

# Big Ideas? Small Steps!

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Hi this is Becky from Oklahoma  
and this is Deb from Iowa.

Deb:

## Introduction

You have a big idea to make your town a better place and you're Getting tired of all the hard work to do such a big thing.

- Tired of beating your head against city council asking for approvals
- Killing yourself trying to raise enough money to do the whole thing
- Talking to everyone and they all like the idea but no one is taking action

But there is another way. **In small towns especially, big ideas are best accomplished by taking small steps.**

At SaveYour.Town, we developed the Idea Friendly method for small towns to do big things. There are just 3 parts. You will Gather Your Crowd around your big idea, Create a powerful network by building connections and then take small steps to achieve the big idea.

**Becky:**

**The Idea Friendly method focuses on how to scale down your big idea.** You want to begin by using your Big Idea to **Gather Your Crowd.** You want a crowd of people so you're not the only one actually working on your big idea. We are crowdsourcing to make it happen.

How do you do that? By putting your big idea out there for people to choose to gather around it.

Talk about your big idea online in your social media places. Be sure to invite conversation and participation so people can be drawn to you.

Invite friends to coffee or to share a beer and talk about the big idea. For instance, you might want a brewery in your town. Meeting with home brewers over a beer to talk about it is one way to start to gather your crowd.

An important principle in Gathering Your Crowd is to Be more conspicuous while doing your thing in public. For example, if your big idea includes cleaning up the downtown, then take a friend or two and get out and sweep the sidewalk, even a little section. It gives you a perfect opening to talk to everyone who walks by. And everyone who drives by also sees you.

Don't worry about the people who are not interested or are negative - they are not your crowd.

When you have gathered a crowd excited about a big idea, you create a groundswell of support. That makes it much easier later when it's time to get government support or approvals.

Now we recognize that you've done this. You've talked to people about your big idea all along. Now you'll be doing it with a purpose, to gather people into your crowd, knowing you are about to turn them into a powerful network.

DEB:

That leads us to the second part of Idea Friendly, which is to **Build Connections**.

You have a crowd, now you want to make it a powerful network ready to take action. When you build connections between people, you're turning them into a network.

You network your way into everything you need through building connections. You and all the members of your network know people. You know people who have things you need, knowledge and information you'll need, and of course, money you'll need. This gives purpose to your conversations. When you share your idea, instead of people responding with the same old, "That sounds like a good idea" now you'll be able to ask them for specific connections. They'll be able to connect you to something that moves the idea forward.

You'll want to ask people 'who do you know that might know more about this?' Ask people where you can get

something small you need, and while you're asking - ask who they know that has resources that will be helpful too. Maybe your big idea is a day care center for your small town. You could ask your crowd "who do you know that has already run a daycare center, maybe in another town, that we can talk to?" or "who do you know that has some toys or furniture they might want to donate?" or "who do you know who might want help move this forward?"

One exciting part of building connections is to get people together *in person*. Talking to each other creates community and creates a sense of belonging around your big idea - which is now their big idea too.

Remember the homebrewers get together we mentioned? Not only is that gathering your crowd, they will network and build connections with each other over a beer! They'll start talking about suppliers and who else they know who made the leap from home brewer to microbrewery, and all sorts of ideas to promote it. That helps move the big idea forward.

Becky:

You've gathered your crowd and are building connections. You have people and resources. Together you can **take the small steps**.

Take small steps by finding the tiniest possible version of your idea. Try it as a pop up, a demonstration, or a mock up. Try temporary things to see if your idea will work here.

As a bonus, when you take small steps like this in public, it gathers more of the crowd to you. See how the three parts of Idea Friendly work together?

The essential principle of Taking Small Steps is to make room for lots of contribution by as many people as possible. Give everyone small but meaningful ways to participate. Not everyone can serve on a year-long promotions committee, but lots more can join a photo walk through downtown and contribute the photos they took.

If your big idea was to see someone open an ice cream shop in town, then why not set up a table in an empty lot and give away a few ice cream bars on a warm afternoon? Hand people notes telling them about your big idea. Talk to everyone while you're out there. Maybe even have some chairs for people to sit in and eat their ice cream, and talk about this big idea. You'd be taking a small step of doing a tiny temporary pop up version of the big idea, Gathering Your Crowd by being conspicuous doing it in public, and Building Connections as people started talking to you and each other about the big idea. This is the Idea Friendly process!

