

Co-Creating Heaven on Earth Summit™

Small Steps: The Biggest Thing You Can Do When You Need to Make Progress Fast

Mark McKergow

Martin: Hi, everyone. It's Martin Rutte with this session of the Heaven on Earth telesummit. Before I introduce our speaker, I want to just set a little context here. Sometimes when people discover what their heaven on Earth gateway is, they think that it's really big so it could be something like ending hunger, ending war or ending poverty. These Heaven on Earth yearnings and these gateways ring deep in our souls even as the roadblocks to achieving them sometimes rise up and sometimes roar up. It's too big, I can't do it, oh, my God, who am I and all the stuff that comes up with respect to roadblocks. So how do we get out of those limiting thoughts that something is too big, is too overwhelming and get into useful actions? Of the three heaven on earth questions that I ask, I want to focus on the third one. The first one is recall a time when you experienced heaven on Earth. The second one is imagine you have a magic wand and with it can create and have heaven on earth. The third one is what if you take simple, easy, concrete steps in the next 24 hours to move that forward? I want to concentrate in this session on taking small easy steps, what that's about and what the value of that is. My guest in this section is Dr. Mark McKergow, a brilliant speaker, a coach and a consultant. He develops new ideas in the fields of leadership, organizations and personal transformation. He also calls himself a recovering physicist, which I love, which means his work is always sharp and applicable in everyday settings. I know that to be true about him. So today, we're going to focus on the notion of simple small steps because Mark has spent years studying the power and the process of little steps and what they can really achieve. Welcome to the second annual telesummit, Mark McKergow.

Mark: Hello there, Martin. Hello, everybody. It's a great, great pleasure to be with you today. I'm looking forward to having this small step conversation with Martin because there's lots and lots of interesting things about small steps that we're going to uncover. It sounds very straightforward and actually there's all kinds of ideas that will be coming out over the next 45 minutes or so that are going to be very, very useful not just for heaven on earth, creating heaven on earth and your part in that, but in all kinds of things that you're doing. Anytime you're working with a situation that seems stuck, tough, difficult or you don't know what to do, very often part of the way of getting unstuck from that is to find yourself a good small step and get on with it. All of that we're going to be talking about today.

Martin: That's a lovely intro, Mark, thank you. Let's begin with small steps. First, this question just came to me, why are you so interested in that? What caused you to get into that?

Mark: Well, as you said, I'm a recovering physicist, Martin. That's absolutely right. I was a nuclear physicist for the first part in my career. I've always been interested in how you create a lot with a little. How can you do things that are really efficient in terms of you put something in and you get more back? That's how the world really gathers pace and gathers momentum. If you do a lot and it creates a little, well, that's going to get hard work in the end. And you're going to run out of steam. But if you can do a little relatively and create a lot, then that's going to be really good. The beginning of my career was I was working in nuclear power plants as a physicist and how nuclear power plant works. It's a chain reaction. You start with a few neutrons and they then hit some of the atoms that create more neutrons which get other new neutrons and you get this chain reaction expanding and expanding and expanding. Of course, if the chain reaction is uncontrolled, that then becomes a nuclear bomb. We're not talking about that here but the idea of doing something that creates more than you put in is really important in all kinds of ways.

Of course, that holds true in business too. If your business makes a loss year after year after year, you're going to end up with no money in the end. Maybe you had a good time on the way. If your business makes a profit, then you can do more business next year and you can do more business this year. And the business will grow. This idea of finding ways that we can do something that gets more back to us for that effort, that's always been interesting to me as a physicist. And it's still very, very interesting to me as a management consultant and leadership speaker today. That's how we can really make a good difference by doing a small thing that creates a bigger thing that creates a bigger thing that creates a bigger thing. If we do a big thing that creates a small thing that creates a smaller thing that creates smaller thing, everything runs out of steam. Then that's actually not really going to work. So, small steps but choosing the right small steps. Of course, that's a very important piece of it too.

Martin: That's what I want to focus on here. It seems completely counterintuitive and yet over the years, Mark, as I've spoken to hundreds of thousands of people about heaven on earth, people will think of big things: the end of hunger or the end of poverty. I see them while that is their heart's yearning and their soul's yearning to do that, they don't know where to start because they think they have to solve it all tomorrow. What you're saying, when I first heard you speak about this, is completely counterintuitive. A small step can actually make a difference. Talk us through why small steps are so powerful particularly when things are tough and then what makes a really good small step because you also said that. Because there can be small steps that make no difference.

