

Expectations and Embarrassments

By Hap Hansen

From beginning to end, life is full of embarrassments and expectations. It started for me when I began my first day of school at age five. Meeting a new girl for the first time, my expectations were great, but then I got red in the face, I 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 pockets, even though I expected more.

Not a week goes by without some incident arising which causes me some 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 also have a tendency to compound. The other day, while following 12 slow-moving cars on the highway, I spotted at least a mile of clear passing opportunity. With good expectations, I gunned the engine and passed 11 of those cars quickly. The 12th car was a patrolman. Cost me 78 bucks. Three points on my driver's license. And three years' worth of higher car insurance premiums. And that's only part of the compounding expectations effect. Later that same day, I cut off a slow-moving driver and slid my car into the last parking place in front of a store. The parking place 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 and expectantly waiting. He pulled his car into the now vacated space. His car also had a sign prominently displayed. Handicapped. He smiled. I smiled, red-faced. Compounding embarrassments. Nasty stuff!

Many embarrassing moments happen at the most inopportune times. Like applauding musicians during a lull in the concert, but before they are really finished playing. Like an unexpected but inadvertent burp that arises out of an onion-laden stomach, right into the face of the boss! And he was in the process of discussing a raise! Like introducing yourself to a sales prospect with a big smile, and unexpected 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 up through your host's inherited and priceless crystal chandelier. Did not expect that!

Group expectations and embarrassments also happen. Like on an elevator, where no one is expected to speak. Everyone stands in awkward silence, staring either at the floor or at the floor indicator lights as they slowly change during the elevator's rise.

It doesn't matter whether it's a single embarrassment, or a group expectation; they can all be humbling and probably necessary from time to time.