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## ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT LESSONS I HAVE EVER LEARNED ABOUT WORK

-Normal Vincent Peale

While I am no expert in the laws of the universe, one thing I've consistently noticed is when you stop thinking about yourself in business and concentrate on the needs of others, you begin to do well. I've seen this rule repeat itself over and over again, and I believe it is one of the most important keys to success.

When I was in high school I started an asphalt business to earn money for college. I ran this business as a **part-time job** during school for about two months, one of which was during summer vacation. My sole objective was to make money. There are many entertaining stories I could tell, but to make a long story short, after several weeks I lost a great deal of money, did very poor work, and failed. Miserably. I'd done shoddy work, and there were a lot of people who were upset with me. The only thing I thought of when I did those early jobs was the money, and getting done with the day's work so I could go and have some fun with friends. Doing a good job wasn't my top priority. I was.

Because I absolutely had to make money for college, I then began working as a garbage man for \$5 per hour. I worked from 5 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday for the remainder of the summer in order to save money for tuition and expenses. It was not a fun job and the people I worked with left a lot to be desired. For example, one day the driver of the garbage truck that I was riding on was pulled over by the police and arrested because he'd assaulted a woman the evening before. I was then relegated to another truck, and the driver of this truck told me one day if I was not careful he would "cut me up."

Even though I'd quit the asphalt business, my phone continued to ring with complaints and demands that I come and repair the poor work I'd done. Towards the end of the summer, I had saved just over \$1,000. I had to use that money to buy supplies to fix the jobs I'd botched. I didn't have to do the repairs, because I'd already been paid, but my sense of integrity won out. I knew I could not enjoy my time at college knowing I'd left shoddy work behind.

As I was buying supplies, I noticed an older man asking a hardware store clerk questions about various asphalt products. The clerk did not know the answers. I did, so I approached the man and began talking to him. I was surprised by how much I knew about asphalt. I must have talked to the man for over an hour. Despite the fact I was not a talented **asphalt contractor**, I was somewhat knowledgeable.

As it turned out, this man was the owner of a large apartment complex, and he was planning on having his maintenance man do a large resurfacing project on the property. During our conversation, I told him how much he should be paying for the work, the best materials to buy, and how to ensure his maintenance man did a good job. At the end of the conversation, the man asked me if I would look at his apartment complex to provide him with more tips.

Not even thinking about the money (I was actually interested in the *process*—and *helping* this man), I went and looked at the complex and called the man with my recommendations. He asked for my phone number in case he had any further questions. When I hung up the phone, I felt good I'd assisted the man with his questions. Throughout my whole exchange with him, I never expected anything in return.

A day or two later the phone in my house rang again. I was not in the habit of answering the phone because I was always afraid it would be another complaint. I let my mother get it. She told me it was the man from the hardware store. He wanted me to do the work on the apartment complex for him! I could not believe it. He said something to the effect, "You care about the work. You will look out for me. I want you to do this because I know you will do a better job than anyone else I could find."

To make a long story short, I made over \$3,000 on that job, and it was done in just two days. The work turned out perfectly. Over the years, I continued to do a great deal of work for this man, and always delivered top quality.

I learned a lesson that summer, one about selflessness and taking pride in your work. Two summers later, at only twenty years old, I was confident about my work. I did more driveway resurfacing than any other contractor in Michigan. I continued in this business throughout college, **law school**, and even after graduation. I loved it! I owed that success to the realization that, in business, you can never focus on just yourself. While I eventually sold the asphalt business, I never forgot the lessons I learned, and I still share them as career advice. Today, I believe I owe my home and much of my current motivation to the lessons of selflessness and caring about your work, which the man in the hardware store unknowingly taught me.

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