He Had 10 Days and a Broken Machine. Could He Save the Job?

EPISODE SCRIPT

Opening cut

Clara

Ten days left, a broken machine, and not a single cut board! That is an absolute nightmare. Did he finally come to you for help, or was he still trying to fix the computer?

Episode

Clara

Welcome to The What If Table. Today we talk about: Why do we spend months or years delaying our most important work waiting for ideal conditions, instead of beginning with the imperfect tools we already have? Who is here with me?

Dennis Hayes

I am Dennis Hayes. I run a woodworking shop with several shared benches. For four years, a young craftsman named Evan Miller rented a space from me for four hundred dollars a month. Evan had great hands, but he turned down every big cabinet job, claiming he needed twelve thousand dollars in digital cutting machines before he could even begin.

Clara

Welcome, Dennis. Four years is a lot of rent to pay while turning down good work! Did he really believe he could not build anything without those expensive machines?

Dennis Hayes

He was terrified people would judge his cuts. He scraped by fixing small chairs for sixty dollars, with only one hundred and twenty dollars in his savings. Then one morning, Clara Ruiz from the neighborhood bakery walked into our sawdust. She offered him three thousand four hundred dollars for two pantries, with eight hundred dollars cash in hand as a deposit.

Clara

Eight hundred dollars in cash on the table, when he only had one hundred and twenty left! That was a huge moment. Did he take the job, or was he still afraid?

Dennis Hayes

He took the eight hundred dollars and promised delivery in five weeks, but panic seized him right away. Instead of cutting timber with his hand tools, he swiped a credit card for an imported digital cutting machine worth one thousand eight hundred dollars. Then he wasted six hundred dollars on glossy paper brochures before making one single joint.

Clara

He went into debt for a new machine and bought brochures before touching the wood? That sounds like pure panic. How was he planning to finish the pantries in five weeks?

Dennis Hayes

He convinced himself the computer would cut every board in forty-eight hours once configured. Three heavy wooden crates arrived with missing pins, and Evan lost two whole weeks fighting confusing software instead of cutting timber. With only ten days left before the deadline, the drive belt snapped, leaving him stranded with piles of untouched plywood.

Clara

Ten days left, a broken machine, and not a single cut board! That is an absolute nightmare. Did he finally come to you for help, or was he still trying to fix the computer?

Dennis Hayes

Evan never reached out. Instead, he stayed late under a dim work lamp, desperately stripping wires to fix the motor while watching the baker's phone calls ring out. He was already two months behind on bench rent, with only eighty-five dollars left in his bank account when the first credit card bill arrived.

Clara

Ignoring her calls while hiding under a lamp is heartbreaking. He was drowning in shame and fear. You were sharing that workshop every day. Did you step in, or did you wait for him to ask?

Dennis Hayes

Before I could cross the sawdust to intervene, the baker walked through the front door unannounced. She stared at the piles of untouched plywood and the broken machine parts scattered across the concrete. Disappointed, she cancelled the entire order on the spot and demanded her eight hundred dollar deposit back immediately.

Clara

She demanded the deposit back, but he only had eighty-five dollars left! That must have felt like the end of the world for him. What did he do?

Dennis Hayes

Evan stared at the floor in absolute shame. He confessed that he spent her eight hundred dollars and promised to repay every cent in weekly installments. Once she walked out, I brought him to my grandfather's scarred maple workbench. I told him that honest, lasting furniture comes from patient hands, not from expensive digital computers.

Clara

That scarred workbench was the exact lesson he needed. After hitting rock bottom, did your words finally sink in? Was he ready to pick up simple hand tools?

Dennis Hayes

The lesson broke through his stubborn pride. That afternoon, he packed the broken digital cutter into its crates for a refund. Two days later, a flooded neighborhood hardware store needed an emergency checkout counter in four days. Evan stepped forward and took the job for eight hundred and fifty dollars, relying only on simple hand planes and a wooden guide.

Clara

Only four days to build a whole counter by hand, right after losing that big pantry order! That took real courage. Could he actually finish it in time?

Dennis Hayes

He threw himself right into the work. Evan clamped a straight two-by-four to the timber as a guide and worked late into the night under a single bulb, hand-planing every edge. On the fourth morning, we loaded the solid counter onto my utility truck, and the owner handed him eight hundred and fifty dollars in cash.

Clara

He actually finished it with simple hand tools! Earning that cash with his own hands must have felt incredible. Did he walk straight over to the bakery to pay her back?

Dennis Hayes

He walked straight to the bakery and returned her eight hundred dollars in full. Soon after, the manufacturer refunded his one thousand eight hundred dollars for the returned machine. That let him settle his overdue bench rent with me. Even better, the hardware owner introduced him to two neighbors, securing custom shelving orders worth two thousand two hundred dollars.

Clara

Returning the money and clearing his debts must have lifted a huge weight off his shoulders. And now new clients were coming to him! How did that change the way he worked in your shop?

Dennis Hayes

It changed everything for him. Six months later, Evan arrives at six in the morning, completely debt-free with two thousand five hundred and fifty dollars in savings. He sweeps fresh pine shavings off his bench, holding a warm thermos, admiring five solid oak cabinet doors drying on the rack, all built with simple, reliable hand tools.

Clara

What a beautiful picture. He finally stopped waiting for perfect conditions and trusted his own hands. Starting early, debt-free, and doing honest work with simple tools must bring such deep peace.

Dennis Hayes

That peace came from letting go of his pride. Waiting for the ready day was never about the tools; it was just fear of what people might say. True craftsmanship does not wait for a perfect machine or ideal conditions. It begins the quiet morning you take a simple hand plane and shape the wood right in front of you.

Clara

That hits so close to home. We hide behind excuses and expensive equipment just to protect our fear. But taking that first simple step with what we have is where real confidence actually begins. What project are you putting off today? Share your thoughts in the comments. Please like, subscribe, and thank you for listening!