

## Dr. Semmelweis and the Domino Effect

Hungarian Dr. Ignaz Semmelweis had a frustrating problem. The death rate of his ward was higher than any other ward of the hospital where he worked. He wanted to figure out what made his death rate so high, and how he could fix it. He knew that his ward was the first that doctors visited after performing autopsies on the dead. Semmelweis decided that all doctors must wash their hands after they finished an autopsy and before entering his ward. After just a short time, the death rate of his ward became the lowest in the whole hospital. Because Dr. Semmelweis had instituted the simple rule that doctors must wash their hands often, it impacted several people by saving lives. This is just one example of a small difference affecting many different people. There are several advantages to helping many people, even if it is in a small way.

One of the best advantages is that you can help make life better for some people. Just by making a small difference, you can help solve a problem in someone's life. Even if you make what seems to be a minor change in someone's life, it can greatly change their day. This can especially be true when you give small gifts to people. For example, you decide to give many people one blanket. Most likely one of those people is without adequate food or housing. He lives a very poor life: sleeping under any roof he can find and eating any available food. This one person will be grateful to receive one blanket. Now he can be warm even when he is not sleeping in proper housing. This is particularly affective in third world countries or poor communities.

Sometimes small differences multiply and grow bigger to affect even more people in an even bigger way. Often this happens because the people whose lives are changed first decide to do the same thing for more people. This simple domino effect does not always happen, though.

Sometimes the small difference itself gets larger. Suppose someone invents something insignificant, but quite useful. This invention grows popular and gets sold all over the world. Someone who buys the invention decides to improve it by adding something more to the invention. This changed invention now gets sold to many more people. This continues until the once small invention is now a huge life-changing device that can help solve big problems.

One minor, yet wonderful, reason to make a small difference for many people is the fact that the recipients are usually quite thankful. They are grateful that someone thought of them, grateful that someone was kind enough to help about them, and grateful that they have something new in their life. It is always nice to do something for someone who you know will be thankful. It makes the giver feel good to know that his receivers are happy.

Another example of a small difference affecting many people is in the life of Harriet Tubman. Harriet was a slave for many years before she decided that she must run away. She fled to Pennsylvania and lived happily for about a year in freedom. Something was missing, though. She had no home with her family to welcome her into. Harriet daringly decided to go back into slave country and bring her family to freedom. Harriet tried to find out where her brothers and parents lived so she could free them, but so many other people wanted to run away, that she took others instead. After several trips back to the South, she was able to free her family, but still did not stop. For many years Harriet Tubman returned to the dangerous slave country and rescued hundreds of Negroes. Because Harriet was able to make a small difference in her own life, she was able to make that same difference in many others' lives as well. There are numerous ways to make a small difference in many people's lives and there are several different outcomes. But all small differences make people happy, which is a wonderful reason to make a small difference in the world at large.