Mark: Let's take it a step at a time, the small steps here in the conversation, Martin. The first thing is often people get this idea that if I have a big goal, a really big goal, then it needs a really big step. There's a kind of neat matching quality about that idea. A big thing requires a big effort and sometimes things require big efforts. But very rarely do those efforts need to absolutely all happen at once. All the huge things that have been achieved by mankind, putting a man on the moon, for example, yes, it was a huge effort but did it all happen at once? Absolutely not. You can trace it back to Chinese people inventing gunpowder back in thousands of years ago, the beginning of rocketry, fireworks and so on. Of course, the whole moon program gathered and gathered and gathered pace through visionaries in the 1920s, then experiments in the 1940s, Sputnik in the 1950s, John Glenn and so on and so on and so on. What looks like a big thing actually is a bunch of small things. Every time I look at what looks like a big thing, it turns out that it's a bunch of small things that gathered momentum. This idea that a big goal or a big idea requires a big step is one I'd really, really like the challenge today. On the contrary, I think the big steps are very problematic. Here's the problem with big steps. Anyone who's listening to this conversation today who has really tried to turn their life around may have experienced this. Big steps often don't get done. This is the problem. They feel really daunting. They feel really large. We don't know where to start. We're not sure whether we have the ability. We're not sure whether we have the energy and it gets put off and it gets put off and it gets put off. In the end, very often I experience that people have big steps and they don't get them done. Here's the theory: a small step that gets done makes way more difference than a big step that doesn't get done.

Martin: I don't know why that's so profound but I get it. It's true. It's true.

Mark: Also, the thing with the big step is when you start beating yourself up for not doing it and then it gets worse, then not only have you not done the step but you're now feeling bad about not doing the step and that then disempowers us to do other things. This idea, a small step that gets done makes more difference than the big step that doesn't get done. A small step gives the world something to respond to. We do something slightly different and that gives the world around us, the universe, the people and the things a chance to respond to us in slightly different way. It begins to create a slightly different resonance, pattern or idea. It gives people the chance and you keep thinking, "Oh, one day I'll do this" but you never do it, then the rest of the world doesn't really know that you're trying to do it. The day you start really trying to do it is a day that other people and those around you can see something and now they can respond. Now they can respond. Now they know that you're trying to do something. Now they can know that they can perhaps respond to you in different ways. And this

may be conscious or unconscious. But actually, doing something slightly different really is the start of creating new ripples and new chain reactions in the universe.

Now, will every small action create an enormous chain reaction consequence? No, I'm afraid not. Some of them just is loud. But here's another thing that's interesting about small steps. You really don't know at the beginning quite what the results are going to be. We don't know whether this is going to be the start of something incredibly profound or a slightly disappointing dead end, but the only way to find out is to do it and is to go there. Imagine you're facing loads and loads of doors and the only way to find out what's behind the doors, you have to open them. However much you sit and stare at the doors and think hard and pretend trying to intuit and whatever. This is not a reliable way of gathering information. This is me, the physicist speaking. The reliable way of gathering information is to go, open the doors, have a look, see what lies beyond and engage with it. If it looks good, carry on. If it doesn't look good, it's okay. We can turn around and go back and try another door.

That's another advantage of small steps is that you can think of them as experiments that we can try out pretty easily and pretty cheaply. If it turns out that this particular small step doesn't start to deliver, and we'll talk about how to up your chances in that in a minute, that's okay. It's only a small step. You can put it to one side. You can have another think and you can come up with a different small step that may have a big impact and even learn something along the way. This power of carrying out a small step as a kind of experiment and is a kind of let's see what happens when we do this. If this is a fantastic attitude because it teaches you about the world, you get direct feedback very quickly and instantly, you have something that you can do and then you have some basis to decide what to do next because should you proceed and carry on down this path? If it's working, then you can do that or if it's really not working, it doesn't feel right and you think, no, this isn't for me, it's okay. You haven't wasted a lot of energy, a lot of time and a lot of money. You can have another think and try another door.

Martin: A couple of questions come to mind. I don't know the right language here. This thought came to me as you're speaking. There is the arena of vision and of big goal.

