

The Butterfly Effect – What You Do Matters



The Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Ohio Committee on Education and Information

**Based on the book, "The Butterfly Effect", by Andy Andrews*

Preparation:

Read the lesson in its entirety and familiarize yourself with the terminology used to avoid the need to read it word for word.

Background Knowledge

In 1963, Edward Lorenz presented a hypothesis to the New York Academy of Science. His theory, simply stated was that:

"A butterfly could flap its wings and set molecules of air in motion, which would move other molecules of air, in turn moving more molecules of air- eventually capable of starting a hurricane on the other side of the planet."

Lorenz and his ideas were literally laughed out of the conference. Who could have imagined that over 30 years later, physics professors from around the world would come to the conclusion that the butterfly effect was authentic, accurate, and viable! Soon after, it was accorded the status of a "law" which is now known as The Law of Sensitive Dependence Upon Initial Conditions.

Instruction:

Propose to the Brethren that they have the opportunity to make history everyday. Every choice, every decision matters; not only to themselves, their families, and their Brothers and friends, but to generations yet to come.

To help make your point, share the following story (paraphrase as needed):

On Friday, April 2, 2004, ABC News honored 91 year old Norman Borlaug as the "Person of the Week". No one knew who Borlaug was. He was introduced as the man who was personally responsible for drastically, dramatically changing the world. In the 1940's,

Borlaug hybridized high yield, disease resistant corn and wheat for arid climates. His specific seed product flourished and regenerated where no seed had ever thrived before and over the years it has now been calculated that Norman Borlaug's work saved more than two billion lives from famine. Or did he?

Maybe it was Henry Wallace, 2nd vice president under Franklin Roosevelt. Wallace was a former Secretary of Agriculture and used his power as vice president to create a station in Mexico whose sole purpose was to hybridize corn and wheat for arid climates. He hired a young man named Norman Borlaug to run it.

Or was it George Washington Carver who was responsible for saving those 2 billion lives? Very few people knew that while a student at Iowa State University, Carver's dairy sciences professor would allow his six year old son to go on "botanical expeditions" with him. It was Carver who instilled in six year old Henry Wallace a love of agriculture and pointed his life in a specific direction – long before he became vice president. Carver developed 266 uses for peanuts and 88 uses for the sweet potato that we still use today. And while no one was looking, Carver flapped his wings a couple of times with a six year old boy...and just happened to save the lives of over 2 billion people (and counting).

Of Course it could have been Moses and Susan Carver. Moses and his wife lived in Missouri, which was a slave state. Neither believed in slavery and was a problem for folks like Quantrill's Raiders who terrorized the area by destroying property, burning and killing. One cold night in January, they rode through Moses' farm. They burned the barn, shot several people, and dragged off a woman named Mary Washington who refused to let go of her infant son, George. Mary was Susan Carver's best friend and Moses quickly sent out word through neighbors and towns and was soon able to secure a meeting with the bandits. On a black horse, Moses rode several hours north to a crossroads in Kansas where, at the appointed time, he met with the bandits. In the middle of the night, he traded them the only horse he had left on the farm for what they threw him in a dirty burlap bag. As they rode off, Moses fell to his knees and pulled from the bag a cold, naked, almost dead, baby boy. He opened his coat and shirts and placed the child next to his skin to warm him. He turned and walked the baby out. Moses walked through the night and into the next day to get the child to safety. He sang to the child and told him he would care for him. He promised the boy he would educate him to honor his mother, whom he knew was already dead. That was the night that the farmer gave that baby his name and that is how Moses and Susan Carver came to raise George Washington Carver.

So when you think about it, maybe it was the farmer from Diamond, Missouri who saved 2 billion people. UNLESS.....

This story demonstrates how real the “Butterfly Effect” is. Ask the Brethren the following questions to generate discussion:

1. How do our decisions, even the smallest ones affect those around us? These could be as simple as leaving a good tip for a waitress, smiling and saying hello to someone, or helping a friend with a task.
2. Think about a decision you made today. Do you think it made a difference to anyone around you?
3. Do you believe that choices we make actually do write and rewrite history on a daily basis? Why or why not?
4. Could you make a difference in the world with a \$10 donation to your Lodge Scholarship fund? What difference do you suppose it could make?
5. What would our Lodge, our Fraternity be like if everyone thought about the decisions and choices we make, with the idea that we were changing history?

Our names may be lost upon the earth after we’re gone, but our actions and words will live on forever. This goes along well with what we are told in the EA Lecture in regards to Faith, Hope, and Charity: *“Charity extends beyond the grave through the boundless realms of eternity.”*

Demonstration:

There is a video presentation by author Andy Andrews on this book at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0x4e8xTvQh8&feature=related> The video tells the story above and could be an alternative to you presenting the lesson. You’ll either need internet access wherever you do the presentation, or you’ll need to download it to play later. At any rate, it’s an excellent presentation and relieves you from the need to present the story that drives the point home.

Assessment:

This lesson will hopefully, awaken some serious reflection in each of us as to how we make our decisions. If it is well received, the Brethren should continue the conversation well after it is over!

“Know that your actions cannot be HOARDED, SAVED FOR LATER, OR USED SELECTIVELY. By your hand, millions – billions – of lives will be altered, caught up in a chain of events begun by you this day. The very beating of your heart has meaning and purpose. Your actions have value far greater than silver or gold. Your life...And what you do with it today...

MATTERS FOREVER.