

A Mother's Lesson in Commitment

by Chris Ladd
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I don't have a fear of commitment; ask anyone. I face commitment with such unabashed bravery and fearlessness, such open doors and unguarded borders, that I commit to everything and everyone that comes my way. It is this naivete towards the limits of human commitment that always gets me into trouble.



WHERE THE
HELL IS
WAYNE, ME

I think it all comes from my mother.

My mother starts every weekend with a relaxing schedule and a relatively clean slate. Let's assume she wants to go cross-country skiing. Saturday morning rolls around, and of course she needs a hat, so she wades into the dense underbrush that is the back closet, and hacks her way clear to where a hat should be, to where she is sure she saw a hat yesterday. And there is no hat.

And then she decides that rather than free just one hat from the wilds of the closet, she will liberate an entire tribe of hats, not to mention their sister scarves, goggles, gloves, and boots, and finally 'make sense' of everything. Today she will empty, clean, sort, and replace the contents of the great, wild closet.

So she does this for a while. She picks up each object in turn, looks at it thoughtfully, and heaves it from 'out of sight' to the very center of the living room. Here, after an hour or two, rough, high piles of jackets, shoes, and stranded golf clubs begin to form and compete for living room dominance with the coffee table.



Chris's mom on a more successful ski.
photo by Chris Ladd

This continues until she discovers, buried deep within the dunes of assorted active-wear, a bottle of sunscreen, half-filled, nestled beside an orphan Birkenstock.

Sunscreen lives in the downstairs bathroom closet, next to the mosquito bite spray, so mom, as mothers are wont to do, dutifully brings the four and a half fluid ounces of SPF goodness back to the bathroom and sets the bottle in its rightful place. Only now, this new bottle upsets the tender equilibrium that was the fourth shelf from the bottom, and the bottle topples. It tumbles, spins, and bounces to the floor, bringing with it some five or six other skin products. Which is just as well, because she could never find anything in there anyway, and shouldn't the hand lotion be closer to the front?

So, she begins her careful reorganization of the fourth shelf. She reorganizes by brand, usage, type, color, con-

sistency, height, purchase price, and active ingredient, stepping back a few feet every so often to gain perspective on her progress. Sometimes she reaches a hand thoughtfully into the metropolis of bottles and boxes, ultimately deciding that, while putting the baby powder behind the face lotion might be convenient for the present, she would eventually regret the decision.

She rearranges. When she's finished, the fourth shelf is so perfect, that the contrast of shelf five and shelves one through three is unbearable. She begins to sort through towels, sponges, soap, and washcloths, shifting the sagging shelves' cargo to the counter, to the floor, and into the hall. In the corner of shelf two, she finds a screwdriver. Phillips head.

In the boiler room, while slipping the screwdriver into its plastic, wall-mounted rack, her eyes fall by chance upon a pair of mounting brackets and

some spare shelving board. With another shelf, she reasons, she could separate the regular towels from the washcloths, and the tiny bars of stolen hotel soap from the large, store-bought ones.

Measuring tape in hand, she heads back to the bathroom closet, and measures. Forty-one inches. The board is 46. It really would be convenient to have that extra shelf.

Stepping over the pile of towels and soap in the hallway, and expertly traversing the stagnant mounds of closet refuse in the living room, she makes her way outside to cut the shelf to fit on the saw. Opening the back door to the garage she sees the setting sun, low on the horizon, and the fading contrast of the trees against the graying sky. Then it hits her.

The reason she is out here, watching the last of her Saturday slip behind the trees, is because she wanted to go cross-country skiing.

I always want to go cross-country skiing. And I always end up reorganizing the closet. Just yesterday, I reorganized several.

But I'm losing my zest for closets. Spending all my time dealing with responsibilities and concerns and projects isn't as rewarding as you'd think, and I'm beginning to miss the quiet whoosh of skis on snow, and the pleasant hum of nothing to do.

So, if you or your organization has any closets to organize, any shelves to install or screwdrivers to put away, go ahead and ask. I'll probably commit to it.

But if anyone wants to go skiing, let me know. I just might clear my schedule.