How You Can Participate in Everyday Activism

by KIKI WOODHAM

Everyday Activism: How to Be an Activist in 10 Minutes a Day

The word “activist” has powerful connotations. When we hear it, we think of tireless door-to-door campaigning, fundraisers, celebrities with pet causes, social media campaigns, marches, sit-ins, and people who risk their lives for something they believe in.

Cancer, AIDS, feminism, LGBTQ rights, animal cruelty and mental health awareness are hot topics these days, and there are plenty of outspoken people shouting from the proverbial rooftops to make themselves heard.

But do we ever think of ourselves as activists? We can, and we definitely should.

Activism doesn’t have to be huge, worldwide and dramatic. Everyday activism often consists of smaller, quiet gestures that make a difference in a small — yet meaningful — way. We’re all capable of that, and it takes much less time and effort than you might think.

Every single person in the world living with a mental illness or a disability already has the opportunity to become an activist. Who better to teach others about the challenges and hurdles we face every day than those of us who live with them? And who could possibly be in a better position to incite the changes we need to improve our lives and those of future generations?

I’m not saying that activism always comes easy. The hardest part is putting yourself out there — when you tell the world (or your part of the world) you care deeply about something truly important, you may find yourself vulnerable or open to criticism. But that one act of courage alone already makes you an activist — the rest is easy in comparison.

Write It Down

Writing a blog, column, Facebook post or article about your cause is, in my mind, one of the easiest and most honest forms of activism. Using your own words to teach people about something you feel is important can have a tremendous impact.

The best thing about writing, especially online, is once it’s written it stays put. A blog post will sit in the same place for years and years, patiently waiting for anyone who wants to read it and learn from it at any time. You’ve done the work, and now you can move on.

Total time/frequency: Completely up to you. Fit it in when (and if) you can or want to.

Tell One Person

Or five. Or as many as you can. Talking face-to-face with people about issues you care about, like mental health

awareness, is the most personal way to teach. Raising awareness about a cause doesn't get much easier or more natural than word-of-mouth.

One of the keys to talking effectively about a cause is not to make a big deal of it. In my home and within my circle of friends and family, the topic of mental health comes daily and is always a part of a larger, casual conversation.

By making my cause an everyday part of our small talk, I'm teaching the people in my life that mental health is nothing to hide or be ashamed of, and talking about it is just as easy as chatting about the weather. I'm furthering my cause every time we talk, and working towards normalizing mental illness.

At a recent get-together the topic of how I met one of my closest friends came up, to which I very easily answered that we'd met during our stay in a psychiatric hospital. My illness may be complex, but it's not hard to talk about when everyone knows it's there.

Total time/frequency: Two minutes here and there. Easy peasy.

Network

Social media is a mixed bag. I don't use it for personal stuff anymore, but I use it for my work as a writer and artist, and tools like Twitter and Facebook are great platforms for activism.

A simple tweet can reach the most unexpected corners of the world, while Facebook gives followers the opportunity for more in-depth discussion.

By following other activists on Twitter and Facebook, you'll be on top of the latest news and developments in your cause, and many of them will follow you back. Tag a few notable names in the field in your posts to reach an even broader audience; you'll often get shares and retweets in return.

Total time/frequency: Five minutes a day to check Twitter and write a tweet or two. More if you want.

You don't have to start a foundation, have 200,000 followers on Twitter, go door to door or be a celebrity to make a difference. Activism happens every day in so many small ways, all around us. If your cause reaches just one person you've done something amazing.