

Taking A Wrong Turn

Submitted by Sarah Fitz-Claridge on 21 August, 2003 - 21:26

Alice Bachini

Pat made an illuminating comment recently, when he **said** (<http://tcsblog.blogspot.com/>); “I always like the comparison of a failure to find a common preference to the failure of taking the correct turn while driving somewhere. It is just that, a failure to figure out the ideal choice at the time.”

There are degrees of wrongness. Deliberately humiliating your child in public is one thing. Forgetting to pack them a second banana is (usually) not as bad. It’s much easier to remedy some kinds of error than others. Most places are fairly near to a banana shop, or at least a garage that sells alternative kinds of goodies. Whereas crossing the desert without a bottle of water could prove fatal.

Sometimes very wrong adult actions cause no coercion in kids at all. Other times, small mistakes lead to floods of tears. Sometimes floods of tears happen because of things parents can’t control and couldn’t reasonably have predicted. Immoral parental decisions and states of coercion in kids are different things, despite being connected.

We shouldn’t hurt our kids “to teach them”; anyway, that isn’t how learning happens. We don’t have to hurt them knowingly in order to communicate moral ideas. If we think our decisions might hurt others, we should look for better ways that respect and help them instead. But sometimes, with the best will in the world, we may do something which upsets someone by accident. If they start screaming and let us know we are standing on their foot, then that’s good. We can:

1. move away,
2. apologise,
3. find out what went wrong, and
4. learn something about the practicalities of giant-sized hobnail-boot-wearing management, such as, “Keep plenty of distance!”

It is terribly important to identify and learn about your mistakes. We all have weak areas and we should all want to improve in those areas, or at least figure out some ideas for working safely round them. I once had a boyfriend with bad breath. When I dropped a hint about it, he seemed pained and insulted. Did he do anything about his breath? No. As far as I know, he’s still single now. Small entrenchments can lead to big bad outcomes.

But there are lots of ways to solve problems. Maybe throwing away the hobnails would be preferable to learning how to walk safely in them, now you found out what’s really involved? The experiment was still useful. You got some foot-wear information that may be applicable elsewhere.

Mistakes are useful. Expect to make them, and if you don't seem to be making them, look more closely and ask your friends where they are. Nobody is perfect: if you're not doing anything sub-perfectly, you're either deluded or not seeking enough criticism. If your job is parenting, some of your mistakes may lead to your kids experiencing states of coercion. Keep helping them, work out what went wrong, learn, and things will always be improving.

Wrong turns can be made good. When you get back onto the direct route, you've gained knowledge of how to stay there better in future as well as knowledge about how to get back, what's off-route and why you strayed. You know more about the world than you set out to learn. And if you unexpectedly passed a roadside ice-lolly stall, all the better. Just don't start doing it on purpose: there's a difference between making mistakes and widening your explorations without the consent of everyone else in the car. And always read the road-signs.

[to post comments](#)

Comments

Link

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 22 August, 2003 - 09:29

By the way, the link to Pat's comment is:

http://tcsblog.blogspot.com/2003_08_01_tcsblog_archive.html#106070086036...
(http://tcsblog.blogspot.com/2003_08_01_tcsblog_archive.html#106070086036984146)

If it doesn't work (being Blogspot),

scroll down to Tuesday August 12th, and click on comments for "We got linked!"

Alice

[to post comments](#)

Hmm...

Submitted by [Jorge \(not verified\)](http://www.allmoviestore.com) (http://www.allmoviestore.com) on 25 October, 2007 - 10:59

This story is really thought-provoking

[to post comments](#)

More articles

- [TCS and Karl Popper](#)
- [Help! Child Hates Eyepatch!](#)
- [Unschooling and Academic Education 1](#)
- [TCS Parenting Is Self-Improving](#)
- [What should I read first?](#)
- [Forget About It!](#)

- The 'Keeping One's Options Open' Mentality
- Are schools inherently coercive?