

Afterthoughts Are Humbling

By Hap Hansen

From beginning to end, life is full of afterthoughts and embarrassments. It started for me when I was five years old and at my first day of grade school. Meeting a new friend for the first time, I got red in the face, stuttered and my palms began to perspire. The same thing can happen to me today, except I usually don't stutter, my face is only tinged with red and I can stick my sweaty palms in my pocket. Not a week goes by that something doesn't cause me some afterthought and/or embarrassment.

Perhaps there is a great scheme rising over my head like a dark cloud to make sure I remain humble and not get too cocky when things seem to be going so well. Embarrassments and afterthoughts also have a tendency to compound. Some time ago, while following twelve cars on the highway, I spotted at least a mile of clear passing opportunity. I gunned the engine and passed eleven of those cars quickly. The twelfth car was a patrolman, driving the speed limit! Cost me seventy-eight bucks in fines, three points on my driver's license and three years' worth of higher car insurance premiums. And that's only part of the compounding effect. Later in the same day, I cut off a slow-moving driver and slid my car into the last parking space in front of a store. The parking space had a prominent sign displayed: Handicapped Parking Only. Backing out of the space slowly, I noticed the driver of the car I had cut off, patiently waiting. He pulled his car into the now vacant parking space. His car also had a sign prominently displayed. Handicapped. He smiled. I smiled, red-faced.

Compounding embarrassments and afterthoughts. Nasty stuff! Many of those moments happen at the most inopportune times. Like applauding musicians during a lull in the concert but before they are really finished playing that song! Like an inadvertent 'burp' that rises out of an onion-laden stomach, right in the face of your date and she was in the process of giving you a kiss! Like introducing yourself to a sales prospect with a big smile and spinach from your luncheon salad is draped unceremoniously over your front teeth. Like insisting on opening the celebratory champagne and the cork explodes out of the bottle and through your host's inherited and priceless chandelier. I wish I could forget that afterthought!

Group embarrassments also happen. Like on an elevator, when no one speaks. Everyone stands in awkward silence, staring either at the floor or at the floor indicator lights as they change slowly during the elevator's rise.

It doesn't matter whether it's a single afterthought or embarrassment or a group of them. They are all humbling. And probably necessary from time to time, just to keep us from getting too full of ourselves.