall goal we're reaching for. Over the next few months, our goal is to increase awareness of the dangers and threats that are affecting the environment in the region. We are working towards creating educational opportunities and informing everyone we can about the immediate and realistic effects that pollution and bad environmental practices have on the area.

At the end of our day, we had filled over 30 bags of garbage. We scoured the area, cleaning up any waste we came across. The day was wet, cold, and rainy, but we knew that our goal was more important than discomfort - after all, nobody ever learned anything through being comfortable - we had to push ourselves and remember our goal. We were astonished by the amount of waste we came across, and even more shocked at the contents of the garbage: we came across toilet bowls, Styrofoam, glass, diapers, clothing, plastic bottles, and even barrels of oil. At one point, we needed to grasp and lower each other into the water ditches in order to retrieve the garbage that was hidden in there.

I'm immensely proud of our group, because we are making realistic and practical advances towards our goal of promotion and education of environmental sustainability. Our actions, although small, were able to cause a rippling effect throughout the community and have inspired others to take actions of their own. Our population is so big, that even if every single

person did only one thing, we'd have the ability to make quite a large positive impact on the environment in a small amount of time.

My hope for the future is that people realize the value and impact of small actions - both good and bad. Just because we can make small positive actions, does not mean people are not making small negative actions too - both of these actions add up eventually, and the negative actions will get larger and larger, causing detrimental and devastating effects to our planet. Every person, no matter how small, possesses the ability to control their actions, and can choose every day to make positive choices for our environment. Our cleaning event was a small example of a lot of small actions coming together to make a big impact.