Mark: That's very important, by the way. I'm not at all against the arena of vision and big goal. I think that's incredibly important. We might come to this later, the importance of working with the big and the tiny all at the same time.

Martin: That's where I'm going with this because the big goal, ending hunger and having heaven on earth can be too overwhelming for people. I've heard that many times or it's naive. Those are the two biggies. But you're saying have the big goal,

have the big vision and then the mechanism to engage with it is counterintuitively that tiny, tiny step.

Mark: Yeah, that's what makes it workable. To end hunger, I think there's nothing I could do right now to end hunger tomorrow. I really can't think of anything, but I think of ways I could start to end hunger. They might be very small and they might be very local but they'd be things that we could start to do. If we think about the right small actions, then we can make them things that stand a better chance of accelerating, gathering pace, including other people and so forth. Absolutely, I would like to encourage everyone listening to this call today to think big. In fact, one of the difficulties with some people is they don't think big enough and think small. Most of the time, we spend in our lives thinking middle sized. This is questions along the lines of "where shall I go on vacation next year" or something like that. That's a middle-sized question. It's a good question. It's a really good question and it's about carrying on with the kinds of things that we we've always done. If we want to try something new, we want to go bigger and we want to go smaller all at the same time. I think that's one of the beauties of your heaven on earth questions, Martin, is the way that they encourage people into that zone. They're thinking both the big and the small all at once. So yeah, have those really big goals and those really empowering, compelling visions. And then get to work on it right away. Having the vision is only the first piece of it. If you don't get to work on it right away, it's just going to sit there on the shelf.

Martin: It's interesting. Many times, I've heard over the years of me speaking about heaven on earth people saying, "Oh, that's too big. It's too overwhelming." What I say is let's put that judgment aside for the second. Would you like heaven on earth? They go, "Yeah." Because the third question I need to acknowledge you, you gave me the third question of my three heaven on earth questions. As you're speaking, something else is popping up for me, the distinction between a small step and a tiny step. As I hear myself thinking, it's almost like tiny step is even easier than small step, but it gets me into the game.

Mark: Yes, it gets you into the game and they get you to the game quickly. I guess the game relatively cheaply. The tiny step is not going to create the whole thing. It is exactly a routine to the game. It's a challenge to try something, to see what works, to see how that feels for you and to see how that's fitting for you. If a tiny step starts producing interesting results, absolutely double down.

Martin: I give you two examples. One woman was Susan Alima Friar in Hawaii. She teaches microgreen, how to grow microgreens, which are little plants that grow in ten days and are very nutritious. What can I do? She said nothing. I don't know. We talked about what heaven on earth was for her and then this little light bulb went on. She said, "Well, I can stick it at the end of every email I send out." It was such a tiny little action what she's done. Another woman wanted to

end violence against women in her county and wherever she went, nothing would work, nothing would work. On a telesummit, somebody said, "What would we have?" A tiny action which is a penny a day and they created this program called Making Change in which she asked people to donate a penny a day to help out in violence against women. Another hugely successful thing. I know that it works and as I was thinking recently about all the people in projects, Heaven on Earth projects that I've seen over the years, most of them, Mark, are small or tiny yet they build momentum. There is one woman who said, "I'm now starting to think a phase two because there's so much momentum has been built in terms of taking these tiny steps."

Mark: That word "momentum", Martin, is very important here. This is about building momentum. It's not about the tiny step cracking the whole thing open immediately. But you maybe start to get an idea of how it might go. If it's really, really running into a brick wall, that's all right. Find something else. Find something else.

Martin: The investment is so tiny that it's easy to just throw it away.

Mark: The investment is tiny but the potential payback is huge. It's a little bit like buying a lottery ticket for a buck and the payback is \$20 million. The thing is here that you have much more chance of winning actually by playing the Heaven on Earth game and finding the small steps. There are many, many different sizes of prize as well. It's the idea of a little potentially get a lot is very much what we're talking about here.

Martin: I want to move with you now into what makes a good small step? You've done some remarkable thinking about that. Could you go over your list?

