

The Value of Small Inconveniences

I most often fail to do the right thing not because the right thing is hard, or truly harmful.

I fail to do the right thing because the right thing is inconvenient*.

It's inconvenient to help a homeless person in distress. It's inconvenient to write a sympathy letter to a friend. It's inconvenient to pull over to the side of the road to help someone with car trouble.

It takes some work to become the kind of person willing to go out of the way to do good. But that's what I want to become.

So I start small.

Many impressive people have impressive morning routines consisting of things like jiu jitsu or acro yoga. Mine includes picking up trash.

When I go for walks in the morning, I'll come across trash on the street, or glass on the ground near my local park. When I do, I know in a split second what I should do. I should remove it. If I don't, some kid is going to step on the glass, or some street is going to become uglier.

I groan inwardly.

It's annoying, because I'm just trying to get through my morning. And sometimes I do. But more days than not, I will stop my walk, pick up the trash or pick up the glass, and retrace my steps to a waste bin.

It feels inconvenient, even though all of this – like so many inconvenient things I should be doing – takes only a minute or two

Picking up trash and/or glass has become a routine now, and I've trained my mind to give myself a pat on the back when I do this small little act of improving the world. I know it seems ridiculous. But I know that just with that small action in the beginning of my day, I defeat a little bit of the laziness behind my failure to do good elsewhere. I build up not just a tolerance but a heightened awareness for inconvenient things which are also “the right thing to do.”

And I still often fail to do the right thing, even with this practice. But I think at least that the small inconveniences I overcome early in my day prepare me for the choices that come later. And I believe that if I fail to pick up the bit of garbage in front of me, I'm going to be less likely to choose an inconvenient thing when it really matters.

*Or I'm being a coward.