

When to Stop (Whoa!)

Knowing when to stop/quit is critical; otherwise the experience can be less than satisfactory.

Picture this: You attend a party. There is lots of music, dancing, food and drink. As more and more guests arrive and settle in, the mood of the party livens up. They all get into the food, drink and dancing plus engage in some high-pitched conversation over the ever-increasing din and merriment. (Because the DJ has to increase the volume of the music to overcome the increasing din of the conversation. Sort of like inflation and wages or a shouting argument).

More food appears and the booze seems to be endless and abundant quantities of both are consumed.

At some stage the party reaches a 'peak'. Most if not all the partygoers are having a really good time. If you or I were at the party, this point in the proceedings would/could be a really good time to leave. To quit. But how many of us would do that? There is still more food, booze, dancing and people to catch up with. Without realizing it, after the party 'peaks' there is one way to go. Down.

Things start to go off the rails. The good time begins to decline. The first negative emotional outburst is expressed and witnessed by bemused onlookers. Someone drops a full glass of red on the carpet. A plate of food is spilt and a halfhearted attempt is made to clean it up with the remnants on the floor being ground in and spread throughout the venue. Someone makes a pass at someone they shouldn't have. The first chuckup is made in the toilet. And that's only the beginning of the decline of the party. I could go on but I hope you get my drift. Leaving at the peak of the party would have been a good option unless one needs to see adults behaving badly.

I witnessed a similar scenario the other day in a dressage arena. I came upon the scene just prior to the peak. The horse was moving freely, willingly and from a dressage point of view, beautifully. He was young and willing. His human was observing this from the ground as another competent dressage rider rode this beautiful young horse through some nice movements and paces. It peaked. The ground-based observer was ecstatic, hardly able to contain herself witnessing what this horse and rider were displaying. I felt 'now' would be a great time to quit and mumbled something about 'when is it a good time to reward a horse?'

Or to put it another way, this horse was like a tube of toothpaste. When full, the toothpaste flows freely and with little effort, just like the horse's willingness, ability and energy. But all of these are finite resources. As they get used up, the effort required to extract the desired amount has to increase. You know, things like folding the toothpaste tube or rolling it. More and more effort is needed to get the last bit out of the tube. One really has to push very hard with a thumb or finger right up into the outlet to get that 'last' bit out of the tube. Finally we give up, and dump the empty tube in the bin (or stable, and don't get me started on that!) Toothpaste is put on the shopping list. The good thing though about horses is that they are a self-renewing resource. The bad thing is that they remember being squeezed for that last bit of performance.

Anyway, my comment about quitting was lost in the joy of the observer's mood. Things went to pot from that point onwards. The horse up to this stage was complying really well with the requests being asked of him. 'Is this what you want?' 'Am I doing OK Boss?' 'I am trying to be really good'. The only reward

he got was to be asked for more. 'Hey, I would like a break!' 'Not just yet we have more to do' 'But I just gave you the best I had'. 'We can do some more other stuff'. 'Bugger you mate, obviously I didn't do the right thing because I wasn't given a break or a reward so I'll try something else, I'll start tossing my head and see if that makes you happy. No. I'll do a couple of pigroots. Nope that didn't work either. Hey get out of my mouth you brute handed human or I'll really resist. Ouch that hurt! You bastard. Thanks for nothing!'

So the party ended on a sour note. It went for way too long and there was just too much everything apart from rest, reward and comfort.

Knowing when to quit is a real art.

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