



Kiwanis Insider

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For the Leadership of Kiwanis

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Dear Kiwanis Leaders:

Last year, shortly after arriving at Kiwanis, I shared a story about the house that we had purchased that had been neglected for some time. Following is a reprint of that story, followed by an update and some new thoughts.

This Old House...October 2006

Two weeks ago, Stephanie and I bought a home here in Indianapolis. The house is 32 years old, and has been empty for almost a year. It sits on a large lot with many older mature trees, as well as many new plants and other greenery. This past weekend I was able to spend some time working on the landscaping around the home, which is when I had my Kiwanis moment.

Since no one has been maintaining the home, the trees, plants, shrubs and ground-cover were totally over-grown. The trees branches were resting on the roof of the house, the weeds in the flower gardens were almost as tall as I am, and the ground-cover was covering up the sidewalks and paths. It was very difficult to even imagine what the previous owners had envisioned when they designed the landscape.

Although I was tempted to tear out much of the old landscaping and start over, it made sense that I should start by doing a little research. My plan was to attempt to locate the previous owner and see if they would be willing to share their thinking. With the power of the internet, I was able to locate them in California and it turns out they were thrilled to be asked. In fact they were so happy to help influence the direction of the project that they told me where I could find a detailed landscape plan for the property. They also offered the name of and phone number of the young man who designed the landscape.

With this information I was able to identify the weeds and remove them, while not disturbing the valuable plants and trees that needed to stay. I was able to trim back the older, more mature trees to make room for some of the newer ones that were struggling to get enough light to grow. In fact, many of the newer trees were not developing properly because they were being over-shadowed by the ones that had been around a lot longer.

I will still need to remove several of the old trees whose roots are damaging the foundation and putting the house at risk. The previous owner is aware that those trees were planted too close to the house and that they needed to come out, but she could not bear the thought of cutting down these marvelous old friends. Although I don't have the same emotional attachment she has to these large trees, I have a huge respect for the beauty and value they have added to the property over the years.

While I am sure you can make many of your own connections to how this story relates to Kiwanis, here are a few of my thoughts:

- It is important to understand & respect what the previous owners (board, staff, and members) were trying to accomplish before making changes.
- The best way to learn is to listen, ask questions and study the plans.
- New programs need to be given enough nourishment and room to grow.
- Some old programs can be renewed with some careful pruning and shaping.
- Despite our emotional attachment to things, occasionally you just have to remove some of the old to provide enough sunlight and room for the new.
- Cutting back in some areas can expose some great things that were always there, but just couldn't be seen.

Ideally our future plans will blend the old and the new in a pattern that allows both of them to thrive. We need to find ways to insure that the mature, healthy programs get the necessary sunlight and water to grow. We also need to make room for some new approaches that are consistent with our core values, but look and feel very different.

The beauty of a well-designed landscape is in the diversity of colors, shapes and sizes, all put together in a way that makes sense. I firmly believe that there is room in the Kiwanis landscape for the mature, as well as the new and fresh.

This Old House...June 2007 Update

For the past nine months Stephanie and I have been working on our house and landscaping and are finally starting to see some results. We had one forty-foot pine tree that was dying and that we were told we could never remove on our own. Of course that was just enough incentive to cause me to get out my chainsaw and make that happen. We also trimmed the larger trees that were choking out the sunlight to the younger trees, and now they are all healthy and thriving. This spring brought out a plethora of new flowers that we were not even aware were resting just below the surface. The sunshine and rain have done their job, and we are now enjoying the results. Although we still have a long list of items to work on, it is hard to believe that this is the same neglected, over-grown piece of property we bought just last year.

Here are my more recent thoughts about how this applies to Kiwanis:

- Even when people are aware that pruning will make things healthier in the future, the process of pruning is still painful.
- There are some great people currently hidden from our view who will burst onto the scene once they receive the proper motivation and opportunity.
- Sometimes things can already be dead, but because they are still standing, people think that they are OK.
- The proper balance of information and inspiration (light and water) makes things grow.

On To San Antonio

For the 6000 attendees who will be in San Antonio next week I look forward to greeting as many of you as possible. I am hopeful that the next Kiwanis Insider will be full of information and inspiration from that experience.

Thanks for leading.

Rob