

## **Sweating the Small Stuff**

By Janet Christensen

Do you sweat the small stuff? Perhaps the more relevant question is "what is the small stuff?"

Every day we are faced with situations, choices, and decisions. How do we know what the long term effects of any decision may be? What seems small now may end up having significant consequences down the road.

The flight of a plane provides a good example of how the seemingly small decisions have huge importance. A plane in flight is constantly faced with wind currents and other factors that cause it to go off course. If the pilot does not adjust the flight path accordingly, being off course by even one degree will mean the plane ends up at a different destination than intended. One degree may not seem like much, however, over time and distance it has a significant impact on where the plane will travel. In fact, a plane is off its direct flight path over ninety percent of the time as the pilot, or autopilot, responds to what is happening around the plane and adjusts to bring it back on course.

A friend recently shared with me how his willingness to overlook some small issues led to some serious outcomes for his business over a period of time. As he was preoccupied with getting his business off the ground, his employee was developing some undesirable work practices and habits that he chose to overlook. Things such as taking work time to promote personal interests, not keeping accurate records of inventory, and keeping "flexible" work hours seemed small and inconsequential at the time. Over time, however, the abuses became more frequent and had greater negative consequences for his business and his relationship with his employee. The willingness to not sweat the small stuff ultimately resulted in some big stuff happening that was costly for the business and for both people.

My friend told me that he realized that by being out of integrity with his values and ignoring the small things, he sent a signal to his employee that the undesirable behaviour was, in fact, acceptable. By choosing to overlook the issues, his employee perceived him to be condoning the practices. He found himself and his business heading in a direction that was far from where he wanted to head and that was out of alignment with his values and ethics.

Not sweating the small stuff means not making mountains out of molehills and not giving people and situations more significance than is appropriate or justified. It means keeping things in perspective. However, it does not mean being out of integrity with your values and ethics. Choosing to set your values and ethics aside in the misguided pretense of not sweating the small stuff sends mixed signals to yourself and to others. Having integrity with your values and ethics means dealing with issues as they arise in a consistent manner. It means making choices and decisions that are based on *your* values and ethics to keep you on *your* path. It means you end up where you want, being who you want to be in your life.

It's the everyday decisions that ultimately take us where we go, not the big ones. Pay attention to the small choices and decisions you make every day. Make them with awareness and in alignment with your values and ethics. Then the big decisions will take care of themselves.

*"The minute you settle for less than you deserve, you get even less than you settled for."*

Maureen Dowd

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