

I felt like Clark Griswold after one of his many miscues in the film “Vacation,” like when he plowed the family station wagon through a “Road Closed” sign, took the vehicle airborne and crash-landed it in the red dust of the Arizona desert.

In my case, however, I hadn't backed the packed-for-vacation family vehicle, a Dodge Caravan, out of the garage yet. I had tried that an hour before, but the van's battery was dead. So I drove our other car to the auto parts store, purchased a new battery for the van and brought it home.

“Honey, I'll have this hooked up in no time, and we'll be on our merry way,” I told my wife in my confident, no-problem tone.

My two boys, who couldn't wait to get going, cracked excited smiles. We were headed to Hershey Park, an amusement park in Pennsylvania. But it may as well have been Walley World, considering I was about to transform into the capricious Griswold.

In a hurry to get on the road and get to our destination, I was careless and rushed. I placed the battery in the slot under the van's hood and hooked the cables to the prongs. But then things went haywire. Sparks began flying like it was the Fourth of July. The van acted like it was possessed, with its horn blaring and windshield wipers turning so fast, I thought they were going to fly off their spindles. My wife and kids watched aghast, aware something had gone terribly wrong.

Me, too. But after a few seconds of turmoil, it dawned on me: I hooked up the battery cables backward — negative to positive and vice versa. Unfortunately, those few seconds were all it took to do some serious and costly damage to the van. In my haste to “install” the battery, I managed to blow out the van's alternator, not to mention several fuses. We wouldn't be driving *it* to Walley World . . . I mean, Hershey Park.

Realizing what I did and the damage I caused the van (and my wallet), I lost my composure. I began saying things, and loudly, I shouldn't have said in front of my 9- and 7-year-old boys, whose eyes widened and mouths dropped after hearing my invective.

Lessons Learned, The Hard Way

BY LARRY AYLWARD



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Since we couldn't drive the van, we packed into the smaller car for the trip. Everybody knew dad was peeved and didn't say much the first few hours of the drive. The time allowed me to reflect on my actions. I learned a few lessons.

I learned I must not be in such a hurry to get things done, especially when things require concentration. Sometimes, make that a lot of times, you have to stop and think about you're doing.

I learned I must strive to keep my composure when things don't go my way, especially when in front of impressionable ears and eyes. When I blew up that morning, I realized I was hardly the model father I strive to be.

I learned I must be humble, but not to the point of beating up myself. I felt like a complete imbecile over what happened. The problem was I told myself I was a complete imbecile, too, the next day and the day after that. I had trouble letting go of my mistake. But I realize now that we all make such faux pas.

Finally, I learned I must stop judging others when they make mistakes. I can still hear myself scolding my 7-year-old after he accidentally dropped his Nintendo DS on the kitchen floor last spring, and I had to spend \$50 to get it repaired. I now realize his was an innocent mistake, and he didn't need to hear my lecture about taking proper care of his stuff.

Why am I sharing all of this with you? Because we all find ourselves in these circumstances, at work and at play, and we must deal with them appropriately. I share my story with you to remind you how *not* to deal with them.

By the way, we had a wonderful vacation, especially considering the way it began. We had a wonderful time at Walley World . . . I mean, Hershey Park.

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