

An Oregon Cottage Podcast

Episode 58: Traded Workdays- How We Get Big Stuff Done

- Brian: Welcome to episode 58 where we talk about how to get things done by trading workdays with family and friends.
- Jami: One of my favorite things! We have all kinds of example projects where we're able to finish in a single day because we had other people helping us.
- Brian: And extra hands are always helpful. There's those jobs where you, you know, you just can't hold up both ends of the board, but I've also found that sometimes having extra eyes and extra brains to kind of think about what you're doing is extremely helpful as well in getting it done right.
- Jami: Well it's also fun. So, but we also of course have some farmhouse updates and garden updates and...It's rhubarb season! And I'm going to share... does that crack you up?
- Brian: (laughing) It wasn't on my calendar, if you'd asked me I couldn't tell you when rhubarb season is. (Jami: Well it is.) Okay. Is it strawberry season too?
- Jami: No, strawberry season kind of comes at the tail end of rhubarb season. But you can freeze your rhubarb and make it last.
- Brian: And still have strawberry rhubarb pie - okay.
- Jami: Yeah. (Okay.) There is still rhubarb going in June so, and that's when strawberries go. So there are a lot of places where it's at this time, actually.

Trading Work Days with Friends & Family

- Brian: Okay. I don't know if, um, listeners can hear this. We have the window wide open. It's just beautiful out here, it's green and breezy and sunny. There's not a cloud in the sky. It's like rare Oregon - Oregon gets like this, just don't expect it all the time. You might hear birds chirping or cars going by. Anyway, if I lean back in my chair and look over at the farmhouse, I can see at least three things, major parts of it done over there that were because we had friends come over and we traded workdays. The biggest one being that front door. (Yeah.) Cutting a big hole in the front of the house, getting an expensive, very nice wood front door and putting it in. And like solving the problems along the way, you know, like it, it wasn't opening and closing without rubbing and my friend knowing what to do to kind of get that all in there. And then of course the same guy, he knows so much, we rented a little backhoe and the side of the house there that's dug down and just looks so much better and was much better for the foundation. Another traded day.
- Jami: We actually talked about that in a previous episode about the boulders and rocks and when you rent small equipment. Uh, I can't remember what episode that was, but...
- Brian: Yeah, I think we talked about like running three things and how that was.

Jami: I'll link to it in the show notes because, you know, that was a good one.

Brian: It's actually really fun. Working with a backhoe is kind of fun if there's no deadline. And then the other one, of course being on the front of the house where we actually had, that was not really a traded day. That was kind of a family wedding. We were going to have a wedding in the farmhouse for our nephew. And so everybody pitched in. And it was incredible what got done just in a day on that. So anyway, all that to say we've had a great history with trading workdays. And then of course we go over, we try to make ourselves useful and help on friends and family's projects.

Jami: Yeah, and that's, I mean that's really fun. I think the biggest reason that I wanted to do this, to talk about this in the podcast is because it's just so cool in so many ways. First of all, you get major projects done and I have on the blog, I have a couple of workdays that we did a number of years ago that are amazing. I went back just for this to look at the photos and I was like - oh my gosh, that is amazing what we accomplished in a single day! Like a yard- My sister's yard, a backyard, went from just kind of overgrown grass and a scraggly tree here or there, to a beautiful landscaped area. And in fact, before this airs and I put the show notes up, I'm going to go over there and take a picture of it now in spring because it's gorgeous and it continues to be all year long. And you can still see the outline of it even now that it's grown more. It's just amazing that we were able to do that.

Brian: It's a transformation I remember in the old extreme makeover, like they do landscape edition, right? We didn't tear down a house and build a new house. But when they had those landscaping shows, how dramatic the outdoor was, it was, it really was with just regular people. We didn't have a contractor or a backhoe or anything. It really, everyone just went.

Jami: And it didn't cost a ton of money. We weren't doing a major, you know, we weren't doing like, building structures or whatever. We were doing things, but it made a huge difference.

Brian: It just looked so great, at the end of the day, we all kind of...