Now that we've introduced you to the Idea Friendly method, let's focus on taking small steps. When you have a big idea, it's tempting to focus on big actions, big money, big steps. But that keeps you from making progress right now and it means you can't meaningfully involve everyone in your idea.

## Examples

Deb:

To help you adapt this method to your own big idea, we are going to share some stories of real people who have used small steps to accomplish their big ideas. As we tell each story, think of ways you could adapt a small part of what they did to your own idea. And if we don't mention an idea like yours, feel free to tell us more about your idea in the comment box at the bottom of the page. That comes to both of us by email, and we will work with you to find a way to take small steps toward your own big idea.

Kristen Simons in Belle Fourche, SD has a big idea to **build a strong arts scene** in town. She started with a simple small step of asking people online who else she could connect with. She posted this on her Facebook page. *Who on my Facebook list are artisans? Bakers, artists, woodworkers, painters, upcyclers, cooks, etc? I'd love to hear more about what you do – and if you aren't one, would love recommendations of who I should connect with in this community.* She got lots of responses, gathering her crowd. To build on that small step, she could share people's responses and tag the artists who were mentioned. That would keep the discussion going. Another small step, she could invite these artists to exhibit at a local event. One small

step leads to another, and they build up to big results.

Bennettsville SC has this big idea that they could **be a more welcoming community**. They decided on a small step of hosting a get together to welcome new residents. All the people that had moved to town in the past year were invited by their realtors to attend this gathering. New residents had a chance to ask a lot of questions like can they burn garbage, where do they change their licenses at, and who should they contact for what. People also shared their backgrounds a bit and asked how they could be more involved in the community. They also heard about the empty buildings and possibilities for starting new businesses in town. They found out how to volunteer at various places. Since that meeting two of the people who attended have opened a new business and a group of people volunteered and helped clean up their neighborhoods!

DEB:

In Webster City, Iowa, we wanted to **bring back our local movie theater** that was closed. Once we had raised enough to buy the building, there was still over \$200,000 to raise before we could open. Rather than wait until all the money was raised and all the plans were drawn up, we opened the doors and invited people into the building several times. One day we sold old movie posters for \$5 each. Another Saturday we asked everyone to come help, and we cleaned the basement. These were small, but very meaningful steps people could take to help save the theater. And they really

mattered, and they helped give everyone the opportunity to claim their part in saving the theater.

BECKY:

- Fogg Behavioral Model
  - Tiny goals lead to big gains because they create habits
  - Have to match your ask to people's Motivation and Ability -
    - if they aren't very motivated or aren't very capable, don't ask them for too much.
      - If you're having to take minutes and force accountability, you've exceeded their Motivation.
      - If you ask Miss Dazey to help you move concrete blocks, you've exceeded her Ability and she'll say no.
  - Need to give people a Trigger - a reminder or reason to act right now

BECKY:

Several people in Waynoka, Oklahoma, had a big idea of **improving the downtown**. One business owner decided to start with the utility poles, once painted industrial silver, but now needing a new coat of paint. Yes, it's something the city has on their to-do list, but there's no reason not to help your local government when you can. The business owner started gathering her crowd. She talked to other businesses, the chamber, and lots of different community groups. They went to work and each group painted one pole, with all kinds of creative



designs. So instead of only boring silver poles downtown, there's one painted with trains for the museum, one with flames for the fire department, one with kids' hand prints for the youth group. They didn't wait for a huge downtown improvement project when they could start with a small step by involving everyone in painting just one feature downtown.

Of course, that wasn't the end of downtown improvements in Waynoka. Even when the big idea involves governments and grants and big budgets and long timelines, there are ways to involve a lot more people in taking small steps.

The city government got a grant to re-do their downtown streetscape, with lights and new sidewalks and everything. In that first phase of the project, their architect dropped three different plans on the city council table, and said, in essence, "Pick one." And that's where it sat for years. It was all up to those volunteer council members to choose on their own.

How could you get everyone in town involved in picking a streetscape plan? You could start with copy of the plans. Then take your duct tape and where the plan calls for a ramp, tape it off on the sidewalk and label it RAMP. Where it calls for plants, drag in some borrowed potted plants. Where it calls for brick, set up bricks. Then have the council walk through and see how the plans hold up in the real world.

