

Avoiding the Shortcuts

By Cindy Campbell

Ah, California. How I love you. The brilliant ocean sunsets, the majestic redwood forest, the colorful fields filled with poppies swaying in the gentle afternoon breeze. I could tell you great things—and there are many—about my lifelong love affair with the Golden State, but if I’m honest, there is one minor thing that I cannot grow to appreciate: freeway traffic (OK, not so minor).

It accounts for much of our daily frustration and is the topic of many casual conversations. Even NBC’s “Saturday Night Live” ran a recurring parody titled “The Californians.” One of the common themes portrayed California drivers as obsessed with beating freeway traffic by using side streets as shortcuts. NBC wasn’t entirely wrong with this depiction. On many occasions, I have been that Californian in search of the ultimate freeway shortcut.

That’s a long introduction to get to my cautionary advice: Beware of the shortcut.

Led Astray

Heading home from Southern California after a recent work trip, the automated female voice came from the mapping program on my mobile phone (let’s call her “Suri” to protect the innocent). Suri’s upbeat voice tells me that I can save 10 minutes by taking an alternate route. While I’m unfamiliar with the suggested path, saving a little time sure sounds good. Roughly 10 minutes into the new route, Suri offers me yet another time-saving alternative. Excited about saving even more time, I opt in to the second suggested shortcut. I was feeling a little giddy about all of the “extra time” I was racking up because,



after all, shortcuts rock. You know, until they don’t.

Thirty minutes into this awesome time-saving route, I found myself negotiating twists and turns, traversing a very steep, narrow, undivided, mountain road. I was too far in to turn back, and even if I could, there wasn’t enough room to pull over, much less turn the car around. For the next hour, only two motorcyclists passed me going the opposite direction. As I reached flatter terrain at the base of the mountain, the back road turned in to a thoroughfare for slow tractors. I made my way through a small farming community and back onto a rural highway. For five glorious minutes, it was smooth sailing, until the loud thump from hitting unavoidable road debris and the resulting flat tire. I will spare you the additional details of my driving adventure that day, but I will say that what was originally anticipated to be a dull four-hour drive turned into a very expensive eight-hour ordeal. So much for shortcuts.

Off Road

Have you ever cut corners to save yourself a little time at work? Perhaps you’ve been enticed by the promise of an easier path when faced with a tedious task. Do you take shortcuts as a quick fix to an

issue or in the interest of expediency? When we take the time to thoughtfully consider how to streamline or improve a process, we increase the likelihood of enhancement without sacrificing quality. While shortcuts frequently save us time, they often cost us more in the long run. It may cost us in extra time spent or additional money when we’re forced to

backtrack and correct a new set of problems created by the shortcut. Skipping the step of due diligence can be costly. The initial temptation of an easier path may cause us to sacrifice quality. We ultimately give up more than we gain.

As professionals, our reputations are affected, positively or negatively, by the choices we make. When someone consistently takes shortcuts in his or her work, chances are good that the quality of the work product suffers and in turn negatively affects the person’s reputation.

As I sat that afternoon at the auto repair shop, I had plenty of time to reflect on the poor choices I’d made about shortcuts that day. (I’m also carrying some deep resentment toward Suri.) 



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