Jami: And I have another one where we did another garden transformation in front of my mom's house. And how we all just came together and made this, it was again just uh, nothing there and we turned it into this really cute little garden with an arbor that we featured in a number of articles during the year, the year and a half that we stayed there while we were looking for a house, because it's a very cute area and she loves it. And again, we were able to knock that out in a day and go from nothing to a completely landscaped area. And you can't do that with just one or two people.

Brian: I know. Yeah. That's the difference. Once you figure out what you need to do, if you have the man power is just so quick to get, if you've got relays with um, wheelbarrows, bringing in, mulch and people laying stuff down. It's like once you figured out what to do, it can go really quickly. (Right.) Transforming it.

Jami: So you do need to plan a little bit in advance.

Brian: Yes, So let's say make that point number one: plan in advance.

Jami: Plan in advance. So if you, you know, you need to have soil there, you know, it needs to be dumped off at your house or have it loaded beforehand. The soil, the mulch, if you're going to use rocks, whatever you're going to use in the

landscape. So you have to plan out what you're gonna do so that you know what you have, and then it has to be there on the day that we get started.

Brian: Yes, absolutely. That's kind of the killer. If you have to run for supplies or people are there, that kind of thing has sort of happened before. It's a huge killer. A huge, huge time suck. (Yeah.) Yeah. I suppose if that was point 1, point 0 would be coordinate your calendars way out. That's what's hard - getting multiple families together.

Jami: Right. And when we did family work days, we did it for a couple of summers I think, and I think that's the big reason why we stopped is, it was really hard to get four or five families to have that many days during, um, you know, activities season, you know, during the summer when you're wanting to go do other activities and camp or whatever, five weekend days.

Brian: Yeah, they're giving up a prime day.

Jami: So it was great when everybody had really big projects we wanted to get done, but as soon as those were kind of finished, we sort of petered out with that. But then what we've kept going was when, we have just one other couple who also have a larger property, our friends, and so there's always something that needs to be done. So we usually don't do it during the winter, but as soon as the weather turns, great spring, summer and fall, we'll do workdays and we try to do it once a month. One month it'll be at our house and other month that'll be at theirs. Sometimes it's every other month. It's really doable when it's just one other couple. (Exactly. Yeah. Yeah.) I mean, doable to keep it going. Like, I think the family workday, it's great when you all have some big projects to do and we were just really able to do amazing things. But when you have just ongoing projects, it's really nice to have one couple to just be able to do the exchange with because even a couple more hands, it does. So we need to... Oh! Because we need to list the other benefits. That was just, getting big projects done is just one benefit.

Brian: Okay, that's the first benefit.

Jami: But the other one is, it's fun! (Yes!) It's really fun. We look forward to it. We get to hang out with people that we, you know, enjoy and you get to learn more about them and find out what they're doing and talk. So it also builds relationships. Like working together really builds relationships. We get to spend time with them, we all bring food and we get to have a little picnic break for lunch. And uh, it's really great.

Brian: And actually. I was going to say point 2 in planning, you've got to plan to feed your crew. This is like moving. (Yeah) there's gotta be some decent food if you're expecting all these people to show up. So, make it fun.

Jami: If it's more than just the one couple. (yeah). But even then we plan a meal, so I might have a soup in the slow cooker if it's a cool fall day or sandwiches or a salad if it's a warm day. And when we had the big family trade work days, we all just brought something that everybody could share. And usually it was a salad or, you know, chips and salsa or something like that.

Brian: Well, one thing, talking about exchange, you said learning - I went to our friend's house, and he was remodeling their bathroom. So one of the things I helped him with, he needed help with, was tearing out the old tub and the surround just to get it out. It's kind of a two man job to get that metal tub out. Then the next week, maybe? I was tearing out our old bathroom. And so it's like, Oh, I've done this before, I sorta know now what to expect behind the surround and everything. It

was actually really helpful to me to have a dry run over at his house, you know, where I could mess up, and then over at our house just like, okay, no, this is what I should do.

Jami: Sure, we learn from people. I've learned a ton of things from how other people do things, and also I've learned kind of different techniques. So my favorite newspaper and mulching technique, I always use a dark compost. It feeds the soil, it looks really great against the plants. But when I used that at my mom's house where it's shaded, moist a lot, and then she has one of those... Sprinklers to keep the deer away?

Brian: Yes, sprinkler with a motion detector to shoot you.

