

Perspective

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Lessons from a flat tire

There are many things you can learn from having a flat tire. My latest learning experience occurred last week.

My wife, Cathy, drove away from the house for an appointment but returned moments later, explaining that she had a flat tire. Being the trained investigator I am, I immediately noticed a three-inch screw protruding from her left rear tire.

I told her to take my car while I handled the flat tire. I thought to myself, "I haven't had to change a flat tire in over 30 years." I'm guessing this is because of the high quality of steel radial tires... or maybe because I have a Triple A card which allows me to call professionals to change the tire.

I figured, "How hard can this be?" Turns out, it was pretty hard. First of all I had to find the temporary spare tire. I tore my wife's car apart like I was searching a drug dealer's car for cocaine before finding the tire hidden underneath the car and this tire had to be lowered by turning a bolt that was buried beneath the jack... and the jack was hiding underneath the carpeted trunk. If it wasn't for YouTube (I couldn't find the owner's manual) I would never have located any of these items.

Once I got the spare tire loosened from its hiding place and I found the jack and lug wrench, I proceeded to try to remove the lug nuts. I

So there I was

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don't know who tightened those lug nuts on this car, but it wasn't a human. I strained every muscle in my arms (which resemble pipe-cleaners) and those lug nuts would not budge. I sprayed copious amounts of Tim Hoel's favorite elixir (WD-40) onto each lug nut and I still could not move them.

In exasperation, I placed the lug wrench onto a lug nut and stood my six-foot frame carrying 190 pounds of blubber onto the lug wrench. No movement of the lug nut. In a fit of rage I started to jump up and down on the lug wrench while uttering some words that I have explictly deleted. The lug nuts began to turn. I repeated this procedure multiple times until I removed the flat tire and placed the spare onto the rim. I was bathed in sweat as I thought to myself, "Why didn't I call Triple A?"

After spending more than two hours on a 15-minute job, I rested and began researching tires on the inter-

net. I learned that the standard replacement rule is to change all four tires on an all-wheel drive vehicle because you should not drive with mismatched tires. According to the experts, the worn out tires rotate faster than the good one(s) which may cause serious mechanical damage. I called several dealers and tire specialists and was told the same story.

Now my wife had recently gotten her oil changed at a dealer and the mechanics at the dealer routinely inspect the car to make the car owner aware of any potential mechanical issues that might cause trouble in the near future, such as brakes, batteries, tires, etc. Cathy's car tires were rated "yellow" meaning they were currently OK to drive on, but that they would need to be replaced down-the-road.

Using this information and the fact that I needed to replace the tire with the bolt sticking out of it, I reluctantly bit-the-bullet and began call-

ing dealers and tire specialists to get the best price. I found a place in Champaign called "Tires Plus." They quoted me a price of \$860 for four middle-of-the-road-quality tires and I opted to buy these.

The next day I dropped off Cathy's car at Tires Plus and several hours later I received a phone call from Patrick, the general manager. Expecting the worst, I hesitantly answered the phone and Patrick told me he was able to remove the bolt from the damaged tire and re-

pair the flat. He inspected the other three tires and said that these tires still had half their tread life remaining. Patrick went on to say that if it was him, he wouldn't buy four new tires, but keep what I had and save \$860, but he would sell me the new tires if I wanted them badly enough.

After hearing this I had to stop my car and ask him to repeat what he just said. After Patrick repeated his news, I said, "Wait a minute. You could have kept quiet and sold me four new tires and I

wouldn't have known any better, but you chose to save a customer over \$800?"

Patrick replied, "Well, if I did that, I would not have been able to sleep at night." Patrick also replaced a brake light for me. The total cost of the tire repair, brake light and labor was \$37.

Today I learned a valuable lesson. I learned how to change a flat tire on a 2016 Kia Sorrento. I also learned (once again) that, for the most part, people are like Patrick. They are decent.

The cheap seats

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."

— Theodore Roosevelt

I'll admit that I only know of this quote after watching The Call to Courage on Netflix, a Brené Brown special that I highly recommend to anyone who is struggling to step into the "arena" of their own life.

It's not always easy to spot those cheap seat spectators. They can seem like they're everywhere and sometimes even fool themselves into thinking they're in the arena.

