

Absorb the Speed Bumps of Your Day



A metaphor I've found helpful in my own life is that of a speed bump. Rather than labeling the issues that come up during a typical work day as problems, I think of them as speed bumps. An actual speed bump, as you know, is a low bump in a road designed to get your attention and slow you down. Depending on how you approach and deal with the bump, it can be a miserable, uncomfortable, even damaging experience, or it can simply be a temporary slow down--no big deal.

If you step on the gas, speed up, and tighten the wheel, for example, you'll hit the bump with a loud thump! Your car will be damaged, you'll make a great deal of noise, and you can even injure yourself. In addition, you'll add unnecessary wear and tear to your car, and you'll look foolish and obnoxious to other people. If, however, you approach the bump softly and wisely, you'll be over it in no time. You'll suffer no adverse effects, and your car will be completely unaffected. Let's face it. Either way, you're likely to get over the bump. How you (and your car) feel once you get over it, however, is an entirely different issue.

If you ski, or ride bikes, you already know how this works. If you tighten up your body, it's difficult to absorb the bump. Your form will be terrible and you may even fall. The bump will seem bigger than it really is.

Problems can be looked at in a similar light. You can be annoyed by them, think about how unfair and awful they are, complain about them and commiserate with others. You can remind yourself, over and over again, how difficult life is and how this problem is yet another justification for why you "have a right" to be upset! You can tighten up. Unfortunately, this is the way many people approach their problems.

When you think of your problems as speed bumps, however, they begin to look very different. You'll begin to expect a number of speed bumps to present themselves during a typical day. Like

riding a bike, bumps are simply a part of the experience. You can fight and resist, or you can relax and accept. As a problem shows up during your day, you can begin to say to yourself, "Ah, here's another one." Then, like the ski mogul or bump on your bike ride, you begin to relax into it, thereby absorbing the shock, making it seem less significant. Then you can calmly decide what action or decision is likely to get you over this hurdle in the most effective, graceful manner. Like skiing, the calmer and more relaxed you remain, the easier it is to maneuver.

Thinking of problems as speed bumps encourages you to say things like, "I wonder what the best way to get through this one might be?" There is a healthy element of detachment involved, where you're looking at the problem objectively rather than reactively, looking for the least path of resistance. In other words, you assume there is an answer; you just need to find out what it is. This is in sharp contrast to seeing concerns as problems, where it's tempting to think in

terms of emergencies.

If you think about your work life, you'll probably agree that in one way or another, you do manage to get through a vast majority of the problems you are confronted with. If you didn't, you probably wouldn't last long in whatever it is you are doing. That being the case, where is the logic in panicking and treating each problem like a major disaster?

My guess is that if you experiment with this one--simply thinking and labeling your problems as speed bumps instead of problems--you're going to be pleasantly surprised at how much more manageable your day is going to seem. After all, problems can be really tough, but almost anyone can maneuver over a speed bump.

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