

The Small Revolution

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Change

It's a word we've all heard a lot this year. We're looking for change in Washington, in our environment, in our culture, and in our economy. Hey, these days, even change for a dollar would suffice. The need for change spurred the election of a new President and brought together a nation divided in ideologies. The desire for change is great, but sometimes it feels as if our problems are greater still. In the face of our individual, national, and global challenges, change can feel impossible.

When we try to change the world all at once, we become overwhelmed with the vastness of our problems. Debts are too large to pay, jobs are too scarce to find, and life is too stressful to conquer. In times as complex as these, however, the answer is surprisingly simple.

We have to start thinking SMALL.

Now is the time for the SMALL revolution.

When tackling problems, we are often told to think big. We filter out life's seemingly insignificant details in order to concentrate on the greater issues. After all, big ideas yield big results, or so the assumption goes. Certainly, no one wants to be thought of as the person who "can't see the forest for the trees." But many times, these very same little details are the ones that can serve as the real catalysts for change in our own lives and in the lives of others—if we only start to recognize their potential.

The SMALL revolution asks people to forget about the old ways. To tackle today's issues and achieve our greatest goals, we need to shift our thinking away from the big picture and focus instead on the small pixels. These new times call for a new outlook, and therefore, we must change our perspective from the grandiose and difficult to the humble and doable. By rediscovering the magic within our smallest actions and celebrating the tiny victories that each of us accomplish daily, we *can* overcome the big obstacles and effect real change.

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Corporations: Downsize your focus.

It goes without saying that the issues facing big businesses in this turbulent economy are monumental. As we watch some of America's industry bellwethers plead before Congress for financial aid, slash their workforces, and even close up shop, the problems can seem insurmountable. Even companies that are managing to do okay are feeling uncertain and in uncharted territory. Yet, when you look closely, many of the issues businesses now face aren't that new. In fact, they are magnified versions of the very same problems they have had to deal with every day in the past—even in good times (with significant exceptions, of course). Drill down, and you will see that the real secret to solving these big problems is to look at them with a brand new attitude, a new perspective, and to attack them piece by piece with SMALL solutions. For example:

Big problem: *Getting clients in a recession (and keeping existing ones, too).* In the face of an uncertain economy, corporations have slashed their spending in an effort to weather the storm.

SMALL solution: *Make small talk.* Now more than ever, it is essential that companies talk—and truly listen—to their customers and clients in order to deliver winning results. But this important dialogue doesn't always happen during the big presentation or in the formal strategy memo. In fact, the “ah-ha” moment can often occur during the most informal times. Take, for example, the Aflac Duck. Our agency's work for Aflac was not inspired by a big all-day meeting, but rather by a brief comment made afterwards by the company's CEO. Just by making small talk, a pop-culture icon was hatched then and there.

You also never know where a new client might come from. Stuck waiting for the elevator? Standing in line at the supermarket? Take off your bluetooth, look up from your blackberry and talk to the person next to you. You'll be surprised what opportunities come your way as a result.

Big problem: *Getting consumers to spend money on your product in the recession.* With consumer confidence at historic lows, enticing them to open their wallets for your product is harder than ever. Shoppers now need a real incentive to spend money, and marketers need to give them the reason to do it.

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SMALL solution: *See the glass as half empty.* That doesn't mean we want you to adopt a pessimistic outlook on life. Rather, we want you to take a look around to see what products are not working and what cries out for a solution. Many times, the best innovations come from existing products, so take three items you use on a routine basis and ask what SMALL change you could make to improve them. One SMALL adjustment could make the difference between a mediocre product and one that flies off the shelves. P&G's best-selling Swiffer WetJet, for example, came from a most unexpected source. During the research and development process, P&G realized they could take their existing technology—the dry weave used in Pampers diapers—and apply it to their cleaning products. Thus, a very effective and fun way to clean was born. Swiffer has revolutionized cleaning in millions of homes, just by finding a new use for a decades-old product—Pampers on the end of a mop! Think of all the existing technology we are surrounded with every day. Imagine the ways they might be able to be “reinvented” for other purposes.