Mark: Yes, I have five things that make a really great small step. Some of them are straightforward and others we'll need to talk about a little bit. Let's start with the straightforward ones. The first thing about a great small step is that it's for me to do. It's not about getting someone else to do something. That might conceivably be a small step, but fundamentally a good small step is something I can do. It's not about trying to get my whole corporation to agree to do something. That's a big step. We want a small step that's for me or the person listening to this call, whoever that is, for me to do. The second thing, combining on that, is that I don't need anyone else's permission to do it. Some people get really tied up into this idea, "am I allowed to do that?" The answer basically is yes. If you are actually thinking about breaking the door, then I would recommend you be very careful. Do you need to permission to do this? I hope not. If you do need permission, then getting permission might become part of a different and smaller step, but it should be something that you can do yourself right now.

The third thing is it's small enough to do in the next 24 hours. Now, I'm prepared to be a little flexible on the 24 hours. If it's something that you can't do till the next meeting of your bowling club on Wednesday, fine. I'll let you wait till your bowling club on Wednesday. But basically, it has to be something that you can put into play pretty much straight away. That's a really good way of breaking it down into a really small step. It is something I can do in the next 24 hours.

Martin: Before you go on to the next one, I think that's important to emphasize. When you first told me about the 24-hour notion, it was like, what? And then all of a sudden I got it because it gets you into action. It puts a short, almost a wall of you can't go farther than this which says really, yes/no. I'm going to do it or I'm not going to do it. And I do do it or I don't do it.

Mark: Yeah, that's right, exactly. The 24 hours is not to do with trying to restrict you to only doing something in 24 hours, obviously. But it's about saying, if this is a really good small step, you can get started on it in 24 hours. You shouldn't have to wait till the next budget round in the spring or something. That's not a small step. There are other things you can be doing or something that gets things into play really, really quickly, 24 hours or thereabouts. You get the idea. Sometimes people come to me with what feels like a small step to them but looks like a very big step to me. If I work with organizations and they say something like, "Oh, right, we'll redo our marketing strategy." And I say, "Okay, is that a small step?" And they say, "Yes." And I say, "No, that's something you can't do in 24 hours." What's a small step towards that? You want to redo your marketing strategy. What's a small step towards that? And they go, "Hmm, maybe we should get the latest marketing data." "Okay, can you do that in 24 hours?" "No." "So what's a small step towards that?" "The marketing data, okay, we can send out the request to the marketing data." "Can you do that in 24 hours?" "Yes, we can." "Okay, there's a small step." You see how it works. What's a small step towards that? And you break it down. It's not that the big step is wrong. It just needs to be smaller so we really get into action quickly.

Martin: Mark, the other thing I'm hearing too but I've never heard before is when the step is realized as tiny enough that they can do it, it's almost like they'll fall into doing it easily.

Mark Exactly, exactly, it's so straightforward. You absolutely have it within your power right now and say, "Oh, I can do that." Right, okay, when you have that feeling, "Oh, I can do that," that's a really good sign. Anything that feels, "Oh, dear, I'm not sure about that," we're not at the small step yet. You may well be that you're on the right lines, but let's make the steps smaller. Particularly if you're struggling with it or it feels too big or something. If it feels okay to do it, then do it, fine. I'm not here to prevent you doing things you feel able, capable and confident about. I often work with people who are free in a position where they

are not feeling very able, very confident or very capable. This is how one of the ways that we work with them just to make the steps smaller. Yes, you're absolutely right. When they say, "Right, I can do that. Let me get on with that. I want to get on with that now. I really want to get on with that now," that's a good sign that we have.

Martin: What you're doing is not encouraging them. You're almost in a sense holding them back because there's so much energy. "I can do that right now."

Mark: Yes, exactly. I'm almost trying to hold them back. I'm not, of course, but I want them to have the energy. The energy says, "Yeah, I can do that. Let's get on with it." It's a good place.

Martin: Let's go on to step four then.

Mark: We've had steps. Remember, step one, it's for me to do. Step two is I don't need anyone else's permission. Step three is it's small enough to do in 24 hours. Now, step four is that it's generative and that's a little bit more of a thing to talk about. What do I mean by generative? Remember we spoke at the beginning of the conversation about the chain reaction type of effect. There are two good ways of making sure that your step is generative in that it's going to generate some response and start to create something that's a little bigger than the step.

