

True bearings

I was coming out of a grocery store one evening about dusk. It was an unfamiliar store – I was in a slightly familiar town. I got in the car, got on the freeway, and headed south. Imagine my surprise when I looked in the rear view mirror and saw the moon rising from due north!

Of course, in reality, the moon was rising in the east, and I was heading due west – it just “felt” like south to me. A mile or so later, the road curved, and I was heading west – I knew it was west; I had a sign to refer to – and so it was.

What’s the point of this story? It’s to point out that even when we **think** we know where we’re going, sometimes, the twists and turns of the path we’re on distract us, confuse us, and turn us around.

If you’ve ever had setbacks in your life, you might have been put on a false course – without even knowing about it. You may now be blindly setting course toward a goal that you can’t reach from the path you’re now on.

That’s why sometimes in our lives, it’s important to realign ourselves with some sort of standard – the same way as I realigned my mental directional bearing with a known “actual west” standard.

It’s obvious how we do this if we’re traveling – we pull out a compass, or a map, or a GPS receiver – but in our lives, what kind of standard do we use to realign ourselves – and why do we need to?

I was speaking of setbacks just a couple of paragraphs ago – as we go through the inevitable changes in our lives, sometimes, we make decisions based on pain and the avoidance of pain – we usually choose to avoid things that will cause us heartbreak, struggle, or trouble. It’s understandable why we do these things – heaven knows, I have done it a lot.

But choosing those roundabout paths can divert us from our original course. And often, we never return to that path – at least without a little bit of coaxing.

And let’s not forget that marvelous Robert Frost quote: “The best way out is always through.”

If we were to compare it to driving – as I often like to do, because it’s such a universal analogy – we’ve hit a bad spot, taken a detour, and never gotten back on the main road.

Sure, sometimes, the detours are more interesting – but if we’re trying to head to a preplanned destination, the detour isn’t likely to get us there. What do we have to do? Of course, we have to find a path to a road that will get us to our destination.

It’s funny how this concept is so simple to understand in driving, but so difficult for us to understand in life.

I don’t know about you, but I’ve let myself get thrown off course more than one time in my life – and finding the path to my destination isn’t always easy.

I was lost one time in a Western city, and found myself at the intersection of “Lois Lane” and “Della Street.” It was an odd sort of feeling (Lois Lane was from the Superman comic books, while Della Street was Perry Mason’s secretary), and I appreciated the experience, particularly where they later renamed “Della Street” after Barbara Hale, instead. But finding myself at that intersection only confused me more. I was lost, and wound up retracing my path until I found a road that would take me back to my starting point.

My little detour cost me time – I kept going deeper and deeper into the maze, thinking I could find my way out – and it took time to retreat and regroup. But retreat and regroup I did.

In our lives, we sometimes make those mistakes – and we need to regroup.

In these cases, it becomes important for us to have that standard to hold up – in other words, it becomes incredibly important for us to have a clear and solid vision of where we want to wind up, and how to get there.

A month or so ago, I found myself in San Jose, California with some time to spare. I can find my way around much of San Jose, but I felt I needed to internalize those streets, until I understood what road went where, and why.

So, I set off -- I knew where I wanted to go, and each time I took an errant road, I found my way back to a road I knew – and then went on from there. I mentally mapped the areas I was seeking to understand – and then went back to my computer and looked it up on a real map, to cement the paths further. In other words, I was learning the many paths to get back to my destination – I was internalizing it, helping my vision to clear up and gain understanding.

In our lives, we must have clear goals in order to succeed at achieving those goals. We must cement those goals in our minds, the same way as we would set our travel destinations. Sometimes, it takes a bit of mental mapping, to find out where we are, and how we can get back on track.

Then, when we get lost or distracted, as we inevitably do, or when the challenges of our life cause us to lose track of the direction we should be moving, we can use that standard – the vivid vision of our destination or goal – as a standard to right ourselves, and head off again on the right path.

I've been writing about this a lot lately, and for two main reasons. First and foremost (to me) I need to keep these important steps more in the forefront of my own mind – I need to remember these rules, just the same as each of us do.

Secondly, however, is the fact that the world seems to be temporarily heading into a bit of an economic downturn. This downturn can mean great opportunities for those of us who can keep our wits about us – and can also mean significant challenges for many of us who will be impacted by it in a negative way.

It's important in such a downturn for us to not be unduly "detoured." We might find our life takes a bit of a detour now and again – but those detours, whether they be scenic or bumpy, should be used only to take us back to our main destination – the goals we set and seek to reach.

When we keep a standard to refer to – either the example of someone else who we wish to emulate, or a definite, concrete goal to hold onto – we allow ourselves to more easily find out which way we're going – and realize that the moon never rises in due north – except if we're at the South Pole.

By knowing where we're going, and choosing to refer back to that goal, that standard, that destination, we are likely to reach our destination, no matter what has happened to us, or what detour we've taken along the way.

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