

THE FIVE-TOED SLOTHS DIDN'T WIN WORLD WAR II

A sloth is any of several slow-moving, tree-dwelling South American mammals. One species has three toes on each front foot, and another has only two. They rarely vacate their trees and are generally considered harmless. Not so with the five-toed sloth.

Seldom found in trees, five-toed sloths are more likely to be house-dwellers. They're disturbingly common, and I sometimes have occasion to observe--from a safe distance, of course--a couple of the critters near where I work.

One meanders about in a rather curious fashion, the bottoms of his feet seemingly coated with goop that prevents them from being lifted quickly. Moving as if waist-deep in honey, he just shambles along with undisguised apathy. A "right-angle aversion disorder" leads him to cut across corners just to save a couple of steps.

The other creature actually locomotes with more determination and purpose. But like his tree-dwelling namesakes, he rarely ventures far on foot. Actually catching him engaged in sweat-producing labor requires careful surveillance of his environs.

Just as his lawn dangerously approaches critical mass, he slowly drags out the mower. Lumbering along, he grinds away at paper and trash and whatever else might be buried in the growth. Then he blows the whole mess into the street. He's of the five-toed tribe for sure.

Signs of the five-toed sloth are everywhere. Too lazy to do otherwise, they'll furtively empty their ashtrays in parking lots or throw refuse out the window.

Even these repulsive qualities haven't endangered five-toed sloths. In fact, a semi-protected status encourages their propagation. Just try correcting a lazy worker, and you'll likely be buried in a blizzard of legal claptrap. We shamefully encourage slothfulness by calling it security.

One father recently lamented his frustration in combating the tug of slothfulness on his children. "It's not that I haven't challenged them and exposed them to great things--it's just that there is so much competition from videos, music, and yee-haw good times that the challenges get buried." Non-productive activities are sucking them down like ducks on quicksand. Those grand ideas that enlarge fathers' dreams for their children may never be.

When a local eatery was forced to close over a holiday weekend because nobody wanted to work, a newspaper reporter deciphered the cause. "The few reliable employees seemed to be from another era, an era when work was something to be valued."

Not long ago a World War II veteran was musing about how the United States could ever have produced all the materials required to win that war. The short answer is "hard work." But what that generation treasured, succeeding ones have progressively despised.

For those who want to succeed, there's something more critical than good grades, good looks, and good times: learning the value of good, hard work. The five-toed sloths didn't win World War II, but they're sure to spoil the heritage and dreams the war generation left for us to enjoy.