

What's Your “Never Could I Ever” Goal?



By Leslie J. O'Connell, ACC, Executive Coach

A large box addressed to me showed up on our doorstep a few days before Christmas. I wasn't expecting anything. Curious, I slit the packing tape, opened the flaps and found . . . plentiful packing peanuts.

Digging deep, I fingered petite evergreen branches. I uncovered a dwarf Juniper bonsai tree – a most unexpected and unusual gift. Surprise turned to gratitude. Though I know very little about bonsais, I'm aware it's a fascinating art form with roots in Japan and China. The miniature trees can live for 50 or more years – and some thrive for millennia. I felt honored.

Wait. Gratitude turned to fear. Now I felt woefully ill-prepared to parent a bonsai. Skimming the enclosed instructions, I could practically hear a line shouting at me: “Bonsais are grown in pots and are totally dependent on you for their care.” Sigh.

Who was the mystery sender? I had a hunch to pursue. Carl. He picked up my call, and his kindly laugh betrayed him. “I know . . . it’s like giving someone a parrot,” he mused. Do you think?!

Unexpected Friendship

Rather serendipitously, our paths had crossed a few months earlier through a friend of a friend. Carl was on the home stretch of an enormous project eight years in the making: a book about his grandfather – a story he pieced together through letters, journal entries, newspaper clippings, and stories his mom had told over the years. Most seventy-somethings would be intimidated to attempt such a project. Not Carl. A child at heart, he takes on life as a daring adventure. My small role was two-fold: fresh eyes to proofread – and a newcomer to cheer Carl over the finish line. I helped reignite his faith and fire to get the book to press.

I immensely appreciated what he was about to achieve. At the start, Carl had a big, hairy, ambitious seed of an idea. He knew nearly nothing about what it would take to write and publish a book. Somehow he figured it out, one step at a time. Along the way, he found people to learn from and lend their expertise. He turned obstacles into opportunities -- and saw it through. Now he holds a 200-page, hard cover tribute to his grandfather’s venturesome life. An extraordinary accomplishment.

Symbolically, Carl’s gift of the bonsai returned the favor – a message, of sorts, that said “You can do this. I believe in you.” We each have that superpower: to believe in and help others grow.

What Would You – Could You – Do?

How many times have you thought “never, could I ever” launch a side hustle or pursue a promotion at work, speak to hundreds of people, learn a foreign language, travel abroad on my own, hike the Appalachian Trail or even the Camino de Santiago . . . or some other big, hairy, scary goal? And then talked yourself out of it.

Too often, we aim low and set timid goals. Or we half-heartedly say “I’ll try.” instead of “I will.” Aim low = fail to grow.

So here’s a question: What would you do if you weren’t afraid?

Copy Carl: Just start. You’ll find a way – and people to cheer you on.

“Failure is something we can avoid only by saying nothing, doing nothing and being nothing.” – Denis Waitley