

Making Ripples

by Amanda Bancroft

Facebook status updates have been the brunt of jokes (sharing what you ate for dinner) and the fuel for social movements (the MeToo campaign). They are funny, boring, inspiring, upsetting, and everything else. Many people avoid social media entirely, with a justifiable aversion to its drama as well as the black hole of time which is the news feed. Yet others are clearly using their status updates as a tool to make a difference, sometimes for their own mental health and often for the benefit of the oppressed or for the environment.

Depending on the person, since we're all unique individuals, social media can be one of many powerful tools to update the status of the world from one that's downtrodden to one that's more beautiful than we can imagine. The real world of actions will always be the deciding factor in what gets done, but it always starts with a thought, an emotion, a connection, a plan, or some inspiration.

Status updates can be very inspiring. They can be thought-provoking, or just make people laugh (hopefully not at another's expense, although this is widespread). Increasing the serotonin in a reader's brain isn't that bad a way to make a difference; we all need laughter to release stress and step back from the hardships of life. Alternatively, status updates can be a way to share true information in the era of fake news. Critical thinking and source evaluation are key here.

You might've seen someone else's status update that motivated you to go do something good, or made you feel great. Probably, you've posted status updates that have made someone else feel good or motivated, too, maybe not intentionally. Each day we have the choice to live our "real lives" and our "virtual lives" with intentionality. If you've fallen into the virtual life of a troll, or just used social media to be hateful or vent, well that's nothing to stop you. Even 100 negative Facebook posts don't have to mean that the next one is also negative. Be compassionate regardless of whether you're typing or talking, because both methods are communicating. Publicly typed words generally reach more people, actually. One could make many more positive ripples with a status update.

If you want to join in but know you struggle with online distractions, there are devices that can help. For example, the Google Chrome browser offers a free extension called Stay Focused (note the "e" is left out) which allows you to set a limit on how long you can spend on any website that you find distracting. You can set limits such as five minutes per day, or block access to sites during certain work hours on specific days. When the time is up, Stay Focused doesn't allow you to visit that site. Visit stayfocused.com to activate it, or seek out similar tools for browsers or devices you use most often.

Just remember to keep it simple – this isn't about perfection or popularity. It's about touching someone else's life in some way that makes the world a better place, and there are millions of methods for doing so.

Amanda Bancroft is a writer, artist, and naturalist building an off-grid cottage for land conservation on Kessler Mountain. She and her husband Ryan blog about their adventures and offer a solar-hosted online educational center on how to make a difference with everyday choices at: www.RipplesBlog.org.