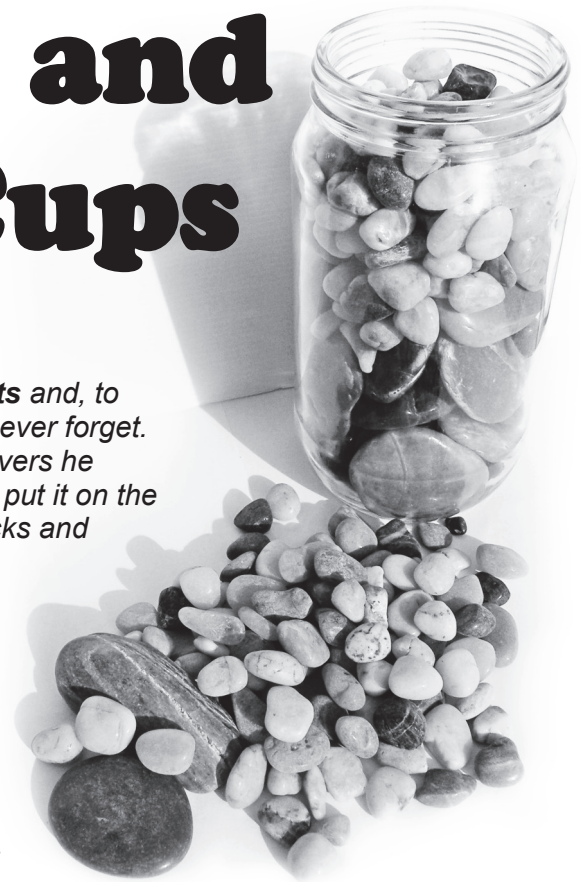


The Jam Jar and the Coffee Cups



A professor was speaking to a group of business students and, to drive home a point, used an illustration those students will never forget. As he stood in front of the group of high-powered overachievers he said, “Okay, time for a quiz” and pulled out a very large jam jar and put it on the table in front of him. He also produced about a dozen fist-sized rocks and carefully placed them, one at a time, into the jar.

When the jar was filled to the top and no more rocks would fit inside, he asked, “Is this jar full?”

Everyone in the class yelled, “Yes!”

The professor replied, “Really?”

He reached under the table and pulled out a bucket of gravel. He dumped some gravel in and shook the jar, causing pieces of gravel to work themselves down into the spaces between the big rocks. He then asked the group once more, “Is the jar full?”

By this time the class was on to him. “Probably not,” one of them answered.

“Good!” he replied, reaching under the table and bringing out a bucket of sand. He started dumping the sand in the jar and it went into all of the spaces left between the rocks and the gravel. Once more he asked the question, “Is this jar full?”

This time the students replied with a unanimous “Yes!”

The professor then produced two cups of coffee from under the table, and poured the entire contents into the jar, effectively filling the empty space amongst the sand. The students laughed.

“Now,” said the professor as the laughter subsided, “I want you to recognise that this jar represents your life. The rocks are the important things – your family, your children, your health, your friends, your education, your dreams. If everything else was lost and only they remained, your life would still be full.

The gravel is the other things that matter, like your job, your house and your car. The sand is everything else – the small stuff. “If you put the sand into the jar first,” he continued, “there is no room for the gravel or the rocks. The same goes for life. If you spend all your time and energy on the small stuff you will never have room for the things that are important to you.

“Pay attention to the things that are critical to your happiness. Play with your children. Take time to get medical checkups. Take your spouse out to dinner. Visit a friend in hospital. There will always be time to vacuum the floor and watch the TV soaps. Take care of the rocks first – the things that really matter. Set your priorities. The rest is just sand.”

One of the students raised her hand and inquired “What about the coffee?” The professor smiled. “I’m glad you asked. It just goes to show that no matter how full your life may seem, there’s always room for a cup of coffee with a friend.”

— Author Unknown