I've often said that the Navy ruined me for socializing in the real world. I'm beginning to realize that my view to the cheap seats is also obscured. In the military, everyone there raised their hands selflessly. While we all had reasons for enlisting, no one fully grasped that your life was on hold and your opinions, values, and free will were no longer yours. In a sense, there were very few

Margie's Mess

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cheap seats. We all, literally and figuratively, were in the same boat.

Perhaps this is why I gravitate toward a more formal administrative setting when picking the groups I join. I operate best when the rules are clear, the chain of command is defined, and those involved have the same expectations for other members. When there are no cheap seats. Everyone counts on each other to do the work, picking up the loose ends when needed.

The word to sum up the last two paragraphs is camaraderie. Textbook definition of camaraderie (also spelled comradery) is a mutual trust and friendship among people who spend a lot of time together. Personally, I would extend it to include a group of people who focus or commit to a specific task that mutually depends on each other's efforts.

Like sailors keeping a ship afloat and functional, we might not completely understand what each person's job is, but we appreciate that they do it and respect their sacrifice for it.

Now, I don't pretend to be a crime fighting superhero. Camaraderie can be found in almost any exclusive group,

from mom groups, special hobby clubs, to schoolteachers and police officers.

This is not to say that as a civilization we should not hold others accountable for providing the service we count on them to do. A complaint about the outcome of their actions is not the same as a criticism of the manner in which they successfully complete their job.

The takeaway is that whatever your group is, when the criticism starts rolling in, because it will, consider who is dishing it. Is this person someone who has fought this battle before? Is their hand one of the first to go up when tasks are being handed out? Has this person stepped up to say they would be willing to take over when you have exhausted your efforts?

Or is this person occupying a cheap seat? On the sidelines, with one reason after another on what holds them back.

Even when you fall short, or those moments when you completely slam into the brick wall of failure, the mere fact that you stepped up to the plate stifles any and all the jeers and boos.

You're either standing next to us in the arena or you're just noise.

- Joe Heller -



The last safe have for conversation

Let's talk about the weather. I never used to like talking about the weather and had little use for weather forecasts because I have, you know, a window.

Usually, you can look out the window and get a pretty good idea of what the weather is going to do. Is it cloudy? Is it windy? Are the leaves melting off the trees?

If you can't tell by looking, you can open the window for more information. My own daily forecast is usually about as accurate as the weatherman's.

There are only a couple of questions I need the weather to answer. Do I need a long-sleeve shirt today? Do I need a

jacket? Should I take an umbrella?

In the winter, do I need my regular coat or do I need to break out my parka? I usually carry my gloves in my pockets in the winter because you just never know.

As an adult, the weather is even less important to me because I'm not outside that much. The weather matters from my car to a building and again from the building to my car. My goals are pretty simple: don't get drenched and don't freeze to death.

As I've gotten older, the weather has become more of an interest to me. To clarify, it's not the weather per se that is of more interest. It's talking

about the weather. But don't confuse "of more interest" with "interesting." I still find the weather and talking about it to be just about the most boring thing out there next only to writing about the weather.

The observant reader might be wondering: Why is talking about the weather of more interest when you have so little interest in it?

Because it keeps me from talking about more important issues of the day, like abortion rights, mass shootings, political elections, war in Ukraine, social media manipulation, gas prices, the economy, etc.

The weather is safe. Unless it's a tornado or a hurricane or something. But I digress. Talk-

ing about the weather is safe.

You can have an opinion about the weather and nobody is going to argue with you unless you veer off into global warming. Ooh, boy. You don't want to go there.

Some people like warmer weather. Some prefer a cool

breeze. Some people actually like snow (including me). So everyone doesn't always agree with each other about the weather in general or even the weather on any given day. But we're all still allowed to have an opinion about the weather without getting into fisticuffs



Ramblin' Man

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or destroying lifelong relationships.

You can like beach weather and I'm OK with that. I can like the snow and you don't care. Nobody seems intent on changing anyone's weather perception.

So, let's talk about the weather. Maybe next week we can talk about food although that's not as safe. If you put cat-sup on a t-bone, you're just looking for a fight.

Better stick to the weather.

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