

# **When Truisms Collide**

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Just this past week I had dinner with a nationally known speaker, whose work is completely outside the homebuilding industry. He mentioned that one of his commencement presentations focused on the theme of “The Good is the Enemy of the Best”. I responded by saying that I often talk about “The Perfect is the Enemy of the Good”. As we talked, it became apparent that several contradictory issues were in play:

1. Each of us believed that his quote contained a “basic truth”
2. Each of us realized that the other’s quote also contained a “basic truth”
3. Fundamentally, the 2 “truths” are in conflict, implying that one had to be, in actuality, false

And thus began my attempt to understand how such a situation could exist. Upon reflection, I realized this apparent contradiction was entirely possible for two reasons. First, is the issue of what each statement actually means. In the case of the “Good... Best,” the quote is an appeal for constant improvement. It is an admonition against settling for an inferior solution when a better one is attainable. The “Perfect... Good”, on the other hand, is in reality, a call for action. The fundamental truth of this statement is that sometimes, waiting for perfection will result in failure. Thus we see that there is less intrinsic conflict between the two statements than first appearances might indicate, primarily due to reason number two. All maxims must be judged in the context of the situation. Thus, given the time and resources, it makes all the sense in the world to strive for the best, and not settle for anything less. But in an environment of cutthroat competition and fast capable opponents, we may not have the luxury of spending the time necessary to improve upon an acceptable (although not perfect) course of action. The perfect solution delivered too late is not perfect at all.

The lesson learned from this mini collision of philosophies is, in itself quite interesting. Basically, listen to all those pearls of wisdom contained in quotes, proverbs, aphorisms, dictums and mottos. But more importantly, examine their underlying truths in the total context of your current situation. The environment within which you are operating may not be perfectly analogous to the one envisioned when that “fundamental truth” was created.