The Wallet and the Purse

It was a dark night in the park. A man was standing under a lamp post, appeared to be looking for something. He repeatedly searched his pockets, and ploughed around the ground. He seemed to be in a hurry, too.

"Can I help you mister?" A lady passing by asked kindly.

"Eh, yes, ma'am. I am looking for my wallet. And I can't go home without my damned wallet."

So the lady started looking around.

An old woman saw it and also began the search. But she had no idea what they were looking for.

Several other people joined them later. Through word of mouth, some thought they were searching for a bag, a file and even a box.

Then a little boy came by and asked the man, "Can I help you, sir?"

"Yes, I dropped my wallet. It's red and about the size of my palm. Please help me find it, boy."

"May I ask where you dropped it, sir?" asked the boy reflexively.

"Over there among the bush," said the man without a thought. "Damn it … where's is it … ? " The man murmured to himself frustratingly, and got on with his business.

The boy stood, scratched his scalp, and asked, "So why don't you search over there, where you dropped it?"

The man was a bit angry now, "How can I find my wallet where it is so dark in the bush. At least there is a street lamp here?"

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Of course this is an absurd story. It probably would not happen in real life. But … wouldn't it really? Often times when we encounter a problem, the first thing we want is "a solution". If we face a big problem, and we are under pressure to deal with it immediately, a solution, or any way to make the problem disappear, would be welcomed.

Look around ourselves, and you will notice there are many occasions when we just grab a solution and tell people things are settled, the problem is fixed. And we have many names for this kind of situation : "knee jerk solution", "quick fix", "band-aid method", "treat the head for a headache", "homework", "scapegoat", "barking up the wrong tree" … How proliferating this "looking-for the-wallet-under-the-street-lamp" phenomenon is nowadays!

In the end the problem still exists, and will happen again. If the culprit or the root cause is not found and corrected, the problem will even get worse. Offering an unrelated solution can provide a false sense of security. Sometimes, no solution (yet) is better than a "wrong tree" solution.

So when we have a problem, don't look for the solution immediately. Look for the cause of the problem, analyze it, and THEN look for solutions.

And the story continues ……

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"Sir, I think we really need to look over there in the bush," insisted the boy. "I can fetch you a torch…"

"Hey, mister, I found a purse," yelled the lady, "Is that your wallet?"

"Oh, not really. But I'll just take that. Thanks a lot everyone."

Storyman