

Take Care of Your Tools

Back in May I spent a few days clearing brush with an older Hispanic man – someone far more experienced in the art of tree work than I. And every day before we started work and after we finished, he would take care of his tools.

He would tighten the chainsaw blade. He would sharpen the machetes. He would sharpen the shovels. And man, did his tools work well, despite the hard work we put on them.

I saw this every day and noticed a discipline and a level of care I still lack. This was a professionalism on the part of my coworker that I aspire to.

It's easy to focus on getting the job done – I tend to be in this camp. I throw my energy, resources, and guts at a thing and worry about the mess later. But caring about the tools that get the job done – that's a level up. And it's an underrated aspect of success.

“Capital goods” are the materials that create wealth. And when what you have to work with are your machetes and your shovels and your chainsaws, those are your capital goods. If you can take care of those, maybe you will take care of the bigger capital goods (with more potential for wealth creation).

It's also worth noting that just as acquiring customers is more costly than keeping them, acquiring tools is more costly than keeping your old ones in good shape. Our business has one tractor that's nearly 40 years old, and it's still in working order because of the discipline of maintenance. We could have flipped through two or three tractors if we hadn't done that.

Finally, there's a psychological edge to keeping tools in proper order that's similar to the edge you might get from brushing your teeth, eating well, dressing well, and exercising in the morning. You feel more prepared for the work ahead when your tools are ready, and you feel a sense of pride that you have fought back the chaos in your world.

I'll be trying to spend more of my time doing this in the weeks ahead: taking care of the things that take care of me.

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