The first piece of that is that it should be to do with starting something not stopping it. If you think about it, stopping doing something, just stopping doing something, on the one hand, might be very hard but on the other hand doesn't give the world much clue that you're springing into action here. Anyone who's ever tried to give up smoking, which I did 25 years ago, knows the difficulty of trying to stop something because to stop it without starting something else is very difficult. Of course, that becomes the secret. Don't think of it as stopping something. Think of it as starting a new thing, whatever that might be. Sometimes people's actions are already they were starting to do something and that's great. Sometimes they come with an action that's more like stopping something. I say now, okay, that's fine but how do we switch it around so that you're going to start to do something? The second thing is that it should be something that's either engaging of other people or at least visible to other people in some way. What do I mean by that? I don't necessarily mean that you have to go and immediately enlist of hundred people to your course although that might be a good thing to do, but it should be something that gives people a chance to respond to you in a different way. And that can be achieved in all sorts of ways. It can be achieved by talking to other people. It can be achieved doing something in front of other people or with other people that they will notice. Those other people might be friends of yours. They might be known to you or they might be complete strangers, out in the street, in the shopping mall, in the

office or whatever. But something that gets you doing something different with or along with other people, that has a good chance of being generative because the other people can now see you're doing something and they can respond to it. That's what's going to give you quite a lot of the feedback and the learning from this. You'll get feedback from your own experience too. But the way that other people get engaged on this is really interesting. Here's a little story about that. Those of us with long memories will remember the Live Aid and Band Aid concerts and events in the 1980s which were about combating the famine in Ethiopia at the time.

Martin: Those were with Bob Geldof.

Mark: Yes, Bob Geldof, exactly. Well, Bob Geldof was the key organizer of this but the way it came about is really interesting. He saw a news report on the BBC about this dreadful famine and it struck lots and lots of people, this particular news report. He was shocked, appalled and wanted to do something. He started to think. "Well, what should I do? I'll send them money." He didn't have much money at the time. His career was on a bit of a slide. He said, "I could donate them the profits of my next record, but that's not going to be very much on a current basis. What am I going to do? What should I do?" He wrestled with this thing and he wondered, tossed in his bed and couldn't sleep. And then he went to his record office the next day where he was trying to plug his latest album. He just said to the secretary, "Have you seen that thing on the TV?" And the secretary said, "Yes, it's shocking." He said, "I'm thinking of doing something. Maybe I could do a special record." And the secretary said, "Yeah, that sounds like a good idea. Who else could be on it?"

So now he's not just thinking of his own special record. The secretary has offered the idea, oh, perhaps somebody else should join. Now he's thinking, "Oh, that's an idea. Who else could be on it?" And then a couple of other people in the office join in and said, "Yeah, that's cool." "I'll think about that." Now, three people have said that's a good idea. So now he thinks, "Well, I should speak to my wife." So, he phones his wife who is Paula Yates. She was recording a music TV show called The Tube at the time and with a load of musicians on it, including his old friend, Midge Ure of Ultravox. And she said, "Hey, Midge, Bob Geldof has got this idea. He wants to do this record." Midge said, "Yes, that's great. I'm in. I'll do it. I've got the skeleton of a song that we might be able to use." So now we have several people and half a song, and it went from there. It was because Bob Geldof mentioned it to the secretary that he was struggling with this and put out an idea that got a response is how the ball started to roll. If Bob Geldof had had all that sleepless night worrying and then hadn't said anything to the secretary, I would be pretty sure to bet that it wouldn't have gone anywhere because he wouldn't have taken a generative step, to get other people engaged.

Martin: That's very clear, and the fifth point.

Mark: The fifth is a really, really interesting one and it's going to tie into how we can really make an effective step. The fifth is think about suppose the step was having a good effect, what would be the tiny signs of progress I'd noticed over the next few days? Tiny signs of progress I'd notice over the next few days. This is not a question that we habitually get into. When we're talking about transforming the world, transforming ourselves and bringing change around, often we get into these conversations about what can I do? The small step conversation is about what can I do? But it should also be about the impact of what will I do? Or what would I like the impact to be? Because if I'm going to take a small step and the universe is going to give me a little positive response, I think I want to know what to look out for. This is about thinking, suppose my small step is slightly moving things in the right direction. What would be the tiny signs I might notice over the next few days? This is not just 24 hours. It's a bit longer now. We'll give the universe time to have a breath and respond. It's good to list these things as part of your action setting.

