

# How to Bait a Hook

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When I say that everything is more rewarding when done alone, people misunderstand. I am neither a loner, nor do I believe I am better than anyone else. I love the company of others, and I enjoy working collaboratively; but I also believe anything worth having is worth working for. Seeing the results of your own merits is more rewarding when accomplished independently.

It was late 1992, I was five and out fishing for the first time. Grandpa and I pulled into the mangroves across the river in our tiny motorboat, just us two. Sharing our little boat was a lunchbox packed by my grandma and our fishing gear. Grandma filled the lunchbox; the gear consisted of three fishing rods, a tackle box full of hooks, line and buoys, and a large bucket like object hanging off the side of the boat (I later learned Grandpa packed an extra rod in case I lost mine in the water). With his talk of the 1940s, the depression in New York City, and my great-grandfathers trucking company, my grandfather changed the way I viewed the world. In later years, I would learn how to drive the boat, change an extinguished light, and tie all the knots; yet, that day I learned only one thing—how to bait a hook.

Before we began fishing, I learned the mechanics of the reel and how to cast a line. Next, we moved on to the bucket hanging off the side of the boat. Grandpa reached into the bucket while it remained in the water and pulled out a small shrimp. As it squirmed in his hands, I learned the purpose of the bucket and its contents. With his bait in hand and my close attention, he baited his hook, cast his line, and began his day of fishing. After this demonstration, Grandpa handed me the other fishing rod, a single shrimp, and left me to my own devices. I was much shorter than the rod, and it was hard to manage with the shrimp in hand. At that moment, I threw a tantrum admirable for any five-year-old.

I was not interested in holding this shrimp (or killing it

for that matter), but he would not help, and at the time I could not understand why. After being pestered by his five-year-old granddaughter, he probably began to wonder the same thing himself. I continued to refuse to put a hook through a shrimp. My behavior was greeted by my grandfather’s continued refusal of assistance. He ignored my ranting and continued his fishing adventure. Surely it would have been easier for him to bait the hook himself, but he let me rant and helped me learn. After what felt like hours (as measured in kid time), I gave in. I put the hook through the shrimp (horizontally instead of vertically), threw my line out, and sat on the bench next to my grandpa—rod in hand.

I wonder if he was evoking the creed “give a man a fish, feed him for the day; teach a man to fish and he will eat forever,” or if fishing happened to be the medium for an education in work ethics. Either way, that October afternoon I learned how to fish without his assistance, and more importantly, I learned the value of doing things for myself.

Country Road  
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Since that day, I have baited every hook myself, because I could. Now, if I wanted to fish, I could achieve my goal without the help of another. Yet, after 20 years of holding this belief, I realize that few people hold an independent work ethic so highly.

In all honesty, I will never know what Grandpa hoped to teach me that cold afternoon on our small boat.

He could have been using fishing as a way to improve my independent work ethic, with the hope I would become a better support system for my mother. Or maybe he was not interested in baiting twice as many hooks.

Grandpa will never know how much that first shrimp on a hook affected me, but his actions are present in my belief system, work ethic, and lifetime of successful behaviors. Although he is no longer with me, his lesson persists in my daily life. Not only do I believe that anything worth having is worth much more if achieved independently, but I plan to impart this knowledge to future generations. In the meantime, I will prepare my tackle box, extra fishing rod, and my bucket of bait.



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Waterfall  
Trung Tran



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