

Tale of Tortoise and Hare is a useful allegory

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One day, Tortoise and Hare agreed to a long and difficult race.

Stretching over miles and miles of tough terrain, hidden pitfalls and unknown enemies, the path before them rewarded only those travelers who could survive its impending dangers. Those who successfully navigated the course were richly rewarded at the finish line.

It was that reward that enticed the unlikely competitors to approach the starting line and embark on a course neither had traveled before.

Hare, the quicker and better looking of the two, appeared at the start carrying a large backpack. Tortoise, an aging and average turtle, carried only his shell on his back.

"What have you got in there?" inquired Tortoise, speaking slowly.

"Tools of the trade, friend, tools of the trade," Hare replied.

A gunshot announced the start of their long adventure, and Hare took off at a blinding pace.

Coughing and muttering in the dust left behind, Tortoise sighed. He slowly took his first few steps.

A few miles down the road, Hare stopped on the banks of a river and opened his backpack. He pulled out a few books, a few gadgets and some charts.

"What are you doing?" inquired a bluebird that sat down on a branch overlooking the water.

"I'm analyzing the river," Hare replied.

"But you've never been here before. How can you analyze something you've never seen?" Bird asked.

"By studying the path I just traveled," Hare answered. "If I take into account the peaks and valleys of the roads and rivers I've already passed, I can predict the depth, current and strength of the river before me."

"But you don't know how the river will change," Bird exclaimed. "What if the rain comes and raises the river, or logs fall in and obstruct your progress?"

"Trust the data, friend, trust the data," Hare patiently replied.

After a few more minutes of calculating, Hare picked his crossing point.

He carefully searched for a log with correct dimensions, placed it in the water, waited until the sun was in the correct position in the sky, and shoved off across the water. Although the current was a little faster than he predicted, and he was carried farther downstream than he had hoped, Hare crossed the river with little difficulty.

A few hours later, Tortoise came upon that same river. Without hesitating, Tortoise slipped into the river and began to swim across.

Bird, who was still perched on his branch above the river, called out to Tortoise in distress, "Tortoise, be careful! You have not completed any of the complex calculations and measurements that Hare has! How do you know what dangers lie in the river?"

"I have no way of knowing what dangers may be in this river. I must simply press on," Tortoise replied.

Meanwhile, Hare was making excellent progress.

He sat down to consider his newest challenge, a fork in the road. This time, he pulled out a pair of binoculars and a microscope.

"Funny-looking objects to be carrying around," huffed an old owl who was observing from his perch.

"Perhaps, but I will carefully study each of my options," Hare said.

"I will get to know each of my options, inside and out," he said. "I will discover which path is the best path and then follow it to victory."

"Maybe either path will suit," Owl countered.

"Nonsense. There is always an option that will help me reach the finish line faster," Hare said curtly.

After several hours of careful analysis, Hare chose his path and set off.

A short time later, Tortoise appeared at the fork in the road.

Without as much as a pause, he started down one of the two paths. Owl stared down at him from above.

"Your competitor has already passed by here, and he has carefully analyzed each path," Owl taunted.

"He has studied them in such detail, he knows them better than anyone in the woods," Owl said. "He has chosen the route that will help him win."

"Hare has his method, and I have mine," Tortoise said. "I must simply press on."

A few miles ahead, Hare found himself in a predicament. He guessed he was not far from the finish line.

His analysis, however, told him trouble could be ahead. He carefully consulted his books, his gadgets, his charts, his binoculars and his microscope.

He discovered he could make a shortcut to his left that would virtually guarantee him the win.

As he began making his shortcut through the brush, a deer called out from behind him, "Hare, where are you going? Why are you leaving the path?"

"There could be trouble ahead," he responded. "I will avoid the trouble, create a new shortcut and win this race."

"Sounds costly," replied Deer. But Hare was already out of earshot.

A few minutes later, Tortoise passed by the same spot.

"There could be trouble ahead," Deer remarked.

"Sure could," Tortoise replied, "but I must simply press on."

"Tortoise, Hare has spent a lot of time and money on his books, gadgets, charts, binoculars and microscope. He has carefully analyzed most every aspect of his journey," Deer said.

"He has used past events and current facts to help him make decisions along his journey. You have none of those tools," Deer added.

"You have simply plodded along slowly without any sort of thought," he continued. "How do you expect to win?"

"Nonsense. You speak of what you do not know," Tortoise scolded.

"I walk slowly so I can conserve energy. That way I can manage both peaks and valleys in the road," Tortoise added.

"I can swim through any river or lake. That means I never have to deviate from a straight path. I carry my house on my back, so I can rest and regain strength wherever I happen to be," he said.

"Deep water, wild animals or fallen trees do not distress me. I don't carry any fancy books, gadgets, charts, binoculars or a microscope, because I don't need them," Tortoise added.

"I am built for efficiency and for longevity. I spend my energies on keeping my load light and my path straight."

"Doesn't sound too exciting to me," Deer mumbled as he pranced off into the woods.

Tortoise shrugged and continued on down the road.

How the race ended is widely known.

Tortoise crossed the finish line first a few hours later. Hare, however, was nowhere in sight.

What happened after the race is rarely told in children's storybooks.

Ironically, Hare received all of the attention. Although he never did finish the race (his backpack got snared in some low-hanging limbs, and he was unable to disentangle himself), his books, gadgets, charts, binoculars and microscope were very attractive.

He was interviewed and praised, sought after and lauded for his smart and insightful use of his tools. He sold his tactics and insight in books and in magazines.

Many other forest animals set off on their own races using the very tools Hare used on his famous journey.

Although Tortoise won, no one really paid attention to him. Tortoise wasn't interviewed, didn't sell any stories and didn't publish a book.

He was, after all, a boring and average turtle.

Tortoise took his winnings and settled down beside a quiet lake with his turtle friends, all of whom agreed: "Slow and steady wins the race."

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