I think we might be going to try this out a bit later in the call and I'll work with you to create a good small action and small step. And we can try this out. This is the idea, tiny signs of progress, what would they be? Have a think because then you'll know what to look out for. The famous French scientist, Louis Pasteur, who invented the pasteurization of milk which is the removing germs from milk by heating it up and therefore making it much, much safer to drink. He once said, "In the field of observation, chance favors the prepared mind." If you know what you're looking for, you have a much better chance of spotting it. This is in our everyday experience. You think you're going to buy a VW Beetle and all of the sudden you start noticing VW Beetles because they're in your mind. If we can be having in mind what we're looking out for, there's a much better chance of spotting it. And that then will give us more clue about the impact of our small step. Do we want to carry on? Do we want to do more? Do we want to build on it? And so on.

Martin: When you spoke to us, Mark, years ago, you used the example of Toyota and that really stuck in my mind. Tell us a bit quickly, if you could, the Toyota story and why it was so important for you as an example of this.

Mark: Well, Toyota, of course, Martin, pride themselves on the Toyota Way of doing things. Part of this Toyota Way is always improving things. They're always looking to improve things and often with small steps. Each new Toyota might look the same as the old Toyota but it has 20,000 tiny, tiny, tiny improvements. Each little improvement on its own might be very insignificant but together, the 20,000 little improvements add up and stack up to an enormous transformation. It's thinking about how big these things can become cumulatively. I was very

delighted to hear Toyota was using some of my work, the Solutions Focus, which is a set of ideas around building positive change in tough situations that includes small steps. Toyota Way was using Solutions Focus. They have discovered this. Some pieces of Toyota were using Solutions Focus. Toyota, they're the Godzilla of lean management. They have so many tools in their Toyota Way. I was really surprised that they could find space for another one.

Martin: We'll talk about your Solutions Focus and how people can get in touch with you at the end of the interview.

Mark: I asked the person who worked with Toyota, "When do you use this idea?" "Oh, we use this idea of small steps when nothing else works. When we're really, really, really stuck, we use Solutions Focus and we look for a small step." Once you find one small step, you can find another one. And then when you have two small steps, you're not stuck anymore.

Martin: It's brilliant because I remember Toyota years ago when they started. They're first bringing their cars over North America and they were junk and they were crap. And nobody would buy them. They started to do this tiny, tiny, tiny, I remember in your talk.

Mark: Oh, yes, right. I feel that it might have been Honda. The basic allegory is right. The manufacturing concerned that, I think it was Honda, they were bringing large motorcycles to the United States in the 1960s to try and sell them. Of course, in the United States people rode Harleys and other big machines. It was very, very difficult for Honda to compete but they said, "Americans, they ride large motorcycles. Let's take them large motorcycles." And they did and the large motorcycles didn't sell. But the Honda people who were running the show brought with them some little kind of runaround scooter things which had never been seen in the United States before. They used them for getting around the cities. The story goes that people kept stopping them to say, "Where can I buy one of those little tiny scooter things?" And they said, "Oh, no, no, no, you can't. We just use these. You need to buy a large motorcycle that we have in the showroom." In the end, of course, the Honda people tweaked that they should stop trying to sell large motorcycles and instead import small scooters which were a new market but actually a market that people wanted. The whole of Honda's success in the United States is built on small runarounds to start with.

Martin: I remember you talking about they would save like 13 seconds or three seconds or they would cost savings of half a penny or a penny which on the face of it was ridiculous and yet the phrase you used earlier, the momentum built.

Mark: The momentum built. There's another example more recently with the British cycling team. The road racing and track cycling team over the last 20 years.

They've become almost unstoppable in winning gold medals and winning world championships. Twenty years ago, the British cycling team was nowhere. And they did it with this concept of tiny improvements and incremental gains. It began with Chris Boardman in 1992 having a special bike built by Lotus that actually had aerodynamic tubes only. Nobody had ever seen an aerodynamic cycle tubes. Also, they had helmets that were aerodynamically shaped. They worked and worked and worked over 20 years and they're still doing it to these tiny, tiny, tiny shavings of gains that on their own make hardly any difference. But when you add them up, all the sudden that's the difference between world records, gold medals and world championships.

Martin: You said, Mark, in the time we have left just a couple of minutes, that in our pre-interview you said that heaven on earth lives in the zone between the big and the tiny.

