

The Courage to Change the Things I Can

By Mark Olmsted



The article, *The Courage to Change the Things I Can*, is written by Mark Olmsted. His story was originally shared on *The Bob Edwards Show* on August 19th, 2011. Mark is a recovering addict and explained that, "[he] is familiar with the serenity prayer. But when he got fed up with all the litter in his neighborhood, Olmsted realized there is a difference between the things you must accept and the things you can actually change." The article explains why Mark picks up trash in his neighborhood daily. Mark had always been against littering in his life and even had interrupted a date once to go pick up trash on the street. In his opinion, "littering is the most preventable and stupid of the world's sins..." He goes on to share his story of being an addict and why he changed his ways. Later he talks about his current life and goes on to explain how his new found "addiction" of collecting litter began.

"Every morning, picking up trash is my answer to the questions: How can I be of service today? What do I have the courage to change?"

Model the Way

- Mark has decided to make clear his values to others and set the example by picking up trash each day.
- He challenges himself each day to focus his efforts and shows how steadfast his values are by refusing to accept anyone who litters.

Inspire a Shared Vision

- Picking up trash is a simple task but it has a much deeper meaning. People do not have to accept the world around them, they have to power to make it a better place. Every morning you have the power to decide if your going to have a productive or unproductive day.

"And every night, no matter how much the day didn't seem to go my way, I can fall asleep counting the bags of trash I've picked up, comforted that in this lifetime I've been able to find one thing to do that's unarguably, unambiguously good."

"I believe in picking up trash because it's taught me that you can't assume to know the difference between the things you must accept and the things that you can change—you have to think about it"

Challenge the Process

- Mark was an average citizen who dealt with a normal problem in his life-- littering. As time went on, Mark ended up seizing the initiative in his community by deciding that enough was enough and that he would be the one to make a difference and start a movement by picking up trash on his daily walks with his dog.
- He was able to come to the conclusion that he could create a small win in his life almost every day even when the day might not have been his best. Through his recovery he was able to find a more beneficial habit in his life-- one that would not only help himself but his community as well and give him a sense of purpose.

Enable Others to Act

- Sometimes you are going to have to take risks. If you know something is bothering you "like a pebble in [your] shoe," then do something about it. Do not wait for someone else to push you; you have the ability and potential to do it yourself. Believe in yourself!
- The satisfaction after getting that pebble out of your shoe is like no other feeling. The relief, comfort, and fulfillment of knowing you did a good deed that not only helps you, but others as well is priceless.

"So one day, I decided to do just that: Pick it up. In a leap of faith, I went down to Home Depot, bought myself an E-Z Reacher, and started plucking."

Encourage the Heart

"For example, though I am also against corporal punishment, there are people who would readily argue that it is a useful and necessary form of discipline. But no one ever defends littering—even the people who do it."

- Littering is a sin in itself. Everyone knows it is a bad thing. Since you know how wrong it is, change it.
- You cannot keep making excuses, you know you can change a lot of things with your abilities. It is all up to you if you have the courage and will to change the issue instead of accepting it.
- In your heart, you want to make the most of every day. What is your purpose in life? You can be of service to others. You can try your best to make their lives as good if not better than yours. Share the wealth and do a good deed.

Mark had been collecting trash for over five years and picked up everything from newspaper, to soda cans, to cigarette packs just to name a few. He usually does his civic duty when walking his dog around the neighborhood. Mark explains that he picks up trash because he has come to understand that there are some things you must accept in your life but there are also things you can change and, in this case, cleaning up his community is something he can do to change it. Mark ends his story of recovery and community service by sharing how even on his most challenging days as a human, he is able to be comfortable in the fact he has done an "unambiguously good" act by cleaning up others messes and mistakes.