

## Success by 1,000 Paper Cuts

BY JAKE MCKEE

Want to change the world?  
Start small, create success, share results.

**I LOVE PUBLIC SPEAKING** and I do quite a bit of it. Most of my engagements focus on social engagement and customer experience, specifically helping business people figure out how to better connect with their customers, fans, and clients.

There are a few questions I can always count on getting during or after the session:

*“But what if nobody in the organization is empowered to make the changes you mention? Who’s job is this change you refer to?”*

Out of all the frequently asked questions in my sessions, that is the one that gets me the most amped up and ready to pounce. My reaction is normally summed up by a quote overheard in the hallways of the South by Southwest conference (SXSW) earlier this year:

*“If you know something’s wrong...f\*\*\*\*\*g fix it!”*

We’ve come to see that fear dictates many of our external-facing business decisions, giving rise to massive terms of service agreements, non-disclosure agreements, massive legal team power, and other protectionist tactics. But it continues to surprise me how afraid we are of our bosses, colleagues, and management teams.

Whose job is it to fix things we recognize as problematic? *Ours!* It is every employee’s *obligation* to stand up for their customers, to be on the lookout for ways to improve the company.

When I started at LEGO, I was a senior web producer who saw instantly that the adult enthusiast community was being completely overlooked. I took on a few extra hours a week to help them. Those few hours turned into an official part of my job, and then my entire job. I didn’t ask for permission, I just started fixing it.

Surprisingly, especially for me, nobody told me to mind my own business or focus on my “real job.” They started seeing results I was producing and asked me to take on more and more and more of those duties.

The trick to making this process work is to use a tactic I call “Success by 1,000 Paper Cuts.” The idea is simple: start with the biggest element of activity that you can do without having to get full blown approvals, budget sign offs, or legal approvals. A single paper cut barely gets noticed, but enough of them and you can cut off a limb.

*Start small, create success, and share results.*

Then repeat over and over again until you have a collection of successes that represent a landmark. Bundle that landmark up and show it off. Use the landmark to get permission to do bigger and more radical—and perhaps more expensive—projects, but only by the new increment.

*Start just a bit bigger, create success, and share results.*

So what are the small things you’re going to do today to impact change and improve your customer experience?

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*Jake McKee is the chief strategy officer at Ant's Eye View, Redmond, Wash., a customer experience strategy practice, where he helps organizations understand how to act like groups of people rather than soulless money-making machines. In a past life, Jake was the global community relations specialist for the LEGO Company, where he spent five years on the front lines of customer-company interaction, specifically working to change the way the company thought about and engaged its most loyal fans and customers. Jake blogs at [www.communityguy.com](http://www.communityguy.com).*

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