

The First Furrow

When I was ten years old my mom sent me with tea and biscuits down to the fields where my father was plowing. When I got there, he had just started a new field and was half-way down the first furrow. I decided to wait until he came back up the field. He took ages – every now and again getting off the tractor to tap something, or adjust part of the plow. By the time he returned to my end of the field I had begun to wonder just how long it was going to take him to plow the whole field. “Dad,” I said, “I have watched you plowing the first furrow and if it takes you as long to plough every furrow, it’s going to take you all day to plough this little field.” “Well son that was the first furrow of the field – it’s the most important, because it sets the pattern for the rest of the field.” He went on to tell me that when it came time for me to plow a field and if I found I didn’t like the pattern when I had finished, I should check the first furrow and I would usually find that the problem started there.

In reading the lives of great men, I found that the first victory they won was over themselves... self-discipline with all of them came first.

Harry S. Truman

On reflection I realize my dad was sharing a valuable insight. So often we become aware of patterns in our lives that we don’t like. Sometimes we even try to fix the pattern, the one that is ‘out there’ somewhere, when really the first furrow is where the pattern is set, within ourselves. In human relations (and communication) the human heart is where the first furrow is cut. How we relate to ourselves, sets the tone and the shape of the cut line for the ones to follow. It is easier to look out than look in. Often an ounce of change made within will easily outweighs a pound of change made ‘without’.

The first furrow connects personal development (the responsibility to develop ourselves) to professional development. To pretend that they do not affect each other is naive.