

## Ripples on the Pond

The other day I saw an up close photo of the moment immediately following an object being thrown into a perfectly still body of water. The impact was so strong that it actually shot a drop back up and held it suspended about an inch above the surface. Below it, a large ring, a ripple in the water, had formed and was starting on its journey to unknown shores. I love this photo because it captures beautifully an axiom I have heard all my life: Be mindful of your words and actions for they can have long lasting effects.

In my mind I am standing next to a large pond that winds and stretches to places I cannot see. It is a glorious summer day; still and silent, the water is a pane of glass. I throw a rock in the middle of it, and as the ripples begin to expand outward, the results of my *action* start to unfold. It's not a grand gesture. Something as simple as a compliment on a drawing an inmate is working on in the Dayroom, asking someone you don't know very well to sit and join you for a spread, providing a sympathetic ear to someone you can *tell* really needs someone to talk to, or giving a neighbor a .15 cent bar of soap because you know he just used his last, and is too proud to ask for one. Any of these can start a ripple.

Your wave of positive energy is immediately apparent as it passes under and lifts up the boats (people) who observe it. Maybe the *action* is to pick up a piece of trash or straighten up your seat and the seats around you as you leave the library. It could be holding a door open for someone, offering some tissue to the guy sitting at your table at lunch so he can wipe off his hands, or even just saying "good morning" as you pass an inmate on the walkway. In our pond analogy, these actions are reflected in the leaves and other objects floating on the surface that are instantly raised to a more enjoyable level. As your ripples spread, more and more areas of the pond are touched by your words and actions.

Take care however, before casting that stone. As our photo so wonderfully captures, there is a negative part to the wave. The valleys in front and behind it can have just as much, if not more, of an impact as the positive aspect can. Unfortunately it's the negative comments and memories that tend to stay with us far longer and more intensely than any others. A snide or sarcastic remark made to a child or significant other on the phone or in a letter, not following through on something you promised to do like waking up a friend for Rec., or simply no longer continuing to talk to another inmate without explanation can be enough to turn your little ripple into a tsunami of negativity, having lasting detrimental effects on your relationships.

But it's the ripples on the pond that land on shores we may never see that have the most impact of all. These are the stories passed on from one person to another, and live on in the memories of the people we interact with. I see it all the time in the people I talk to as I recall stories my parents and grandparents told, in the wisdom my pastor shared, and in the lessons my favorite teachers taught. These waves are STILL finding shores and making impact decades after they were launched.



So what kind of waves are YOU setting in motion? I ask myself this question all the time. And now I have the image of this awesome photo to carry with me as a reminder: Be mindful to keep your words and actions of a positive nature, so that they may raise up all who are impacted by them, regardless how distant the shore.



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