

Counselor's Corner

"Lessons from a Tomato Plant"

There seems to be nothing like fresh fruits and vegetables from one's own garden. Every year, I buy one tomato plant, and every year I fail to get many tomatoes. This year, a friend told me a secret that changed everything. She told me to trim the leaves. It turns out that the main stem produces many secondary stems. In between the main branch and the secondary ones, a third appears and is known as a sucker. Although suckers blend in nicely with the other greens, they are actually burdens on the plant. The sucker does not bear fruit, but the plant continues to focus on it as if it does. As a result, the real fruit-bearing stems are deprived of some nutrients and produce fewer tomatoes. **What a revelation!** With clippers in hand, I set off to eradicate those suckers, only to discover that they weren't always easy to identify. I found some and did reach my goal of getting more tomatoes, but I am certain I could have gotten a better yield if I were skilled in pruning.

It dawned on me that we are like tomato plants, full of lots of good things, but (whether we admit it or not) full of suckers that are zapping our energy and keeping us from reaching our goals. The more suckers we can identify and remove, the more we can discover greater physical, emotional, and spiritual health.

So, it seems that we need to clearly identify our goals, and then figure out what is stopping us from achieving them. For example, if our goal is to do better in our educational endeavors, what is stopping us from getting there? What suckers are draining us from moving to the next step? Do we make sure we get enough sleep so we are ready to get the most out of a school day? Do we eat breakfast for energy? Do we write in our planners, and then check to make sure we are taking home the correct books and handouts? Do we complete all of our assignments? Do we set out our clothing the night before? Do we seek teacher help when we do not understand? If we are not doing any of the above, we are encouraging the growth of suckers. Lack of planning, prioritizing and effort will stop us from achieving our goals.

Making more friends seems to be the goal of many. What may be stopping us from doing that? Are we joining clubs? Volunteering? Do we celebrate with others when they have success? Do we get off our chairs and get involved in a new activity? Are we compassionate and other-centered? Do we have a healthy use of the internet? If not, we are letting the suckers of fear, jealousy, laziness, gossip, and negative self-talk grow within. These things will keep us from connecting with others.

The tomato plant is living proof of what can be gained by eliminating suckers. Don't try to get them all at once, but **start**. Even a baby step is a step forward. I wish us all the best in removing the things that keep us from achieving our goals.

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