



Bending, Not Breaking

A HIGH PITCHED SOUND PIERCED THE quiet morning as I waited in the stopped line of traffic. I craned my neck, and my eyes darted about, trying to find the source of the cacophony. After a few seconds, the culprit was reflected in my driver's side mirror. A team of four men in hardhats were feeding massive tree limbs into a wood chipper, while another two men worked together, cutting more of the tree to the ground.

They worked in teams, lifting huge sections of branches that were dripping with leaves, and moved them toward the chipper. Muscles flexed and strained under the weight of the heavy limbs as they loaded them into the machine. The limbs shook and lurched forward, as they were loaded, a sea of green leaves moving farther into the machine as the chipper quickly devoured them. On the back end of the machine, a tall, angled shoot rose high into the air, like a periscope. As the machine consumed the tree, out of the spout came a shower of wood chips. The transformed body of the tree, a thing of beauty years in the making, was reduced to small chunks of wood within seconds.

The tree had been tall with mighty branches stretching out from the base of its trunk. Vibrant green leaves clung to each branch and created a natural canopy, shading the sidewalk and yard below, which I often drove past, traveling to and from work. How long had the tree been there? I could only guess. Thirty, perhaps 40 years, at least.

I'm not sure why they were cutting the tree down. It might have been diseased; perhaps the roots were interfering with the sewer lines below, or the branches with the power lines above; maybe they were building an addition on the house or making spot for a garden? Who knows? I am not a "tree hugger" nor one who would chain myself to a tree to stop its destruction, so I am not judging the homeowners for cutting the tree down. I am willing to accept they had a good reason

for its demise; however, I was sad to see it go, and struck by how quickly something that is beautiful and deep-rooted could be destroyed.

Something of such beauty takes time to create. What starts as a small sprout in the ground, grows to such magnificent proportions with the tender attention of the sun and rain, and the gift of time, during which it grows stronger and sturdier and supportive. It is amazing that something that was so beautiful, precious and long in the making could so quickly be destroyed and reduced to pieces, never to be the same. What took a lifetime to build, took mere minutes to destroy.

The beautiful things in life always are that way, though. It always takes hard work, commitment, determination and patience to see something build from a fledgling state into something of beauty, endurance and value. Things of beauty that are worth keeping are always a long time coming and are never built in an instant. We can easily forget that hard work, effort and commitment are the keys to achieving what lasts.

Remember that small house your grandparents or parents lived in that was the coziest, happiest home in which you had ever been? They most likely spent their lifetime slowly fixing it up and making improvements, one task at a time; not expecting granite countertops, walk-in closets, stainless steel appliances and a jetted tub right off the bat. They put in the work and knew it was the family within the walls of the home that was the most valuable part of the house.

Careers require just as much work. Somewhere along the way, in this day, the humbleness and appreciation for starting at the ground level, putting in your time and sweat equity, and earning your way toward the top, has been replaced with expectations of extreme salaries, easy workloads and little being asked of you. It is the hard work, commitment and experiences that make a career so rewarding, though.

Quality, beautiful relationships are not created in a day either. It is the years of work, commitment, honesty, respect and love that make them grow into strong oaks that support you in the seasons of life. Like trees, when the winds of adversity come and difficult times blow in, it is the relationships with the deep roots and the commitment to stand their ground that bend, but don't break, and survive the storms.

Whether it is a family, a career or a relationship, the things that loom so large, impressive and important in our lives are also the things that are the most delicate, vulnerable and easy to damage. A few moments in a proverbial chipper can damage things. What has taken years to build, can be compromised with the quickest and most damaging of actions, or with neglect and disregard.

The good news is the opposite is also true. When families, careers and relationships have those strong roots and are given the chance not just to grow in the warmth of the sun, but also to stand strong against the winds and storms that rage around us, and to test their strength when the storms try but fail to break them, they can grow from the resistance and come out stronger.

Press into your roots and weather the storms.

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