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We All Should Strive To Be the Palm in the Storm

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We All Should Strive To Be the Palm in the Storm

By Carolyn Massiah
UCF Forum columnist

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Hurricane season is beginning to hit its peak activity. Multiple storms have been brewing in the Atlantic the past couple weeks.

Seasoned Floridians know that we should always be worried about the trees in our yards during hurricane season. However, we do not have to worry about the palm trees as much as we do about the oaks. The palm tree may take a beating but it will likely survive the storm.

We should all strive to be the Palm in the Storm.

Throughout life, we will all face some version of a storm. The storm could come to you as relationship or family issues. The storm could present itself as problems at work. The storm could also blow into your life as health or financial concerns.

No matter the presentation of the storm, we will all have storms just as certain as Florida will have hurricanes at some point. It is not a matter of *if* the storm will occur but *when* it occurs, and if we will survive without too much damage. We will indeed survive if we strive to be the Palm in the Storm.

Would it surprise you to know that there are some palms, the sabal in particular, that can withstand winds up to 145 miles per hour? Also, the massive trunks of those oak trees in your yard may be able to support the abundant weight of branches but they are very limited in flexibility compared to the stems of the palm tree.

As such, palm trees are able to bend 40 or 50 degrees without snapping. So, when the strongest of winds from the most brutal of storms are beating down, it is the palm tree that will bend in the storm but not snap. It is the palm tree that will, after the winds and rains have passed, be able to stand back up and continue to exist.

We should all strive to be the Palm in the Storm.

Researchers have conducted a great deal of study on how and why trees survive storms. I think when we examine some of their findings, we will find guidance in weathering our own storms.

Let us take a look at the Do's and Don'ts of how we can be the Palm in the Storm.

1. **Do not be a lone palm:** In 2004 hurricanes Ivan and Jeanne, research showed that trees growing in groups survived the winds better than individual trees. Your chances of surviving the storms in your own life will also be much lower if you attempt to be a lone palm. So, it is our job to grow and develop rewarding relationships such that when the storm comes, we will not be alone in our battles.
2. **Do befriend palms different from you:** Research shows that when a variety of species, ages and layers of trees and shrubs have been planted in a community, the trees will be more likely to survive hurricanes. We also need to be willing and eager to populate our lives with a rich diversity of others. That diversity will provide you with a patchwork quilt of people to stand by and over you as storms bear down on you.
3. **Do remove hazardous palms from your life:** Research demonstrates that removing hazardous tree species that are endangering lives and property, and that have low wind resistance increase the remaining trees' survival odds. Stop right now and ask yourself who or what might be the dangerous tree in your life. Perhaps it is a person who has not matured with you and is more a thorn bush than a strong vibrant palm tree you would be able to count on in the storm. Perhaps it is a habit that you have (or don't have) that you know will make you vulnerable to the storm on the horizon. Now is the time to remove those hazardous trees from your life...before the next storm. Remove them now and increase your chances of surviving the storm later.
4. **Do not mistake wear and tear of palms for defeat:** Research shows us that the greater the wind speed of a storm, the more likely trees will lose some or all of their leaves. However, leaf loss does not mean the tree is dead. The same is true of us. Every storm in our life will batter us and perhaps leave us bruised in some way. However, never mistake the wear and tear that you have suffered during a storm as defeat. Instead, see that bruise of the storm as proof that you fought the battle, bent down as far as you could during the storm, and you survived!

Aim to be the flexible but resilient palm in all storms of life. Living in Florida, we must be aware and prepared because storms will come at some point.

When you are not in storm season, prepare by surrounding yourselves with a diverse group of other strong palms. Remove those palms and other trees that will not be helpful but rather harmful to you during the storm. When the storm comes, do not try to survive your battle alone. Rely upon and lean on the diverse group of palms in your life.

The storm may bend you down and you may feel as though you will surely snap, but know that you will not. The storm will end and you will survive.

Be the Palm in the Storm!

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