

The Blacksmith and the Horseshoe

By John Mehrmann

In the midst of overwhelming challenges and against all odds, a simple observation from old country wisdom can be a powerful inspiration. If you should find yourself in circumstances in which the bad news and losses seem to keep coming in waves, remember the story of the blacksmith and the horseshoe.

It was a late evening in the office and most of the people had already gone home to enjoy time with their family. Sitting behind his desk, a young man stared at stacks of reports and spreadsheets. It seemed as if his job was growing more desperate with every passing day. Deadlines were getting shorter. Customers were becoming more demanding. The number of new projects was only outpaced by the growing number of urgent and emerging emergencies. It required all of his time and all of his dedication just to keep up.

Yet, the desperate situation at work was something that he had come to appreciate. The overwhelming challenges of the job helped to keep his mind off of the circumstances outside of work. It was better to concentrate on the insurmountable tasks in the office than to succumb to depression. To go home meant to be alone, to face the bills and wonder how to make ends meet. There had been a time long ago when his life was full of laughter, but lately his time at home was as empty as the bank account.

The young man sat at his desk, his concentration gradually slipping away from the reports and the spreadsheets. He began to reflect on the circumstances outside of work, the problems that he tried to avoid by keeping occupied by the job. He took a deep breath and closed his eyes, reflecting on the continuous onslaught of circumstances that had brought him to this moment in time. Virtually alone in the office, and even more lonely at home, he started to think about the numerous painful events that he had faced.

At the same time there was one other individual in the building. It was a slightly older gentleman who had a slightly crooked smile and a dull twinkle in his eyes. As the gentleman was slowly sauntering toward the door, preparing to go home to his own family, he noticed the sad young man behind the desk. The gentleman paused at the door, then came back to sit across the desk from the lonely young man.

"It's none of my business, but I hear that it's been a little rough on you lately," the gentleman said with a slight accent.

"It just keeps coming," replied the young man. "Every time that I think that it can't get any worse, something else comes along that I didn't expect. I feel like a boxer in the ring that keeps getting sucker punched, but I don't even know what round it is anymore. At least the boxer knows when the fight is going to end."

The gentleman smiled and nodded his head knowingly. There was a moment of silence between the two. It was not an uncomfortable silence. It was a quiet exchange of recognition and understanding.

Finally the older gentlemen leaned forward and said, "You must feel like a horseshoe right now."

The young man immediately imagined a rusty old horseshoe being stepped on day after day. It was an appropriate analogy. The young man smiled and nodded his head.

"Lot's of people hang them on their wall for good luck when the horse is done wearing them. That's got to be pretty tough to get worn by a horse and hung on a wall. You ever try to bend a horseshoe?" asked the gentleman.

"I'm pretty sure that I can't bend a horseshoe," replied the young man.

"You ever see a blacksmith make a horseshoe? He takes a piece of metal and sticks it right into the burning coals of a hot fire. That fire is over a hundred degrees and glowing red. Then he pulls that metal out of the fire and uses a huge hammer and an anvil to strike the metal. The blacksmith hammers and shapes the metal, sticks it in water just enough to cool, and then puts it back in the fire." The gentleman paused for a moment as the story took effect.

"The blacksmith will repeat that process as many times as it takes until he gets that horseshoe in just the exact shape that he needs it. He will use fire, water and the power of his strength through that hammer until the piece of raw metal is shaped into a perfect horseshoe. That horseshoe is something he can use. It is strong enough to support the horse, and no matter how many times it gets stepped on, the horse can't change the shape that the blacksmith made."

The gentleman slowly rose from his chair and reassuringly patted the young man on his shoulders.

"You just need to figure out," said the gentleman in his slow and comforting voice, "what shape do you want to be in when the blacksmith is done with you? I'm thinking that you are going to be stronger, and that nobody else will be able to bend you either. I look forward to that day because I believe in you."

If you are at a point in life in which you are in the middle of your own struggle, remember the saying that 'the things that don't break us only make us stronger.' Have confidence in the knowledge that there are others who have had to bear personal burdens and succeeded. It was through the personal struggle of the older gentleman that he learned the lessons he shared with the young man. As the young man has grown out of his struggles and discovered greater internal strength, it is his time for me to share this story with you. It is a respectful reminiscence of the country wisdom, and hopefully it will be an inspiration to another.

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John Mehrmann is President of [Executive Blueprints Inc.](http://ExecutiveBlueprints.com), an organization devoted to improving business practices and developing human capital.

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