Jami: Which basically constantly keeps this, that mulch moist. (Yeah) It grows weeds. A lot more than it ever did in ours. So I had to go with a different technique there. When we lived with her, we changed it over to a cardboard and wood chip mulch. And that has lasted a number of years without any weeds. So, I learned a new technique that I wouldn't have even thought about if I hadn't had that. So yeah, there's learning that goes on, either from the people or what you're doing, and it's inspiring and motivating. Lots of great, lots of great reasons. So I've talked about my sister's yard, my mom's yard. We also painted at a number of places. We painted my other sister's house when that's, that was their big project. Then they came over to our cottage, our previous house, and helped us finish up all the trim after we had painted our house yellow. It took, you know, trim is the thing that takes...

Brian: Um-hm, oh my goodness. Or just painting, the sister-in-law that painted the French door -wood panels? Or slats, I don't know what you call them.

Jami: And I do have a photo of that. I'm going to link to that on the blog and there's a photo of my two sisters, actually, one worked on the inside of the French door and the other worked on the outside to do all of the little individual panes.

Brian: Yeah, yeah. The little wood things.

Jami: That was a labor of love. It was great. And then, we also had, they finished up the arbors for our garden, our two grape arbors, so we had painting and woodwork. We had a number of different things that were done. And you mentioned the excavating here, but we also, it was my friend and I who built that rock wall in the sunken garden area that we've created. And she was really helpful because, I mean not only the manpower, but we had to, it was kind of a puzzle that you were putting together, so we'd both stand back and kind of look at what it looked like and be like, well I think we need some more over here. You need a flat rock in there. And it was just really great to be able to bounce that off of someone and, and kind of figure out something like that. So this is all to say that we're just big fans of trading work days with you know, family or a single couple. And I'm going to link to all of these that you can be inspired, too, that I have on my site. So go to the show notes page. These will be linked, too, and you can see the incredible transformations before and after. And I hope this inspires you to get some work days scheduled on your calendar to trade with family and friends.

Farmhouse Updates

Brian: Well I have a confession to make on the farmhouse update. Progress has been a little bit slow. We've been traveling a little bit and then we've been going heavy duty on the garden for our available work time. So I've just been sort of working

with the electrical, continuing that. And just to say that all the wires are in, so I've just got to do some stapling and um, and then we're ready for that inspection. So onto the next thing.

Jami: Well, that's good. And I think we were talking about this and thinking, oh well there aren't any really updates so we shouldn't, but here's the biggest thing- it takes time. When you're doing, we talked about this as one of the cons when you're your own contractor, is that it's a bit slower. Things are slower. And it's because we have full time jobs and we have other responsibilities. And so those will often come first before the house. And this is a perfect example of now where we have a month, maybe a month and a half, where we have to get the garden done and then it's too late, you know, we have to really get it done now. So the push now is to get the garden, which does have a few more updates because we have a few more beds done and I'm filling all the other beds, which takes time because we have to go and get the soil and then have to fill those. Then we go get the compost that I have to add that layer. So it all takes time. But here's the real life DIY - it's slow.

Brian: Yeah, it is. We have a friend who builds houses and then he's building his own house, for the first time that he's going to live in a house he's built. And just to hear his progress, we see them about every week. It's just like, it's just incredible how much he gets done, you know? He's, of course he can spend all day working on it. He was builders with him. Yeah. He, he'll have a guy come and do, you know, the whole roof, all the electrical in a day, you know, that kind of thing.

Jami: Well we did have someone come and do our roof. We didn't do that.

Brian: Well that's true. That's true. Yeah. When we've hired it's gone fast. But yeah, progress. It's important to continue progress. Maybe that's what it is. Just barely keep the ball rolling. So.

Jami: Right. And I think, you know, we will hire out some things, but we know you can do the electrical, so we just want to get that done, get that permit passed, then we can move onto the next one.

Brian: Speaking of the garden, did you talk about the picture we got finally?

Jami: In my newsletter I did, but I don't think we've mentioned it on the podcast.

