



Sins of Omission Deborah Clemmensen

I have been thinking a lot in recent days about the impact of things not done, the sins of omission. Today the FedEx delivery guy arrived at our door with a heavy package and said he had twisted his ankle getting it out of his truck. Expressing my dismay, I offered him ibuprofen, which he said he had in his truck. But I failed to get him a bag of ice for his ankle, not even thinking about how this was what he really needed until after he had driven away. This man makes his living during the pandemic walking to and from his truck delivering items to privileged folks like me who can thus stay safer at home, and I forgot to offer him ice for his twisted ankle. That failure will haunt me for a long time.

What other sins of omission might I have committed because I have privilege? Have I spoken out consistently to confront racist, sexist or homophobic language or assumptions every time I encounter them in myself or others, or have I opted to stay silent and be “nice” to avoid offending a white person? Have I failed to really comprehend the persistent macro and micro aggressions directed toward Black, Indigenous, and People of Color? Have I done enough to support Black Lives Matter? Have I committed fully to becoming anti-racist, even if the work takes me outside my zone of privilege and comfort? What have I done to help make the Collaborative Law Institute authentically inclusive, not just another white person’s organization seeking to “diversify”?

For me as a white person, failing to address systemic racism and other forms of oppression should haunt me as much as forgetting to provide that bag of ice. White privilege is very forgetful, it resists change, it generates fear, defensiveness and tepid half-measures that maintain the status quo. I can’t allow myself to look away from what is twisted and painful or to convince myself that I am not personally responsible for its perpetuation. I must recognize and actively accept my role as a white person in what continues to go so very wrong. Sins of omission hurt people. Enough.

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