



A Dark And Stormy Night

(or, how to thrive in this economy)

By

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It was a dark and stormy night.

I always wanted to start a story that way, and actually, it WAS a dark and stormy night. I was driving a compact car and dragging a covered trailer with about a ton of books and personal property in it.

My wife and I were on a four lane highway coming out of the mountains, headed steeply downhill to the valley floor. As I came out of the last set of mountains I could see the valley below lit by flashes of lightning.

I would have enjoyed the view, if we hadn't been slammed by a gust of wind that was pounding across the face of the mountains. The trailer started fishtailing wildly, whipping the car from side to side.

The highway was divided and there was a dropoff on each side, hundreds of feet down. I didn't want to lose control and arrive at the bottom of the mountains any sooner than we could get there by driving.

"We're in trouble," I told my wife.

"Can you fix it?" She asked.

"I don't know. Hang on."

I remembered my Dad telling me that when you were dragging a heavy load and it started fishtailing, you should speed up so that the trailer was directly behind you, and then apply the brakes. I knew my Dad had done a lot of driving in his life, so I followed his advice.

It was hard to get myself to do it. We were going downhill fast in the stormy dark and weaving wildly all over the highway. Believe me, the LAST thing I wanted to do was go faster.

I gulped, and put the pedal down to the floor. We got up to about 70 or 80 and the fishtailing smoothed out. I thought we were going to be fine until I saw the trailer slide past me on its metal side. It had broken a wheel, tipped over and snapped the trailer hitch, and was traveling faster than we were on the rain-slick highway. And it was going to drag us by the safety chain, which was attached to the frame of my car. Oops!

We pinwheeled across the highway, headed for the edge. I waited until the trailer was behind us and applied the brakes.

Now we were going backwards at about 60 miles per hour, facing uphill. I warned

my wife to brace herself for a sudden stop. We jerked to a halt when the trailer axle dug into the curb at the edge of the dropoff, and then we slammed backwards into the trailer.

"Get out, get out!" I yelled, fearing that someone coming downhill would plow into us. I had the headlights on but we were below a curve in the highway and facing into traffic. I ran uphill, laying out road flares to warn other drivers. Fortunately, it was late and traffic was light. We were very lucky.

Okay, here's the punch line and –

Why this story makes sense for you, in this economy.

A few hours after our accident, when our property had been gathered from the spill and the trailer and car had been towed, we were given a ride to a hotel by the Highway Patrol.

"You know, we've pulled lots of people out of that dropoff and they didn't do too well," the officer told us. "You were smart to put on the gas when you did."

"Huh?" I said. "I thought that it didn't work."

"Oh, it would have worked a lot better if your trailer hadn't broken off a wheel," he said. "But it turned out pretty good anyway. If you hadn't dragged your rig straight, it would have jackknifed into you, and you probably would have rolled off the highway. Lots of drivers in your situation panic and hit their brakes.

"Because it was straightened out before you used your brakes, you were able to let the trailer stop at the curb and then stop against it. Following your father's advice probably saved your lives."

I remember thinking about that officer's words as I enjoyed a hot shower that night. Here I was, safe and warm when I might have gone over the edge and been crushed at the bottom of the canyon instead. If I hadn't followed Dad's advice and faced my fear and taken control.

Hmmm. You know, it's kind of like our whole economy is spinning out of control right now, on a dark and stormy night. We have had some bad financial news in the last few months. And there are 24-hour news channels on TV repeating it until people start to freak out and believe that things are hopeless.

Actually, the worst effect of hard times comes from these sensational stories. They're repeated so much that lots of people overreact and create even more bad effects. Sales slow down, projects are delayed, jobs are eliminated and it's all you hear about for a while. Totally unjustified by reality. Fueled entirely by fear.

So this story is useful to you how?

Here's how -- YOU don't have to star in the "financial highway crash" stories that they're telling on the news.

In my highway story, my Dad's driving experience gave me a tactic that saved us, even though it was the opposite of my impulse.

When it comes to economic upset I've been here before. A drop in real estate values also triggered the Savings & Loan collapse in the 80s', and I was working in land development. I remember being told by a sales manager that hard times were full of opportunity.

"What you oughta be doing," he told me, "is to sell more and invest more in advertising, because this is JUST when all your competitors are running for their caves, thinking that no one will buy anything."

The truth is, SOME PEOPLE ARE ALWAYS BUYING. There are just fewer of them. But there will also be less competition if you hang in there.

Your customers will have fewer alternative choices, so you need to let them know you're confident and stable when others are cutting back and shutting down.

"Your competition is thinning itself out," he said. "Just work a little harder and smarter for a while, and when things turn around you'll be better off than you were before."

So I invite you to think about it. It might be a good idea to hit the gas and take control of things. You'll have more influence over events instead of being the helpless victim.

That way, chances are much better that you won't go over the edge.

Seeya,

Tom Hoobyar

Note: you'll find more "voice of experience" stories at my site:
www.streetsmartceo.com