Big problem: *Maintaining a good public image in the face of a world in crisis.* With the controversies over government bail-outs, executive bonuses, and predatory business practices clogging the airwaves, consumers have a right to be skeptical. In fact, according to a February 2009 *Trendwatching* report, only 13% of Americans put their trust in big businesses. A handful of companies, however, are ahead of the curve: they have already discovered that SMALL acts can work wonders for their reputations.

SMALL solution: *Make SMALL impressions on your customers by giving back to the community.* These little acts of generosity not only boost your image, they are relatively easy and inexpensive. For example, Whole Foods brings their customers directly into the mix by rewarding them with wooden tokens whenever they opt to bring their own reusable bags instead of using paper or plastic disposable ones. Shoppers then choose to “donate” the tokens, valued at a nickel each, to local charities listed within the store. By engaging their customers directly in this shared experience, they are enforcing their commitment not only to the earth, but to the individual communities that surround their stores. SMALL impressions can also come in the form of product giveaways. Every year Ben and Jerry’s gives away free ice cream for an entire day, which not only reinforces the company’s “do-gooder” image, but it also reminds the general public of the product they may have otherwise forgotten.

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Big problem: *In the midst of the economic downturn, employee morale is at striking lows.* With lagging profits and ever-increasing layoffs, workers are anxious, unhappy, and unsure.

SMALL solution: *Make a little go a long way.* These challenging times mean most companies are unable to give raises or hire additional staff, so look for other small gestures that can keep teams motivated. To boost morale without breaking the bank, try things like remembering employees' birthdays and personally delivering a compliment for a job well done. And, of course, nothing brings a company together like free food. At The Kaplan Thaler Group, for instance, we took over an ice cream truck for a day. Parked behind our building, the truck surprised and delighted our employees with whatever sweet treat they liked. Take it from us, a single scoop can boost more than sugar levels.

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Entrepreneurs: Think small. Win big.

For entrepreneurs, a niche business can be ideal, since there is little direct competition and they can be launched on a shoestring budget. Many times the most successful niche businesses are created by making a SMALL improvement to an existing product.

SMALL business owner Sheri Schmelzer knows that first-hand. In a budget-stretching maneuver, Schmelzer jazzed up a pair of her 7-year-old daughter's Crocs with a few inexpensive buttons and rhinestones she had in her sewing kit. Not surprisingly, her daughter was elated and soon the whole Schmelzer family was making their way around town in their *haute couture* Crocs. It just so happened that the resin clog company's headquarters were only a few miles from Schmelzer's home and inevitably, a company employee spotted her handiwork and passed along her business card. Before long, Schmelzer launched her own company, dubbed Jibbitz, and was contracting manufacturers in China to produce her footwear charms. And just a short while later, with business booming, Crocs purchased Jibbitz for the not-so-small sum of \$20 million.

Million dollar ideas are everywhere. In fact, one just might be licking you in the face. At least that's what happened to 52-year-old divorcee Carol Gardner. Broke, unemployed, and alone, Gardner entered her local pet store's annual Christmas card contest in hopes of snagging the grand prize: a year's supply of dog food. With this humble goal in mind, Gardner set forth on the photo shoot that would change her life. She plopped her 4-month-old English bulldog in the tub, fashioned a fluffy white beard out of bubble bath around her face, and pressed a button. After writing a cheeky caption, Gardner sent her entry off to the pet store, and to her surprise, she won. The card became a hit with all of her friends and family. Suddenly, the light bulb went on: she could create a greeting card business based on Zelda, her mutt of a muse. And so, Zelda Wisdom was born and shortly thereafter, Hallmark came calling, helping to turn her SMALL idea into an international line of greeting cards, gifts, clothing, jewelry, and even books.

As we were writing our book, THE POWER OF SMALL, we discovered that many times the greatest business ideas began on a whim. Schmelzer, Gardner, and many others like them never set out to create the next big thing; they did it by accident. No pressure, no deadlines, no proposals, no facts and figures. Outside the confines of the traditional problem-solving mentality, and without the threat of possible repercussions, they were free from their inhibitions and found something big by starting out very, very small.

Take it SMALL.

