



## **How to Make a Big Impact: The Butterfly Effect**

**By Pam Morris, Early Learning Center director**

Everyday we each have choices that are part of our lives. Some typically have very little impact on our day to day - what we choose for breakfast, which shirt we choose to wear - the purple one or the gray one? (always choose the purple one; it truly is the best color!) Of course there are other choices that will take us down completely different paths at each decision we make. Do I take Alma School or Dobson to work? Should I stay the extra five minutes to answer the emails that are in my inbox? Can I wait until tomorrow to return the phone call? While each of these may not seem monumental, they take your life in a different direction just by making these choices.

I equate these small choices as being in line with the butterfly effect. Have you heard of this? It is the idea that if a butterfly flaps its wings in Israel, that it could change the course of something that occurs on the other side of the world.

Now what if we look at bigger decisions? Should I let the green car merge in front of me on the 101 during early morning rush hour? Will giving up a little space change the outcome of my day? Let's play the scenario out in both ways.

First: I don't let the car merge. There are so many people on the road and I am already nearing the time I need to be at work. Plus, the green car waited until the last minute to merge with the rest of us because she thought that she could travel in the lane that was about to end and pass us all. She can wait.



Evaluate how you feel during this interaction. Are you feeling frustrated with the perceived inefficiency of the driver in the green car? Are you feeling stressed from having not enough time and being worried about not getting to work on time? How do you move on from this stressful situation? Is your child in the car with you at the time? Does your stress spill out onto them?

Now, let's choose the other option. You let the green car merge. You breathe through the fact that the driver did kind of "cut the line" by not merging earlier. The traffic continues to move as before, you don't lose any extra time by letting the car in front of you and you still reach work with a minute to spare.

Evaluate how you are feeling at this point. You just did something nice for someone else. Maybe they too only had a short amount of time to get to work without being late or the driver was on her way to visit her dad at the nursing home to bring him some cheer. Your child is still in the car. How does this new sense of being affect your son?

You never know what someone else is going through. You can only know your situation. But what you can do is choose the path of kindness more often than not. And when you have your children in the car, you can be that role model for them that shows choosing kindness and understanding might be a better way to handle a situation.

It all comes down to perspective. If we can step into someone else's shoes, just for a moment, can we see a situation differently, and then react differently that will change the direction of the outcome; ideally for the better.



Not so long ago, I had the opportunity to choose kindness and be that role model for my daughters. We were in a local store soon after businesses were allowed to open at the end of the summer. Everyone was wearing masks but everyone was in such a rush to get through their shopping that there was no patience to be seen. Carts were cutting each other off - well, the drivers of the carts were cutting each other off. There were two sales people at the checkout area who were crying and the store manager was trying to calm them down.

My daughters were nearby when this was happening and overheard the conversation. "You handled the situation well and you were respectful to the customer," said the manager. "You are doing a great job and I appreciate your being here." The manager then said, "We all just have to remember to have patience with each other and we will be OK."

Right after this occurred, I was standing in line with my daughters. A woman in another cart hit me with no apology and then cut in front of me. My daughters were ready to leap to my defense. The woman then turned and said, "Oh were you here first?" My response was, "I was but you can go ahead." Again, my daughters didn't understand. I calmly explained that we weren't in a hurry, clearly this woman was and while I can't change her behavior or the choices she makes, I can choose my reactions and how I live my life and go about my days. I said, "I choose patience and understanding and kindness whenever I can."



Do I do this everyday? I wish I could answer yes truthfully. Do I try to do this everyday? That I can answer with a resounding yes. Each choice I make, when I am fully present, fully cognizant of the situation and practicing mindfulness, I make the choice of patience. But I, too, get busy and try to multitask one to many items and the patience gets left behind. This is a daily goal I strive for to be a better version of myself, not only to be a role model for my children and the children I get to surround myself with each day but also for me.

When I practice mindfulness and am choosing the path of patience, when I can take someone else's perspective, I really do feel better about myself and have a brighter outlook.

Your choices may take a different route, but I challenge each of you to look inside yourself and see what might be one small item you might try to change that would give you a calmer outlook for your day. With this one small tweak, imagine what additional strength and beauty you could bring to your child, your family and to the world around you. And how changing your perspective would allow you to participate, positively, in the butterfly effect. It just takes one different choice.

Shabbat Shalom.