

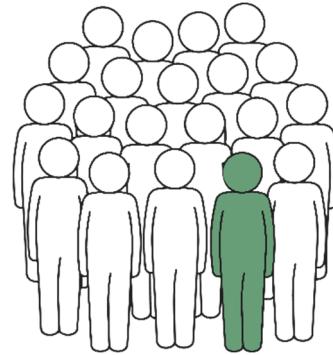
Insights from *The Slight Edge* by Jeff Olson

Select a random group of 20 people who want to improve their lives this year:

- 20 people who want to lose weight
- 20 people who want to get out of debt
- 20 people trying to stop their business from bleeding money
- 20 people who want to reconnect with their friends and keep their relationships from fading

Only 1 in 20 tend to lose weight and keep it off, get out of debt and stay out of debt, continue to improve their business, or continue to make their relationships a priority. The other 19 made improvements when things got terrible, but relaxed once they escaped rock bottom.

Eventually, their old habits took over, and they regressed until they hit rock bottom again. This is what author Jeff Olson calls the "rollercoaster life," and it's all too common.



Why do most people spend their lives on the rollercoaster and fail to make lasting improvement?

If your answer is a lack of discipline, you're not wrong—but it's more than that. People fail to make lasting improvement because they don't realize that small seemingly insignificant actions that require zero discipline will lead to significant results several months from now. So they ignore the easy-to-make choices and focus on high-willpower decisions.

An aspiring author is too busy deciding whether to sit down for four hours and write her next chapter, when she should be choosing to open a note on her phone throughout the day and jot down one idea. **It's easy to do. It's also incredibly easy not to do.** It probably won't lead to anything impressive in the next week, and it's hard to see how it will lead to a completed book a year from now... but it will.

Here's why: Choosing to move slightly toward your goal in seemingly insignificant ways compounds the way a penny doubling every day does. The penny goes from one cent to four in the first three days, and just \$5.12 after day 10. The results are boring for a while. But by day 30, you have a mind-boggling \$5.4 million.

When the aspiring author makes the tiny choice to jot down one idea, then two ideas the next day, and four the next, she eventually starts making hundreds of tiny decisions that allow her to generate an enormous number of good ideas without much discipline. Just as nothing happened for a while with the penny, and then it seemed to happen all at once, the author made little progress until it felt automatic, and writing felt effortless.

There's another way to see how these slight choices lead to lasting improvement: When you're steadily and slightly pushing the change scale on the positive side, it has no time to dip back the other way. You never give regression a foothold.

Therefore, whatever change you want to make, shift your mind away from thinking about the big transformation and just focus on gaining a slight edge. Look for things that are easy to do or not to do, things that will be insignificant a month from now but could transform who you are a year from now.



2 Examples of “Slight Edge” Thinking

1. If you want to rejuvenate a fading friendship, you don't have to "fix" it in one emotional phone call. Instead, make the micro-choice to send a one-sentence text right now, like, "**Hey, saw something today that made me think of you.**" It takes ten seconds. It's easy to do, and tragically easy not to do. Check in once a week and see where the conversation takes you. Soon, you're meeting up in person frequently. After a year of tiny deposits that have compounded, you've created a friendship you'll cherish for the rest of your life.
2. If you want to lose weight and keep it off, you don't need a perfect meal plan or a drastic diet overhaul. Instead, before grabbing your usual afternoon snack, ask one question, "Am I hungry or just bored?" If it's boredom, choose to drink a glass of water and go for a five-minute walk instead. It's easy to do and remarkably easy not to do. Make this micro-choice once a day, and you've avoided an extra 200 daily calories. But that micro-choice does so much more for you over time, because each positive choice makes you feel in control and proud of yourself. Your small choices compound into a new self-image, making it easier to avoid unnecessary snacks as the year goes on. After 365 days, you've shed 20 pounds and transformed how you look and feel, not through willpower or restriction, but through one tiny decision repeated over and over.

The slight edge is choosing to relentlessly make the easy-to-do decisions that slightly push the progress scale forward. Just as you can slide backward through neglect, you can slide forward through tiny decisions that cost you nothing and no one would notice if you skipped. But you make them anyway. And a year from now, that makes all the difference.