

CitizensConnection



Don't Be Afraid to Choose a Difficult Path



Mark Kagy, Acting Inspector General

Over the years, we have all faced challenges, problems, and situations when it looks like there is no easy answer. These situations can be big or small. They can affect your relationships, your career, or even how you look at yourself in the mirror.

Whenever there's a challenge, we often identify the path of least resistance. We're experts at finding the least painful or the least risky, or the solution with the least effort involved. It's self-preservation, an instinct built into every living thing.

And sometimes it should be completely ignored.

Innovators Don't Take the Easy Ways

The path of least resistance works well in some situations. It works great for water! It's how rivers are formed. Water will always find the easiest path to flow and that predictability allows us to build cities around it and use it to our advantage in the creation of electricity. The path of least resistance also works great for electricity. This predictability allows us to build lightning rods to save buildings from damage. It also allows us to work on a system of wires, knowing electricity would rather travel through a wire than our more resistant body-saving equipment.

That said, in my career, the areas where I have seen the most novel, creative and revolutionary ideas have almost always been the result of someone choosing a more difficult path. Think of the innovators, the trailblazers, the leaders you have met. I'm guessing the same is true in your career.

Now, don't draw this out to an absurdity! I'm not suggesting you mow your lawn with a pair of scissors because that would be the more difficult path. But right now, someone reading this is likely facing a fork-in-the-road decision. Maybe they have an innovative idea to solve a problem at work, but it has never been tried before or they don't have the courage to speak up during a meeting. Maybe it requires a lot of effort or they simply fear failing.

If that's you, consider the challenge of a more difficult path. If this is not you, ask yourself, are you building an environment in which that person can feel safe and supported in trying something new?

Use this time and opportunity to choose the more difficult path. It will build confidence. You will teach yourself that you are much tougher than you realized and you will become accustomed to challenging yourself.

Real growth results from challenge and struggle. The benefits are significant even if they take time to reveal themselves. Do not avoid something because it is difficult. Tackle it head on – *because it is difficult.*

"We choose to go to the moon. We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things (accomplishments and aspirations), not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win."

- John F. Kennedy

— Mark is Acting Inspector General at Citizens and a member of the Executive Leadership Team.