

# HOW *little* THINGS CAN MEAN A LOT

I'm not convinced everything needs to be all that complicated.  
I'm for small solutions that make living easier.

BY JIM CAMPBELL



I wonder who invented pockets? Someone did, you know! I never thought about things like pockets being invented until I saw a medieval tapestry hanging in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, England. It showed a group of people on a pilgrimage, possibly to Canterbury. They had no pockets to put their stuff in! Instead they attached their stuff to leather thongs hanging down from their belts.

All around their waists all sorts of things dangled: purses, bags of food, cooking pots. It must have been quite a sight to see them trudge by with all their stuff swaying to and fro. I suppose it was in those times that thieves acquired the name “cut purses.”

In a crowd, a quick move with a sharp knife meant a pilgrim's or a merchant's purse would be gone. Inventing pockets is not as big a thing as inventing an electric light or an airplane, but whoever invented pockets made life a lot simpler for people.

Then there is the business of shoes, of lefts and rights. Did you know that for hundreds of years shoe manufacturers used straight lasts. That meant that left and right shoes were identical. No accommodation was made for the way feet are made. It must have been the origin of the idea that you had to break in your shoes. It was you or the shoes.

Originally I assumed that, like the pocket business, they did that a very long time

## PEN POINT

ago. I checked with the Bata Shoe Museum in Toronto. They said it was in the 1860s, only about 130 years ago, when most shoe manufacturers got around to making different shoes for left and right feet. There should be a monument for the person who got that simple idea and carried it out.

There are all sorts of things we take for granted, as givens, things that seem to have always been so. But someone had to figure out these “obvious” solutions. I wonder who first put handles on mugs and cups so we wouldn’t burn our fingers holding hot drinks? And what about the person that figured out buttons. Before buttons, people either wrapped themselves in togas and saris or struggled with laces and pins. And how about the fellow that invented matches? He sure made life a lot simpler for people. I guess before there were matches you had to have a fire burning all the time, or be pretty good with flints and that sort of thing.

Today, as we end the century, we seem to live in a time where every problem is identified as being complicated and every solution as requiring some high-tech gadget, something to plug in or that comes with batteries included. And why is it that every personal problem has its own support group and therapist ready to schedule counselling sessions?

I’m not convinced everything is all that complicated. I’m for small solutions. Like using a simple Chinese fan in a warm room instead of a buzzing battery-driven

one. Or like developing a new habit rather than getting into complicated programs.

A new habit? What do I mean? Well let’s say you’re finding the days long and the normal daily problems and hassles a pain in the neck. What could you do? Well, you could decide to make a simple change in your life. Like being courteous and thankful all the time – to everyone. It is not complicated, not high-tech, but it can change the way your days go and the atmosphere you live in.

When you thank people for their help and service, for things often unnoticed, they are usually surprised and delighted. It is a way to give some measure of enjoyment to the day. After all, courtesy and expressing gratitude are what lubricates our society. So a

thank-you is good in itself.

Strangely, there is a feedback loop in this. Your acts of courtesy, by themselves, add lightness to your day, they ease the strains and pressures. And, in the process, you find all sorts of things in your life to be thankful for, things you probably would have missed.

It is not on a par with inventing pockets, figuring out it takes different left and right shoes that make a pair, putting handles on mugs and buttons on clothes, or coming up with matches. But it is, like them, one of those small things that make living easier. ✨

Courtesy is one of those small things that can make a big difference.

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