Seabiscuit: A Depression-Era Inspiration

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In a sense, Seabiscuit may be just another movie about a long-shot character overcoming insurmountable odds and warming our hearts. What makes the story endearing is the masterfully crafted combination of real-life storytelling and filmmaking. Based on a true story, Seabiscuit acts as a metaphor of its day. America was recovering from a devastating depression, and being the underdog was unfamiliar to anyone.

In the context of the Great Depression, in a nation rampant with shattered dreams, four lost characters converge as an unlikely tale of heroism unfolds. Based on the best-selling novel by Laura Hillenbrand, the story has been skillfully adapted into a screenplay; however, much of the true history is omitted. The story starts out with Charles Howard (Jeff Bridges), a shrewd businessman who finds himself escaping across the border to the racetracks in Tijuana, Mexico, after the tragic death of his son. With the persuasion of his competent trainer, the forlorn Tom Smith (Chris Cooper), Howard is drawn to purchase the lazy, mean, but nevertheless intriguing horse known as "Seabiscuit."

Distracted by a failing marriage, Howard meets Marcela (Elizabeth Banks), a woman half his age whose vitality and love for the races inspires Howard to select the most suitable of jockeys for the horse. This jockey, Red Pollard (Toby Maguire), a native Canadian, shares the plight of many adolescent Depression-era boys who forfeited their childhoods in order to make money. The book gives an unprecedented view into the grueling life of a horse jockey, which the movie only touches on.

Viewers will be inspired by the indomitable spirit of Red despite troubles and injuries along the way. Second time director Gary Ross (Pleasantville) does an impeccable job of recreating the atmosphere of the horse race in all of its ebb and flow.

Viewers with short attention spans should be aware that the true appreciation for Seabiscuit comes with a fair amount of devotion to character development. The complexity of this true story warrants a significant amount of background knowledge. As the setting moves through different parts of America and beyond, occasional subtitles denote new geographical locations. This film is not a depression documentary, as it may initially appear, but a sports biography.

This film is rated PG-13 for some sexual situations and violent sports-related images. I found the few questionable pieces of the film to be necessary to the storyline and well-supported by facts documented in the book. Although Seabiscuit targets a wide range of viewers, it has a sentimental appeal for older audience members.

A Little Procrastination: Everybody Does It

Procrastinate. Put it off until tomorrow, or the day after. Students do it. Teachers do it. Everybody does it.

And it's bad, bad, bad. Rigor means putting off a horse. Procrastination, like cholesterol, has its good and its bad kind.

From one perspective, some put things off because it's necessary. Since we can only concentrate on one thing on our to-do list at a time, we need to make sure everything gets postponed.

So rather than decrying the art of putting off, we may need to perfect it, just make sure we're putting off the right things. For example, if getting a good night's sleep is a priority (yes, it needs to be that at least once a day) we need to learn how to make everything else wait. Or if studying for a test, doing a paper, or spending some time with God or with other good people are important (as these things sometimes need to be), we have to practice putting off other less purposeful activities.

Simply put, good procrastination means putting off anything that gets in the way of accomplishing what we'll feel best about at the day's end. Or at the semester's end. Or at life's end, for that matter.

Bad procrastination, on the other hand, is closely linked to "avoidant coping styles," according to researchers Sirois and Pychyl at Carleton University in Ottawa. Such coping not only results in late term papers, they say, but is related to higher rates of smoking, drinking, and a tendency to postpone seeing a doctor for acute health problems.

Not good. For all of us bad procrastinators, just getting started can be half the battle. If we can make ourselves work at some things that are less pleasant first, even if only for twenty minutes, it can help us get off dead center and help us get off dead center and give us the taste of success we want to be sure to accomplish the next day. Reward yourself with a break every now and then. That is, after reading for a class, take some time to catch up on e-mails. Or after finishing the first draft of a research paper, enjoy dinner with a friend.

For all of us bad procrastinators, just getting started can be half the battle. If we can make ourselves work at some things that are less pleasant first, even if only for twenty minutes, it can help us get off dead center and give us the taste of success we need to keep going.

Good time management may be hard, but it's also very simple: Put first whatever's important at a given time, then put off everything else.