Brian: We were experiencing chewed-on plants and we weren't sure. We had put up the deer fence and we hadn't seen deer. We thought, they're surely not jumping over it. I'd seen one rabbit a mile from the house. And you thought, well maybe that was the culprit. We would see squirrels running all over the property, on our back porch eating the bird seed. They're just kind of cute with their fuzzy tails. I'd see them running around over there on the rocks, not thinking much. So I just said, well before we go and do a bunch more to try to barricade the garden, let me get a game camera and let's just get a picture of whatever it is eating your lettuce. So you planted lettuce, peas, carrots, what were some of the things you had in?

Jami: Lettuce, yeah, lettuce, peas, and carrots, ha.

Brian: Yeah, so I got this trail camera, like a cheap one off Amazon, and set it up kind of with a general view of the garden. And except for the pictures of me loading it, it always takes your picture when you walk up to it, or the dog. We learned that the dog checks the garden every morning. We don't know where he goes, but he goes out and has his picture taken at about eight every morning. Pictures of nothing, 10 pictures of nothing. Just blank, we weren't sure what was setting it off. There was, there was no animal in the picture then. But we still, there was

some lettuce still eaten. So I scooted it up. Like I put a ladder out at the very end of the bed and pointed the camera down at the bed. So basically it's just like if anything is eating this and it's not a ghost, it is going to show up on film. So I'm going back through looking at the - it's got chomped down again- and go back through. Again, a picture of me walking up to the camera, picture of the dog, and then some blank pictures. And I'm just flicking through them and Emma's like (our daughter), Dad, go back. And sure enough. What was in the picture at the far end of the bed?

Jami: Ground Squirrel. (Yeah) A ground squirrel chomping down on the peas. Yes. Pea leaves, I should say.

Brian: Yes, and a couple more pictures in, it's the really good one that you posted in the newsletter. He's looking at you while chewing on something. I mean there's no, there's no doubt. He was like caught in the act. In court this would convict him. But the problem is ground squirrels aren't supposed to eat or like those things.

Jami: No, squirrels aren't.

Brian: Oh, squirrels aren't, okay.

Jami: And so I read, you know, squirrels that climb up a tree - tree squirrels. And that's kind of how you tell the difference when you scare them. One will go up a tree, the other will go down in something.

Brian: Okay. It looked very similar, like the fuzzy tail.

Jami: We had some nesting underneath our house, remember that? (Yes, yes.) In our other house. And so they would scurry underneath the house. I looked it up and tree squirrels, they, they will dig. They will make a lot of damage and they will eat fruit. So like if your tomatoes are ripe, they'll eat that. And so, you know, they're not great to have either, but they're not known for eating the leaves of things. However, ground squirrels love the little tender leaves and that's why they left the kale and the broccoli alone, because those don't have tender leaves, and they don't bother the onions. But oh, those pea leaves. And they got, they'd let them get a little bit, and then they'd go and eat them all down, and then they'd let them grow again a little bit, and then they'd eat them all down. They wanted those tender little shoots and they loved them. And so I did learn after researching ground squirrels do eat tender, little vegetable leaves.

Brian: And we have photo evidence. So anyway, now we've got to figure out what to do about them. But.

Jami: Yeah, that's sad because they climb.

Brian: So putting chicken wire around the bottom of the fence isn't going to...

Jami: It will help a little bit, but we'll have to cover beds with something. And right now we're just trying to get the beds done so it's not a priority.

Brian: Anyway, you'll post a picture of that. I thought that was kind of interesting.

Jami: Yeah, that is.

What's Cooking

Brian: Well, speaking of gardening, I had no idea that it's rhubarb season.

Jami: So you mentioned (laugh).

Brian: And so you have come up with a list of some of your favorite seasonal rhubarb recipes.

Jami: Yes. I mean, I have quite a few on the blog because we had a couple of plants that produced and they're one of the first things that produce in the spring, along with asparagus. And they're perennial plants. So once you plant them, they'll just produce for you every year without you doing much. I mean, I would add a layer of compost and then I'd keep them watered. And that's really all they need. It's a great plant. And now I found out that they, the deer don't like them, so hey, plant points. So, I actually created a, uh, it's very popular- it's called the Ultimate Rhubarb Guide. I have a number of ultimate vegetable and fruit guides. The Ultimate Rhubarb Guide is really popular because it helps, it's something a little different, like rhubarb isn't that well known of, not like corn. And so it shows all about how to grow and harvest rhubarb, but it also includes a ton of recipes and links to recipes for preserving rhubarb and cooking with rhubarb. So all kinds of muffins and breads and pies and all different ways that you can preserve rhubarb in jams, and chutneys, and freezing it, and just different ways. So it's really a good resource. Again, these things will all be linked.

