

A WEEK IN *Learning*

The Longest Shortcut

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Some of our most valuable lessons come from our biggest mistakes. I'm going to tell you about one of mine. Around 2002, I was living in Salt Lake City and was planning a trip to Phoenix to visit family. I had made this trip several times before, and it was never pleasant. Unfortunately, there is no direct route from Salt Lake to Phoenix on a major highway. I always had to drive down to Las Vegas and then back over to Phoenix. Altogether, it was over 9 hours on the road if you had at least three Red Bulls and only took a few bathroom breaks. This time, I decided I would take a shortcut. Looking at the map, (a paper map, mind you) I planned a route that connected right down south, through Utah, into Arizona. What I didn't realize at the time, was that this one-lane road went through Grand Canyon National park. Up and over mountains. I didn't have a cell phone, and I was starting my trip in the dead of winter.

A couple hours into my "shortcut", a snowstorm began to set in. I was slowly driving up a mountain, with countless switchbacks, at about 10mph to avoid skidding on the ice. I realized it had been hours since I had seen another car. Eventually, the snowstorm turned into a full blizzard and I couldn't see.

As I started heading downhill on the mountain, my car became no match for the snow and ice. My car began skidding out of control. I tried remembering: do I steer into or out of a skid? Growing up in Phoenix, you tend to gloss over those sections in Drivers ED about navigating icy conditions. After a full 360, my back tires slid off the side of the cliff. My car skated sideways until it bounced back onto the side of the road and I came to an abrupt halt in a pile of snow that was up to my windows. So here I was, stuck neck deep in a snow drift during a blizzard, on top of a mountain, no one around for miles, and no way to call for help.

Just for laughs, I put my foot on the gas to see if I could make my way out of the snow. Of course, my tires spun wildly to no avail. At this point, I climbed out my window and began digging my car out of the snow. This went on for hours. About every half hour, I would hop back into the car and try the gas to see if I could get any traction, but I still couldn't move an inch. As I stopped to catch my breath, I noticed some red dots beyond the tree line across the road. My heart sank and a lump in my throat developed once I realized what it was. It was a pack of wolves. Maybe five or six of them, standing completely still, staring right at me.



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- Jared Allen

The Longest Shortcut

As I stood there in disbelief, the wolves began to slowly inch forward towards me. I raced back to my car and began honking the horn wildly, which seemed to scare the wolves away. However, as I went back to start digging, the wolves returned. This time, they were more confident. They approached me just a little more quickly. Over the next hour, I went back and forth between digging more snow away from my tires and honking my horn to keep the wolves at bay. I even started to jam whatever I had in my car - paper, luggage, trash - under my tires in an attempt to get traction. Still, nothing worked. But I refused to give up.

Inexplicably, after at least 6 hours on the mountain, a brown station wagon drove up and parked next to my car. "You need some help?" she said. I replied with an emphatic, "Yes." I was too mentally and physically exhausted to ask who she was or why she was driving up this mountain. She tied some rope to one end of her station wagon, and the other to my car, and pulled me out of the snowdrift. After the storm had calmed a bit, I found out that I was only a half hour from the next town. I don't know who this woman was, or why she was on that mountain that day, but I owe her my life.

The Shortcut

I learned many valuable lessons on that trip that I still use to this day. The first being that there's no such thing as a shortcut – if it were actually shorter, it would just be the main route. At times, in an attempt to save time and energy, we may try to cut corners and take the easy way out. More often than not though, this puts you neck deep in trouble. Or snow.

Stuck in the Drift

Sometimes those shortcuts put us into situations that are seemingly hopeless. However, a situation only becomes hopeless when you lose hope. Any action you take to fix the situation, at this point, is better than no action at all. Own your mistakes, pick yourself up, and start digging yourself out of the snow.

The Wolves are Just Beyond the Tree Line

"How could things get any worse?" This phrase is usually followed by something that is much, much worse. The wolves may be just beyond the tree line, waiting for you to drop your guard or show weakness. These may be negative team members or family members. You can't ignore them completely, but don't let them slow you down.

The Miracle Station Wagon

When we get ourselves into trouble, we may say, "I got myself into this situation, I'll get myself out of it." Denying yourself perspective and additional resources is a recipe for disaster. It may be a blow to your ego to accept help, but it's important to take it when it's offered. If I refused help on that day, I would have been a wolf's dinner, and you wouldn't be reading this article.

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