

The Power of One

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By Lisa Hammond

LAS VEGAS, Nev.—Margaret Mead once said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

I have personally experienced the power of Margaret Mead’s words many times. Years ago as I was struggling through the ups and downs of running a small business, a customer sent me a letter that not only changed the direction of my business, but also changed my life. It gave me hope at a time I desperately needed it.

The customer’s name was Liz, and she wrote to tell me that, although she couldn’t afford to shop at my catalog company as often as she would like, she wanted me to know that it mattered a great deal to her. She said she looked forward to each and every issue of *Femail Creations*.

With her heartfelt letter, she included \$2—four quarters and a dollar bill. She explained she wanted me to put the money toward mailing costs to make sure the catalog stayed in business so she didn’t miss a single issue.

With tears in my eyes, I read her note over and over again. I just couldn’t believe that a complete stranger would make such a profound gesture.

How did she know the business hung in the balance?

How did she know how much I needed a sign to go on?

Her letter couldn’t have come at a better time. I was so grateful for the reminder that the work I was doing mattered and was making a difference.

I shared the story of Liz’s letter with my dear friend Cathy Conheim, founder of the Real Women’s Project—an organization dedicated to helping women realize and celebrate their inherent beauty and strength. Cathy knew all too well how the challenges of constantly being underfunded and overstressed were impacting me. She also knew my customers were loyal and believed in the mission of my company.

Cathy challenged me to share the story of Liz’s letter in my blog. At first I thought it was “unprofessional” to share all my struggles and told Cathy I thought my customers would think I wasn’t being a good leader. But I took a leap of faith.

With all the courage I could muster, I posted the blog and mailed out the newsletter to my customers with the story of Liz's letter and asked for their vote of confidence and encouragement. After I sent it out, waves of panic hit me. What have I done?

They are going to think I am incompetent. They are going to know we are struggling financially. I went round and round with panic, consoling myself with the knowledge that at least my customers knew I put my heart and soul into trying to make a difference.

Then an amazing thing happened. A few days after the blog post, letters started arriving at the office. Letters just like the one Liz had sent me—filled with support and encouragement. And, more shocking, these letters had money inside—change, dollar bills, checks for \$5, \$10 and even \$25.

Dozens and dozens of letters began arriving at the office. Then, hundreds of letters started pouring in. The letters contained heartfelt messages of support and stories of how much the catalog meant to them, encouraging me to never give up. They were putting their money where their hearts were.

Not one letter said "you were unprofessional" or "you are a bad leader."

Every single letter said "thank you for telling the truth about how hard it is to do something that makes a difference, and we want you to keep going because it matters to us."

They sent whatever they could afford to give—even though I hadn't asked for a penny. I asked for a vote of confidence, and I got it.

It was a turning point, and Liz's letter helped me keep putting one foot in front of the other. I kept her letter and her four quarters and one dollar hanging up in my office for many, many years to remind me of why I was in business. One person, one dollar can make a difference.

I am not alone in this realization.

- The longest journey begins with one step.
- The greatest accomplishments begin with one idea.
- The greatest fortunes were built beginning with the first dollar.
- The greatest books are written one word at a time.

You may be only one person, but you may very well be "the one" to do great things in the world. Start where you are. Begin now. You have the power of one.