Jami: Then I have some recipes on the blog that are some of my favorites. And one of the very first chutneys I ever made, well one was tomato, but then after that I made a rhubarb chutney, a Spicy Rhubarb Chutney, and it is SO good with pork. I don't know what it is, it's also good with chicken, but it just makes pork so good. I think it might be because pork is traditionally, like pork and applesauce, you know, you serve apples with it or applesauce. So maybe there's that slightly sweet and then you add the spice in. It's very good and it's super easy to make. And then I actually created a salad dressing that you can use the rhubarb chutney in. So if you have the rhubarb chutney, you can also make a salad dressing with it. I have a couple of canned rhubarb recipes. One is a honey lemon rhubarb butter and it's just basically three ingredients, like rhubarb honey and a little bit of lemon juice, and you use a slow cooker and you make this rhubarb butter that's to die for, it is so good. Then I have a ginger rhubarb jam, so it just makes a really small batch, but that is also very tasty. And you can use either one of these things in rhubarb, honey crumb bars. And again, most of these things are lower sugar or just use honey as the sugar as a sweetener. And then I have a glazed orange rhubarb muffin and it's really interesting to have the orange and rhubarb together. It's a little bit different and really good tasting. So if you have rhubarb, here's your go-to guide. If you don't, I encourage you to grow it if you can or find it at the farmer's market when it's in season because it's really fun to be able to make some of these.

Brian: It sounds really good. And as a person who wouldn't pick rhubarb as a favorite fruit, some of this stuff is really good. I can recommend it.

This Is Really Cool!

Brian: Regular listeners know that Jami and I really like audiobooks and one of our sites? Services? I don't know what you call them, that we go to a lot is Audible. They just have really good stuff and it's easy to find.

Jami: It's a membership and I have a membership.

Brian: There you go. But I meant they're probably the Amazon of audiobooks.

Jami: Well, they're owned by Amazon (laughing).

Brian: Oh, okay. So really in more ways than one isn't it? (Yeah.) So I'm going to try to not make this too long. I have a, years ago I posted - and it continues to sell - an Amazon Ebook, a kindle book, a business writing book on writing white papers, which continues to sell every month all the time. And so, I've been looking for ways to expand its sales. There seems to be a demand for it. So I created a video course for it. It's on Udemy and it's been continuing to sell. So I thought, well, I love audiobooks. And the next stage would be to turn it into an audiobook and get it up on audible. So I was researching how you would do that. And of course being owned by Amazon, they've made it like the Kindle Free and pretty easy to do. All that to say, to experiment and kind of learn how to do it, I've been doing one of my creative writing pieces, which I do sometimes and don't talk about. I wrote kind of a long short story that I then recorded, produced, which was way more work than I thought. And I'm talking, it's very difficult to have the energy of a performance and it took a week of recording sessions to get an hour, just over an hour short story recorded. It's incredible because it sounds, when the mic is close to you, it sounds like you're eating a banana. All the smacking in the clicking of the mouth noises, your tongue gurgling away on your teeth, and you snort, and breathe. And anyway, you have to edit all of that out. You notice in audio books, that's all clean. So I did all that. So all that to say, I was able to get it posted on Audible and it actually sold a copy. But the reason I'm announcing it here isn't to sell a bunch of this book, but if any listener who emails me and would like the audio version and a pdf version of the book for free, I will send to you. I'll send you a link, you can download it as an MP3, me reading it or performing it and or the pdf if you want to read it. So the name of the short story is called Cherry Coke. That's kind of, it's in the plot there. And just let me know. You can,

Jami: Should you give a little synopsis, maybe make them want to email you?

Brian: It's about a football coach who's desperate to win a game and what he does, how he gets, he does this thing with one of his assistant coaches. It's just, it's kind of amusing,

Jami: A little bit of a mystery.

