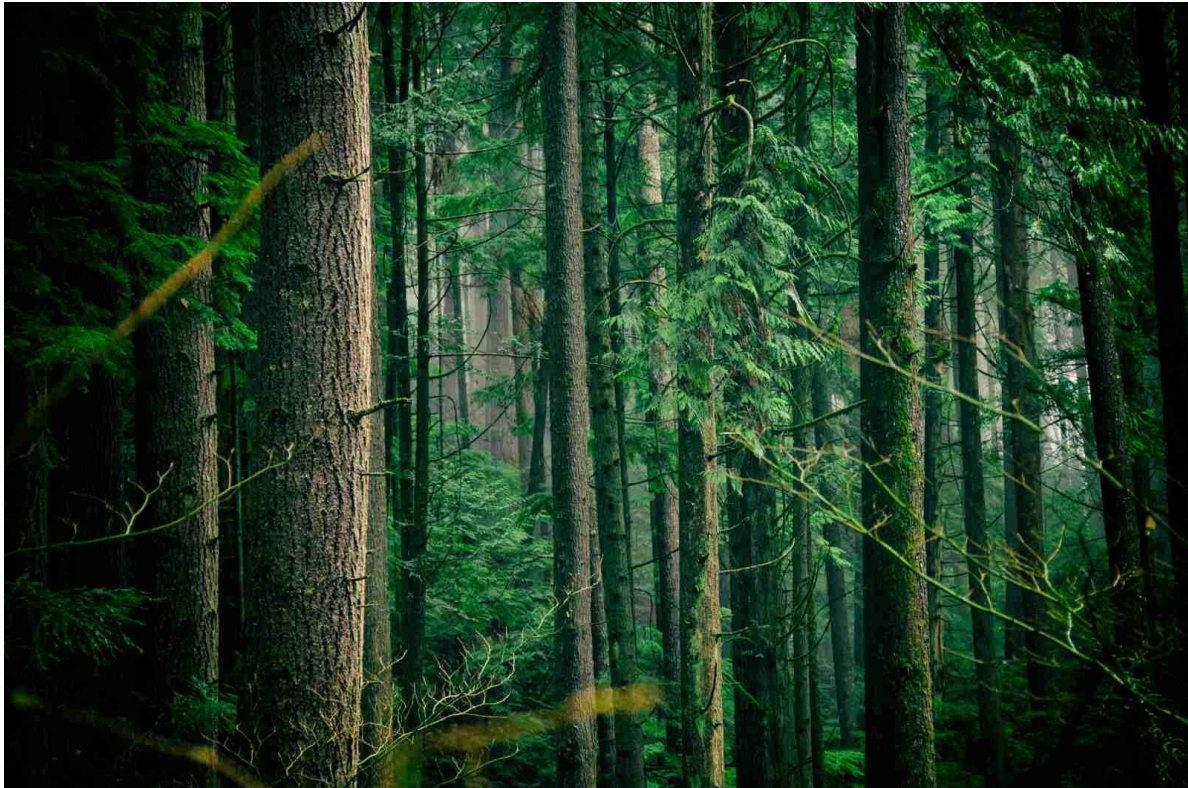


# 3 Life Lessons We Can Learn From Trees

**From the importance of pacing yourself to relying on your community, there truly is wisdom in trees.**

Brad Stulberg



There are few things I like more than hiking through Redwood Regional Park. It's a mixed but predominantly Redwood forest about 15 minutes from my place in Uptown Oakland, California. I often head to the forest with my wife, my kid, my close friend Justin, coaching clients, or some combination of that group. Sometimes I get so caught up in good conversation that I forget to observe the trees. I don't beat myself up for this. But I do think that if we pay attention to trees there is much we can learn from them.

A new book, *The Hidden of Life Trees*, by Peter Wohlleben, drove this idea home from me. It's a wonderful exploration of forest life. Trees have been around for a very long time. They are quite resilient to changing weather patterns. They are long-lasting because they do a few things really well; all of which could benefit us humans, too.

This shouldn't be surprising: In the grand scheme of things, trees are our distant relatives. We aren't separate from nature. We are nature.

So, what can trees teach us?

## Presence

Trees have a heightened awareness for changes in the seasons. They sense these changes by paying close attention, using their equivalent of nerve cells, to shifts in temperature, wind, and light. Without paying such close attention, they'd be at risk for dropping their leaves too soon and missing out on precious sunlight that can be turned into energy. Or, they might hold onto their leaves too long, increasing the risk they'll be blown over by storms or crack due to the weight of condensation and ice on their branches.

Trees don't resist changes in the weather, or pretend they don't exist, or try to power through them. They are acutely aware of them, accept them, and adapt by controlling what they can control. This all starts with paying close attention.

## Patience

Though different types of trees have different builds, they all follow a universal rule: grow too tall or too wide for their trunk and they eventually suffer from disease or acute injury. Grow too fast too often and they die.

This can be a great challenge for trees, especially during fruitful times when there is lots of sunlight. They are tempted to grow more branches and leaves to soak up the sun. But trees also come to learn, from suffering little micro-tears when they try to grow too fast, the importance of ensuring their trunk is thick, stable, and solid enough to support any additional crown growth. They attend to their core before extending themselves further.

Trees pace themselves well. They don't grow beyond their capacity, but they do grow to be very tall and wide. It just takes time.

## Community

The healthiest, longest-living trees live in forests amongst their family and friends. Wohlleben gives tons of examples of how trees look out for each other when they are sick or being blown around or during times of drought. But the passage below is my favorite from the entire book:

*“A tree is not a forest. On its own, a tree cannot establish a consistent local climate. It is at the mercy of the wind and weather. But together, many trees create an ecosystem that moderates the extremes of heat and cold, stores a great deal of water, and generates a great deal of humidity. And in this environment, trees can live to be very old. To get to this point, the community must remain intact no matter what.”*

Think about what makes a human life meaningful, healthy, and long-lasting.

Presence. Patience. Community.

Unfortunately, you don't see these traits being held up on cable news, social media, or even in newspapers. Sadly, you hardly see these traits being held up anywhere these days. If anything, it seems like the current culture works *against* these ideals.

Maybe we should consider being open to wisdom from sources a bit beyond ourselves, from sources a bit beyond the narrow worlds to which we artificially constrict ourselves. Look to trees. They have years of experience and lots to share.

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