



Pursue recognition and you will lose yourself. Define your own success. Be free.
Dr Shyam Bhat

The Carpenter and the Woodcutter: A fable

Ramappa decided to take up carpentry one day. He said, “It’s better than simply chopping wood and giving it to others to make money.”

“What do you know about carpentry?” his family asked.

“I can learn,” he replied.

And so he began, toiling in his shed, trying to shape wood into a chair, or a table. Some people laughed at him when he told them that he was a carpenter. “What do you know of furniture, you fool? You don’t even have a chair in your house.”

Others were angry with him, after suffering an ungodly pain in their rears, typical if they sat for anything over a minute on one of his chairs. But slowly his work improved and each year, a few more people began to take him seriously, and each year, fewer people laughed when he said, “I’m a carpenter, not a woodcutter.”

Day by day, year by year, he toiled in the shed. The wood cut into his hands, he lost a finger to an axe. Month after month, he put his furniture out to sell, and when nobody bought it, chopped the tables and chairs up, to sell as firewood. Then, one day, he successfully sold a chair. More chairs and tables began to sell and a few years later, people even began to compliment him on his work. Now everyone called him Ramappa, the carpenter.

He continued to work, trying to perfect his technique. He invested in new tools, he bought books on design, attended classes, and constantly worked to improve himself.

A decade later, his work began to win prizes, big design prizes.

He became a widely acclaimed furniture “designer”. Now when he said, “I am a carpenter,” people said, “What a great man.” Others were irritated. “Why is he pretending to be so humble?” they asked. Still others thought he was being incredibly clever, “What a post-modern, cool, ironic thing to say.”

The years passed in this manner. Then, one day, someone found something in their attic, an old chair made by Ramappa, when he first started calling himself a carpenter. A few more of these pieces were found, and they were all acclaimed as masterpieces.

In a few months, Ramappa’s current work, the furniture that he had so painstakingly learned to make, was deemed “ordinary and remarkably boring”. “His old work,” one critic said, “makes his new work seem pretentious and superficial.”

Another said, “In order to be creative, you have to be fearless, bold, pushing the limits. That is what Ramappa had done in his early pieces.”

So he tried to make furniture like he used to, those odd misshapen chairs and tables that were previously worth even less than the wood that they were made of, those ugly objects, then mocked, and now loved.

Ramappa went back to his shed, but the magic was gone. He couldn’t make them anymore. He had learned too much.

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