Each of us as individuals could learn a lot from the above entrepreneurs. Our personal and professional lives are so over-scheduled, over-worked, and under-rewarded that sometimes life feels too overwhelming to get moving again. But, THE POWER OF SMALL gives you the tools to cut through the clutter of everyday life in order to concentrate on the little things that can really make a difference. By thinking SMALL, we can not only manage during difficult times, we can actually thrive.

Go mini to maximize your productivity. We've all heard the term "multi-tasker," but why not become a "*mini*-tasker"? Trying to achieve your greatest ambitions all at once is a self-defeating strategy. As the old cliché goes, "Rome wasn't built in a day." So when you imagine your goals, break them down brick by brick. These smaller components of your larger plan then become easily accomplished "mini-tasks," which one by one will help you construct the future you've envisioned. The key is to break down the huge job into manageable chunks. For example, if you find the idea of cleaning your entire house overwhelming, narrow your perspective (literally) and the clutter suddenly becomes manageable. Just make a circle with your thumb and forefinger, look through it, and find just one thing to clean up. Done? Do it again. Pretty soon the house will be spotless.

Break it down to relax and hone your focus. When facing a stressful day, full of deadlines, meetings, phone calls and an ever-growing inbox—don't tackle it all at once. Rather, take a moment to visualize your day as a collection of moments. At work, this can mean taking a half-hour break from emailing so you can solely focus on getting that memo or budget done. Don't even look at your email again until you have finished proofreading the document. By compartmentalizing the various sections of your schedule in this way, you can slowly conquer it by checking off one thing at a time.

Give yourself a minute. Even if you are rushing to meet a looming deadline, take a step back, and before you hand something in, imagine you have just one more minute to make sure everything is exactly as you want it. Giving yourself just 60 seconds to look over an email or report one more time can make the difference between impressing your clients and possibly offending them. So, use that extra minute to relax and review with a final push of focus before you press the “send” button.

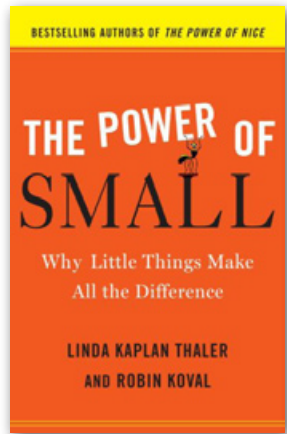
Most importantly, appreciate the little things in life. These are no doubt stressful times for all of us, and in times like these we tend to forget about the multitude of SMALL good things in our lives and concentrate only on the big bad things that weigh heavily on our shoulders. We all need to take time out to breathe and reflect on the positive aspects of our life, whether it's our good health, a good dinner, or just a good laugh. So, before you end each day, tally up the things that went right in the past 24 hours. Did your son thank you for helping him with his homework? Did you have a traffic-free commute? Make a list of these positive things and appreciate them. If you take the time to add up all the good SMALL things you have, you'll quickly find that they outweigh all the bad things combined. That doesn't mean the bad things disappear, but it sure makes them easier to handle, one SMALL step at a time.

Join the SMALL Revolution.

THE POWER OF SMALL lives within all of us, from the automatic pleasantries we exchange in the elevator that help to forge relationships, to the little strokes of inspiration that lead to the creation of new fortunes. The SMALL revolution isn't about changing the world overnight; it's about making a gradual difference, one modest achievement at a time. Every person counts; every one of us can make a difference in our own little way. So, join our SMALL revolution and tell your friends that SMALL is the next big thing.

THE POWER OF SMALL lives within all of us,
from the automatic pleasantries we exchange
in the elevator that help to forge relationships,
to the little strokes of inspiration that lead to
the creation of new fortunes.

And remember, **“A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step”** —Lao-tzu. 📖



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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Linda Kaplan Thaler and Robin Koval are CEO and President, respectively, of The Kaplan Thaler Group and the authors of the national bestsellers *The Power of Nice: How to Conquer the Business World with Kindness* and *BANG!: Getting Your Message Heard in a Noisy World*. Their newest collaboration, *The Power of Small: Why Little Things Make All the Difference*, was released April 21, 2009. You can keep up with them at [The Small Blog](#) or follow them on [Twitter](#).

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