

Small Actions, Big Changes

Can modest individual actions ever really make a difference? In fact, each of the actions referenced in the Ackerman quotation you read contributed to social movements that ultimately led to monumental change. Can you think of other examples of individual actions leading to large changes? If so, add them to the table below.

Action	Country	Context	Outcome
Staying home from work or occupying their factories and offices	Poland	By 1980, Poles were living under an increasingly corrupt, repressive regime. Workers at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk, led by electrician Lech Welesa, went on strike and occupied the shipyard for nearly a month in protest, setting off a series of strikes across the country.	The government signed an agreement with the workers granting democratic reform that opened up more civil space for popular resistance. It was the first victory in the fight against Communist rule that eventually led to the defeat to the Party.
Refusing to carry identity papers	South Africa	Apartheid laws separated and subjugated the black majority. The most hated were pass laws that required citizens to carry racial identity papers and restricted movement of blacks. In 1960, thousands of black citizens converged on the police station in the town of Sharpsville without their passbooks as a sign of resistance to the laws.	Police opened fire on the peaceful protestors, killing 60 and injuring nearly 200 more. Images of white policemen shooting unarmed black citizens shocked the world and sparked international condemnation of the Apartheid regime. It was an immediate setback for the movement, but one which unified the forces of opposition that would ultimately prevail.
Printing newsletters in their basements	Russia	Dissatisfaction with the authoritarian Tsar Nicholas II was widespread in Russia by 1904, but it was unfocused in a hierarchical society with widely divergent needs and goals. Father Georgii Gapon united different segments of society around a common goal, primarily with pamphlets and petitions that became popular in intellectual clubs and labor shops alike.	A series of strikes and demonstrations in which hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets did force the Tsar to make some concessions in October 1905. The movement was ultimately taken over by militants and ended in a bloody 1917 coup, but managed to win significant civil liberties through the power of voice and concerted action.
Not leaving	United	In February 1960, four black	Images of calm, well-dressed

when they are told to go	States	college students sat at a segregated lunch counter in a North Carolina Woolworth's store and refused to leave until they had been served. The method became a popular form of protest and by mid 1961, 70,000 youth had participated in the "sit ins" that generated more than 3,000 arrests.	black students being attacked by angry young mobs galvanized the nation and mobilized support for the civil rights movement. Desegregation of lunch counters and other public facilities was specifically mentioned in the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Source: A Force More Powerful, A Century of Non-Violent Conflict, P. Ackerman and J. Duvall, Palgrave, 2000