Brian: Kind of a mystery. Yeah. You just have to listen to it to get it. It's free. I mean, come on, you're, if you listened to it and you've just wasted an hour. What you should do is email me directly, brian@brianboys.com and just ask and I will send you the stuff. We aren't going to post a link to it on the show notes because it would be up there forever. So again, if you'd like a free audio file for the entire short story and, or the pdf of the whole thing to read, just on your laptop, brian@brianboys.com.

Jami: So just to be clear, the cool thing is just being able to put something free up on Audible. Anybody can do it. Yes. And the second cool thing for all the listeners who don't really care about getting a book up on Audible is that they can actually download a free book.

Brian: Yeah.

Jami: Okay. Well my Cool Thing is actually an audiobook, too. This is one written by someone else and it's called, Code Name Verity, and I had been hearing a lot about it. It's a historical fiction set in World War II and it's about a woman pilot and, uh, I guess a spy? A woman spy, and they're friends and one of them gets, they're on a plane and the plane has to land. And so the other one parachutes. Anyway, they get separated on one gets taken.

Brian: She's captured.

Jami: Right, captured by the Germans in France. This is over in France. So when they were occupying France. And it's written in the form of, the first part of the book is from the one woman's perspective and it's all of her writing. So she's writing notes and that's what we're hearing, her write the notes. And then the second part of the book is the other friend, and she also was writing notes.

Brian: It's not an all knowing narrator. (Yeah.) It's kinda like the one gal, it's, I guess without giving it away, it's like her confession to her captors. Right. So, and they want to know everything. Yeah. So we learn everything.

Jami: Right, so she tells the whole story. And we listened to this - the reason you know about it is because it's one of the books that we listen together in the car. We do that a lot. Those of you who listen know that. And it was super exciting, like very well produced. Like the women, I guess it was two women, who read the audio book, we were just very impressed. Um, the story, we were trying to figure out what was going on. I had heard a lot about this book, that it was good ,that there was some twists, some things you didn't know, maybe an unreliable narrator. I wasn't quite sure. So, I was really listening for that and lots of really interesting things happen and characters, and you're just trying to figure out what's going on in the background because all you get is what she's writing.

Jami: Right. So I really, I think it's a good book and I really enjoyed it, but I do have to say, I think we were a little disappointed in the ending. And we kind of talked about it afterwards, and I want to give any spoilers away, but I didn't really think it needed to end that way. I kind of thought it was a little bit of a cop-out, actually. (Uh-um) And the twist wasn't all that big of a twist, and I'm not really sure, and the end of the book kind of ruined a little bit for me, but I still think it was a great book that just had a lot of... And, and she, the author also writes I should say, at the end what she took liberties with and what was true and um, that there were women working in this private, it was a civilian, but they flew,

Brian: Civilian, yeah. They would ferry the warplanes. So let's say you need a bomber brought down here or up to here. You know, you wouldn't get your military pilots because they've got to be out on missions. Women pilots could do that.

Jami: So, so there was a lot of true things that happened. And then a lot of, you know, of the names of the bases and the people, anyway, there was true things. So she talks about what's true and not, which I always really like. So yeah, Code Name Verity. I think it's a great book, but I would love for you guys to listen to it and then tell me what you thought- if you thought you were kind of disappointed with the ending or not.

Brian: Yeah, I don't know. I thought the twist got me, but again we discussed six other ways it could have ended too, but anyway, that's all that's a matter of taste. Great book and worth listening to.

Jami: Oh, definitely worth listening to.

Brian: Well that is all the time we have for this episode, so if you have any great ideas or any experiences with trading, workdays let us know. Send us feedback on that. Other rhubarb recipes? (Oh, Yes) I don't know, anything you can think of, ways to, suggestions for me to get working faster on the house, I don't know.

Jami: Or how to keep ground squirrels out of the garden.

Brian: Yeah. Or if you listen to my story and like it or hate it or have like a whole different idea, let me know. Get that. You can leave feedback either by responding to your email newsletter. You can leave it on the page, the podcast downloads page that's on your site, or through the usual social channels. We've just really appreciated people that have gone on and left reviews on iTunes or on the podcast App, and we're just collecting those high ratings and reviews there and it helps people find the show and it's helped it grow. So I just want to say, thank you for listening and we will talk to you again soon.

Jami: Bye Bye.