Mark: Yeah, it's tempting to think of the big and the tiny as like opposite ends of a spectrum, isn't it? I imagine the spectrum where you have huge at one end, middle-sized every day in the middle and tiny at the other end. I'd like everyone who's listening to this call to imagine that scale but bent around so it forms a ring. If you imagine, you bend that thing around. The middle-sized things are on one side of the ring and on the other side you've got a place where the huge and the tiny touch together. The thing is not a line. It's a circle now and there's a place where the huge and the tiny touch together. I think that's a place where very, very interesting things can happen. The everyday ordinary progress we do with the middle-sized things. But the ways that the world gets changed and the ways that the world gets transformed is with this combination of the huge and the tiny. The Buddhists and others have had this idea for a long time, this idea of, for example, that, yes, you can seek perfection but if you do seek perfection, you should seek it in something very, very ordinary like a cup of tea.

I'm lucky enough to go to Japan sometimes to work and I am struck by the way that if you go to a very, very nice Japanese restaurant, all the plates, the bowls and things they give you are all handmade and they're all slightly different. In the Japanese tea ceremony, there's this idea of appreciating the bowl that you're going to be served your tea before the tea arrives and enjoying the bowl because it's handmade. It's slightly different, it's unique and there's something there would be to be appreciated. Sometimes we're tempted to think in terms of, oh, I want to seek perfection in an enormous Ferrari, an amazing house with a swimming pool or something. Actually, I think that there's a lot in this idea of seeking perfection, seeking heaven on earth in the every day, in the tiny and building from there. It's not to say that there aren't bigger things involved here but we should seek these things in the tiny both in terms of our actions, in terms of the signs that we're seeking and in terms of the space that we create to look. In the Japanese tea ceremony, the whole process is the space to appreciate the

beautiful tea bowl that you're being offered. Creating that space to look is another very important part of this whole process I think. When we thought about the tiny signs of progress, the tiny signs that we're hoping the small step will create, we also need to take space and time to just look. Maybe they're there. Maybe some of them are there. Maybe they're there in beginning forms. Maybe they're there but they're slightly different. Maybe they're hiding around the corner. I don't know. But there's something about slowing down enough to look that also seems to me to be vitally important in this process. If we're rushing around looking for our tiny signs, we're going to just step on them. That's the risk. It's like stepping on a tiny ant or something. Whereas if we are very careful, cautious and stop and look, then we might see them. Then we might get an idea for actually what's the impact I'm having with my small steps. And how can I build, how can I go on and how can I make the most of the chance I have here?

Martin: Mark, let me ask you, here's a magic wand for you. What's heaven on earth for you?

Mark: Of course, this is an enormous question. It's one I always enjoy grappling with. If I'm thinking about that today, I'm thinking about Carl Sagan's famous Pale Blue Dot picture where he arranged for Voyager space probes to take a picture of the Earth from somewhere almost outside the solar system. You can just see it and this Pale Blue Dot, this tiny, tiny, tiny blue dot in this blank background. It's to do with us all recognizing some way that for all our squabbles, all our strife and all our differences and so on, that we on this planet have more that combines and unites us than divides us. The realization and the playing out of that realization is a usually long and painful sometimes process with many setbacks, but it is something that there is progress about, up and down and to and fro. It would be something about for me this idea of is there's more that unites us than divides us becoming a bigger idea, even bigger idea as we go forward.

Martin: That's very clear, very clear. How can people find out about your work, Mark?

Mark: Well, I've been talking about the Solutions Focus way of working which includes small steps very specifically that my book, *The Solutions Focus*, is out there. And I have a website at sfwork.com, that's SF for Solutions Focus. My latest book is on the paradigm of leading as a host rather than a hero or a servant. That has a nice chapter called A User's Guide to the Future in it. That puts together a lot of this work on the big and the tiny in one chapter with lots of nice practical exercises and illustrations. If you're interested in small steps, folks, that's another thing to look out for. The book is called *Host* by Mark McKergow and Helen Bailey. It's out there. You can go check it out.

Martin: I love it. Also, the hostleadership.com, is that --

Mark: Yes, there's a website connected with that book and it's hostleadership.com, exactly, hostleadership.com. Thank you.

Martin: Mark, thank you, I adore you. To have someone go into such depth and such sublime distinctions about what is a small tiny step is miraculous and for me clearly a major contribution. Let's put it this way, a tiny step is a huge contribution.

Mark: Thanks very much, Martin. It's a nice thought. Thank you.

Martin: Thank you, Mark, so much. Bye-bye.

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