

DTD Episode 61 Show Notes

Are You Really Suffering From a Lot of Little Problems?

Episode #61



Tools You Can Use In Leadership & Life

Doesn't it seem like life brings you one little hiccup after another? It is often easy to stay busy fixing one small challenge after another. Our lives or work can get consumed with the little nuisances coming at us. But, we'd still rather have a bunch of small manageable problems, right?

Well.....I'm going to ask you to examine that today. You see, on the surface, little problems seem small and unrelated and one little challenge after another can consume our entire focus.

Often, however, what we're missing is that there's actually a bigger issue to tackle. Focusing on one little snafu after another does nothing more than shift your attention away from the solution that could actually alter your entire circumstance.

As a for instance, I have a client I've been working with for a while. At the start of each session he would describe the current challenge:

- The team missed this deadline,
- There was a mistake on this project and no one caught it,
- We had planned to have a celebratory lunch together but we had an emergency,
- I didn't have time to exercise
- I have no clothes that fit right now.

The full focus was on fixing each little issue as it popped up, or at least taking the time to complain about it.

I knew they were all connected but he didn't.....Yet! So, his time was consumed with these seemingly unrelated, but constant small hiccups.

One day, as he described yet another minor frustration, I popped out of my chair and said, "Hold that thought! I'll be right back!" I went out into the waiting area and asked the receptionist where they kept decorative vases or containers. She pointed me in the direction of some cabinets in the kitchen and I perused everything they had quickly and to my delight found the perfect visual!

It was a beautiful crystal basket. It had probably originally been delivered filled with a bouquet of flowers.

I brought it back into his office and set it in the center of his conference table.

"What's this?" he inquired.

"It's a basket", I replied, with a smile!

He was puzzled so I went on to explain.

All of the minor frustrations, snafus, challenges that monopolized his focus each week were the cause of a much bigger problem. Looking at them as separate issues was precluding him from working on the real issue.

And there isn't as much pain involved with a lot of little snafus. There is just a constant low level of frustration. However, pull all of that pain together and you have the motivation to tackle a big issue. It was time for him to muster the strength and tenacity to attack the real issue.

He and his entire team were working without margin. I have never seen a tighter schedule anywhere. They literally have appointments scheduled to the minute. It is one client, my only client, where I KNOW, for a fact that I will finish ON TIME. It doesn't matter what we are covering at the end of a session. When that clock hits our designated time we are done. On the dot! As a matter of fact, he often gets antsy about 7 minutes before the end. I feel his energy begin to shift to the next task at hand.

Working this tight means that any emergency, any snafu requires hours of finagling with schedules to move things and the ripple affect is felt for weeks or months. I am NOT exaggerating.

One week they lost power for a day and a half. Yes, that is a HUGE inconvenience for any business. But weeks later they were still feeling the pain of that outage. They had no margin to allow for a swift shift of workload or appointments.

So, this beautiful crystal basket was to become the symbol of the bucket in which he must add every little challenge. He needed to start feeling the full brunt and pain of the real issue rather than the small pain of each tiny challenge.

You see, his focus was on all the minor consequences of the bigger issue.

It brings to mind the old saying, “he could not see the forest for the trees.”

For the first few weeks I had to keep reminding him, “Yep, that happened because you have no margin.”

“That must be frustrating. That happens when you have no wiggle room in your schedule.”

“This too is because you are too tightly scheduled.”

I would point out ways that a problem could be so much smaller if they had more time to deal with it.

I pointed out where he would describe a visit with relatives as a drudgery, not because he was reluctant to see them, but because he was overwhelmed by the thought of another drain on his time.

Slowly he began to see. The crystal basket, while not as masculine as the other items in his office, became an important visual to help him begin to see the smaller issues as interconnected. Began to help build the motivation he needed to tackle the larger problem rather than focusing on all of the smaller consequences. A focus on these little things could consume his time but would never transform his situation.

Your larger issue may not be time but I do want to ask you where you might be focusing on the small consequences of poor decisions or a lack of self discipline. Is there a place in your life or work where it is time to shift your focus to a larger issue that is creating the on-going chaos?

- Is your monthly struggle to pay your rent or mortgage the result of a larger spending issue? Are you perhaps shifting too many resources to smoking, gambling or unnecessary shopping?
- Is your inability to find time to grocery shop, take a leisurely walk or soak in a hot bath the result of your people pleasing tendencies?
- Are the struggles you have with your team, significant other, or kids the result of your lack of integrity over all? Do you fail to keep your promises? Or, perhaps the larger issue is your anger.

Start to pay attention to the little struggles and follow the chain back. What causes each? Is there a common theme?

Where is it time for you to focus on the forest rather than the trees?

Package the emotion and frustration and begin to ignite the desire to tackle that bigger issue rather than the ongoing smaller consequences. It is time to truly transform your circumstance!

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