

Making Ripples

by Amanda Bancroft

It's understandable. Who wants to make a difference if they will suffer for it, and be inconvenienced? (Well, some people are willing, but that's another story.) In a world that often penalizes people for doing the right thing for someone else or on behalf of the environment, naturally it may seem like an uphill battle better left un-fought. But that's a grave miscalculation.

Turns out, the little voices that tell us not to do something good are often (but not always) uninformed and ignorant. Will it really be too expensive to buy an ethical item or is there actually a huge sale going on or about to happen in future? Will volunteering take too much time or will time open up like outer space if we stop watching so much TV? Everyone's different (I don't even have a TV or access to online streaming) so the little voices will be uniquely wrong for each situation. The trick is to figure out what you truly want to do to help someone else or the planet, and get informed about what it will actually take – not what you *think* it *might* take – to make a difference. This is important even if one decides to take action but underestimates, rather than overestimates, the challenge.

If you want to conserve water but think it'll be too much inconvenience, pick water conservation methods which are automatic (like low-flow showerheads or installing a rain barrel underneath the downspout near the garden). If you want to be a fashion designer but think ethical or conscious actions just aren't for you, look at the competition you'll have from fair trade and organic boutiques that make soft, stylish and high-end wear from bamboo and other sustainable materials (especially the online stores, which are huge right now). If you want a peaceful, beautiful yard and think native habitat would look too ugly or take too much work, look around at the featured native gardens in our area and hire someone to design a space where you could meditate, do yoga, or watch birds while simultaneously supporting native ecosystems.

It sometimes happens that doing the right thing looks a lot like living in the so-called developing country. Don't people only conserve water if they're forced to during a drought? And isn't throwing stuff away a sign of wealth? Who makes their house out of dirt unless they have no alternative? Actually, not wasting water is a good idea if we want clean water to meet our needs now and for future generations. Items thrown away are coming back to haunt us, via pollution, because they don't really go "away" at all. And even wealthy people in Northwest Arkansas have chosen to build using dirt-based methods (think Earthships, Earthbag homes, cob etc) because it's smart, efficient, artistic and eco-friendly. It's also more legal than you might think, in some areas.

No deprivation is required to make a difference. If you pick an action that's compatible with your abilities and desires, it can actually be really fun to make the world a better place. It can save you money and may not take any extra time. Start small, go slow, ask questions, but do something!

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.