



## The Advisory Alliance 60-Second Email™

### ***Experience is Teaching, Now. February 26, 2009***

*In this month's 60-Second Email™, we add a missing piece of the developmental puzzle.*

In last month's issue, I cited the work of Lombardo and Eichinger in discussing the type of experiences that lead to significant personal development. These experiences have four qualities in common:

- 1) You know very little about the experience as you go into it.
- 2) You have to make a difference.
- 3) You feel a chance of significant failure.
- 4) You feel a tremendous amount of pressure.

I realized, however, that I omitted one other piece of the development puzzle, and I also remembered a related story:

I was driving from Montreal, Canada to Portland, Maine to visit a good friend. It was a late Friday autumn night, and I was driving through the twisting, turning, mountainous, two-lane Kancamagus Highway in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. As I approached the summit, instantly I was entombed in fog. Visibility was less than nil. All I saw was the hood of my car. Nothing more. Everything was gray. I had no color vision, and no sense of depth. It was unnerving.

And here was the question: Do I stop in order to avoid hitting the potential car or truck in front of me (and still get hit by a car or truck behind me) or do I pull over onto the soft shoulder (and still hit a vehicle that's also on the shoulder and/or get hit by a vehicle behind and/or accidentally roll down the side of the mountain)? I chose the latter.

With the car on the shoulder, I literally inched the car forward, always bracing myself for impact should I suddenly strike the car or truck in front. It was like waiting for the shark in "Jaws" to suddenly leap out of the mist, onto my hood, and into my car.



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Eventually the fog dissipated, I could see the pavement, and slowly I resumed my speed and my trip.

I thought of this incident, because it seemed to fit Lombardo and Eichinger's criteria:

- 1) I knew very little about this experience as I got into it. (I had experienced fog before, but not this type of total loss of visual cues.)
- 2) I had to make a difference. (I had to get out safely.)
- 3) I felt a chance of significant failure. (Indeed.)
- 4) I felt a tremendous amount of pressure. (An understatement.)

But I didn't learn from it because of those criteria. They just made it stressful. The two things that ultimately made it a "developmental" experience for me were:

- 1) I survived it (not an inconsequential factor).
- 2) I learned from it. I created a rule of thumb from it. (After that experience, I never traveled the "Kanc" when conditions were conducive for fog. Listening to weather reports tended to be just a bit helpful in that regard.) This is the missing piece of the development puzzle. For stressful, challenging events to be meaningful, and not just stressful, effective leaders and managers deliberately learn from them. They ask themselves: "What did I learn here?"

From the conversations and emails I've had with colleagues, friends, and clients, it feels like during these "foggy" economic times, many of us are going through experiences that easily fit the 4 criteria:

- Few of us have had experience with these types of economic challenges.
- We need to make a difference (in our jobs and with our families).
- Fear of failure is high.
- And so are stress and pressure levels.

One of the keys to "surviving" these times emotionally, psychologically, and professionally is challenging oneself to learn from them. What rules of thumb about your business, your job, your relationship, or yourself are you discovering based on the journey you've experienced during the past year and a half? What have you learned from the turmoil? Surely you have at least one rule of thumb based on your experiences to-date. What is it?



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At some point, the economic fog will lift, and a more normal journey will resume. Will you really benefit when it does? Remember the Buddhist proverb: "When the student is ready, the teacher will appear."

And if experience is the best teacher, during these economic times I think we can say class is in full session.

So what are you learning today?

Have a comment on using experience and rules of thumb to further your growth? Share your thoughts with other readers on our blog: <http://www.advisoryalliance.com/blog>

And you can access all of our 60-Second Emails (TM), including last month's issue, "Fear: Maybe not a Friend, but a Reliable Companion" via this link:  
<http://www.advisoryalliance.com/newsletter.php>

Best regards,

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