Then don't stop there. Do this on a weekend, and hold a festival at the same time. Popup a bunch of temporary businesses on empty lots, and hold performances or poetry readings or something in the pocket park. Get everyone downtown and start listening and watching.

What works? What doesn't? Can you gather their ideas in any way?

OK, now do the same thing over again with plan number 2. Test it out! That's how you involve everyone in town in small but meaningful ways.

DEB:

**In small towns especially, big ideas are best accomplished by taking small steps.**

Mike Larson and some other people in Sugar Creek, Missouri, want to **have a city pool again**. It will be a long and expensive project. First, they want to find out how much interest there is before they start. They're going to host a "day at the pool", where the old pool used to be. They'll mark the outline of the old pool on the ground with paint or string or something. They're inviting everyone in town, all the current residents, former residents and all the people with memories of the pool to bring little wading pools or beach chairs or anything like that. They'll provide the water to fill the wading pools, and everyone will have a great time. They'll talk about their big idea, building connections and finding resources they need.

DEB:

**If you're struggling to think about small steps that could lead to your big idea, start by asking questions.** Asking questions leads to conversations that leads to building community and getting things done. I'm going to tell you this story about home brewers and the

questions I asked around their big idea. As you listen, I'd like you to think of the questions you could ask around your big idea.

When I visited Decatur County, Iowa, several people said that wanted a brewery. They talked about the big barriers in their way: finding the right building, the right funding, the right people. The big idea seems really hard this way. Why not start smaller? Here are some of the questions I suggested they ask themselves and each other to help them start small.

#### Gather Your Crowd

Who in the county already makes home brew? Who wants to talk about finding a place for adults to hang out? Who is interested in finding a way to bring a new business to town? Invite them to come together, over a beer, and talk about beer. Share the big idea of having a brewery. Talk to each other, think about all the ideas.

#### Build Connections

Who knows who that already started a brewery? Go visit them. Find out what they had to do to get there. Start finding out the things you need to know: licensing, manufacturing laws, etc. What resources does your local community already have that you could use? Who do you talk to get access to those resources? Who knows other home brew clubs you could visit?

#### Take Small Steps

Have your home brewers do a sampling. See if people really are interested in having a brewery. Maybe form a home brew club. Try things out. Test your market and your product. Could you offer free samples in an empty building downtown and then visit about some ways to use that building to bring adults together? Could you set up at a local event in a beer tent environment? Maybe use monies collected to support that event? Again, bring people together, over a beer, to talk about the possibilities!

Becky:

**You have everything you need**

When I was in Illinois, people brought up a lot of issues holding them back. The city council is spending money on the wrong priorities. A local foundation is giving money to the wrong things. There aren't any entrepreneurs in town, so we need to recruit from outside. What if the answer to all of those is already at hand?

It doesn't matter what the council is doing. You don't need them to start. Go do your thing, starting by gathering a crowd. You don't need their permission or anything. Let them do their own thing.

It doesn't matter what the foundation is funding. You don't need their money to start. It doesn't take any money to start conversations and Take Small Steps around the thing that matters most to you. If you think it takes money, your steps are too big. Take Smaller Steps.

You don't need to recruit outside entrepreneurs. You have your own people. They might be kids in school, families with lower incomes, or retired seniors, but you have potential entrepreneurs. Start with them.

Anytime you think there is something you need before you can start, start by Gathering Your Crowd. You need a crowd so you can Build Connections. When you Build Connections, you build your network, and your network is where you find the resources you need. Your network is also where you find the innovative ideas that let you solve a problem in a way you never would have guessed alone.

So think about the thing you need, the thing driving you crazy. Pretend for a minute that it doesn't matter at all. The only thing you need is the Idea Friendly Method. That brings you the people, the connections, and the action steps that are perfectly do-able.

---check the time Deb -- 'becky would you like to talk about social capital?

## Conclusion

**Deb:**

**Why small steps - when do we get to do big steps?**

It seems like it would be great if we could just jump in and have all the money we need to accomplish our big ideas. That so rarely happens! Even when it does, there were already a lot of small steps taken behind the scenes.

More often, receiving a huge chunk of money is a disadvantage, actually making it harder to accomplish the big idea because you didn't have the groundwork in place, you didn't take small steps first!

