

THE CARPENTER

An elderly carpenter wanted to retire. He told his employer that he planned to leave the house-building business and live a more leisurely, laid-back life with his wife, enjoying time with his grandchildren.

The contractor was sorry to see his good worker go. He asked the carpenter if he would build just one more house as a personal favour. The carpenter was reluctant at first, but at last his boss persuaded him to agree to do it.

But it was easy to see that his heart was not in his work. He cut corners. He didn't do his calculations properly, so he didn't order enough wood, and when he ran out he couldn't get matching timber. He resorted to shoddy workmanship – door jambs weren't plumbed straight, so the doors scraped the floors when opened, window frames weren't true and draughts blew in. It was an unfortunate way to end his career.

When the carpenter finished his work, he called his boss who came to inspect the house. But instead of going inside to check it out, the contractor handed the front-door key to the carpenter. "Here, take the key. This is your house," he said, "it is my gift to you for all you've done for me over the years."

What a shock! What a shame! If he had only known he was building his own house, he would have done it all so differently. Now he had to live in the home he had built so poorly and with such little pride.

(1)

Think of yourself as the carpenter. Think about *your* house, the life you are building one day at a time. Each day you hammer a nail, place a board, or erect a wall. Build wisely. It is the only life you will ever build. Even if you live it for only one day more, doesn't that day deserve to be lived graciously and well?.

Your life today is the result of your attitudes and choices in the past. Your life tomorrow will be the result of your attitudes and the choices you make today.

The blessing is not in living – but knowing how to live

Mexican proverb

The story in your classroom

Straightforward story that is best told in a relaxed informal, contemporary way.

The moment when he receives the keys is a big one.

(1) Allow time for the class to digest the shock before you add this bit, which is you in teacher mode!

Learning Points

We build our lives in ad hoc fashion. We react to what happens rather than acting, willing to put up less than the best. At important times we do not give the job our best effort. Then with a shock we look at the situation we have created (six weeks before our exams?) and find that we are now living in the house we have built.

If we had realized, we would have done it differently.

Share the two short stories below, then ask your class to reflect on their years in the school/college. Are they putting their time to good use?



The Three Bricklayers

A passer-by stops and asks the three men, What are you doing?

“Laying bricks, dumbbo!”, snaps the first man, rudely.

“I’m building a wall,” says the second, matter-of-factly.

The third man looks up and says proudly, “This will be the gateway to a great Temple!”

Look up and try to see the bigger picture. If you want people to make the most of what they are doing, to put their heart soul into something, they need to understand their purpose.

The Wise Traveller

A traveller arrives in a strange land and to his surprise, he is made King! However, he soon discovers that his tenure will only last *one year*. After that, he will be cast away on a desert island, alone.

Unlike the previous Kings who had a great time for 365 days only to rue the rest of their exile, this traveller put the year to good use: he had a lovely house built on the island, with a pool, billiard table, gardens, vineyard, etc, so that when his royal year was over he had something very pleasurable to look forward to.