Small steps give you:

- Confidence. Each small step accomplished builds your abilities and your beliefs in your idea.
- The permission to fail. Failure is not such a big deal - if you fail smaller, and quicker. You have the opportunity to correct your course in a more manageable way.
- More people involved. When you give small but meaningful ways for people to participate, they will. It gives them the power to have real connection to your big idea as well. It's like it was part their idea too.
- The ability to not be attached to the outcome. This just means your big idea might turn out to be different looking once it is accomplished. And it will have turned into a big idea supported and built by many, not few.
- Small wins more often. Small wins are reasons to celebrate and feel good about our big idea.

**In small towns especially, big ideas are best accomplished by taking small steps.**

Becky:

We would love to have your stories, ideas and questions about your big ideas and the small steps you can take to achieve them. Put them in the comment box at the

bottom of the page, and we'll answer your questions personally.

Thank you!

## **Work done to create this video:**

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Release March 1

**Big Insight:**

Starting small means you don't need permission and you can get stuff done.

## Initial seed of the idea:

101 little things you can do for your town (take small steps--a reaction to these million dollar projects people want to start with)

- Helps change mindset from huge to tiny
- 99% of all the best things you can do for your town don't require anyone's permission.

## Problem small towns face:

Grounding us in what people are thinking and saying so we can get a handle on what to address during the video and how to market the video to small town people in words they'll recognize. We'll use parts of this on the sales page, in emails and on social media.

- *It's hard to get a big project to succeed:*
  - *Council won't give needed approvals*
  - *Lots of money to raise*
  - *Not enough people support you*
  - *Other people are wasting time and money on projects that you think are wrong*
  - *It is a frustratingly slow process taking a lot of effort and time*
- *We think it has to be a big project funded by the city*
  - *Why doesn't the city pay for it? Hear that all the time.*
  - *Why is the city wasting time and money on this other crap that I don't like??*
- *Others look down on small projects*



- Little things like cleanup days don't seem important enough (ties to Deb's "beauty matters" point) (I actually had a city council member tell me he had more important things to do than pick up trash. This was while I was picking up trash on trash-off day, with the mayor standing right beside me.)
- People say you need a big shared vision, so that means a big project, right?
- You talk to a lot of people, and they sound supportive, but nothing happens
  - We have great ideas but not enough people to make them happen
  - We have a lot for a town our size - but we never can quite accomplish anything very big.

People ask about their big projects.

- They need council approval, 3 layers of permitting processes, millions of dollars. They want to know how to apply Idea Friendly principles to that.
  - Such as replacing an old pool

People obsess over what others are doing instead of taking action themselves

- We need to recruit entrepreneurs
- We need to attract Millennials
- We need to bring in more manufacturers
  - Notice the we never includes the person speaking - it is often the city!
  - Or some other group of "them" - I told them!
- "They" -- the council or foundations or groups -- "are wasting time and money doing the wrong things"

- Fogg Behavioral Model
  - Tiny goals lead to big gains because they create habits
  - Have to match your ask to people's Motivation and Ability -
    - if they aren't very motivated or aren't very capable, don't ask them for too much.
      - If you're having to take minutes and force accountability, you've exceeded their Motivation.
      - If you ask Miss Dazey to help you move concrete blocks, you've exceeded her Ability and she'll say no.
  - Need to give people a Trigger - a reminder or reason to act right now
- Social capital: You'll work on building your social capital. Bonding Capital is working with people you know. Linking Capital is connecting people to outside resources. Bridging Capital is meeting new people you would not meet in a normal day.
  - Mountains of research have shown the importance of social capital.
  -
- Involving students helps to tether them to their community. They take pride in the work they did, and this is how they will remember their town - as it is today, and if they had any input into making it better. I try to spend time with students during my ECE's. I simply ask them 'what do you want' and I'm always delighted in their excitement over being involved in creating big ideas for their town. This

excitement multiplies when you show them how to  
Idea Friendly up their big idea - and encourage  
them to begin taking small steps.

Random notes:

### Beauty matters

*Moments of beauty – be it music, art, nature, or an act of kindness – can take you out of a space of weary familiarity. Beauty, in whatever form it takes, can interrupt a pattern of behavior or a way of thinking and cause us to stop in our tracks and take notice of it. There are people holding out on the toughest frontiers of existence, surrounded by misery, but yet somehow sustained by a moment of beauty. Michael Freyer, author of The Subversive Power of Beauty (receiving lots of pics of people decorating their flower pots)*

