

OPINION

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Completing an off-the-wall paint job

Last year at this time I was giving my new digs a brand new paint job. I never actually finished.

I did run out of paint, if that counts for anything. Though I must admit that I never did run out of wall, or ceiling, or door, or edge work.

Now, it's possible to argue that I didn't stop for anything more than a rest, something in the range of 10 months; okay, an extended rest, but a rest none-the-less.

Hey, painting is tough work, and I was afraid that the onslaught of warm weather would cause problems with fumes and stuff. Yeah.

I first noticed that I'd never finished the job when I realized the place needed a few touch-ups.

So now it's out to the hardware store for a little paint, over to the psychologist for a little motivation and away we go.

Maybe while I'm at it I'll get around to hanging those closet doors I took down last year in anticipation of actually applying paint to them.

Knowing my luck like I do, I'll arrive at the hardware store to find that the world's largest paint manufacturer has discontinued Flat White Latex No. 1, once the world's most popular paint, now, not even a novelty item.

This reaffirms my position as an unpaid member of the Murphy's Law quality control department. Strangely, the existence of the fact that I've never seen a flaw in the application of the Murphy's Law product line, would seem to suggest that the law doesn't actually exist. Of course if nothing can go inherently wrong within a given system then of course Murphy's Law is not applicable.

The upshot being that Murphy's Law is the perfect statement of reality. Its principles satisfy not only observable phenomenon, but work within the strictures of itself. Even gravity has difficulty with that one.

I've often thought that the application of gravity to painting would be an efficient method, from a labour perspective, of covering a specific wall surface. You ready a number of painters, based upon wall surface area, then, fling the prepared paint near the top of the surface to be covered. As the paint runs down the wall strategically situated painters brush it in variously necessary directions.

Known as the Splash and Dash system it is by necessity quick, messy in the hands of an amateur and paint intensive. And because the system will either work, or not work, it means I'll never have to paint again, and in that way it cannot fail from its purpose.

Now all I have to do is search high and low, far and wide for the elusive Flat White Latex No. 1. Perhaps in some jerkwater town that time forgot, cans of this miracle tone will be stacked neatly below dripping cans of Murphy's Oil Soap.

Upon opening the paint tins oil soap will mingle its chemistry with the last few gallons of white paint left on the planet to produce a paint that cleans itself from the surface as soon as you apply it.

Now that would be just my luck — a real off-the-wall paint-job.

REAUME WITH A VIEW

with BRAD REAUME



A recipe for securing marital bliss

How do you handle the stresses and strains that are inevitable in a marriage?

There are conflicts in every marriage, about who should clean what, how to discipline children, what to spend your hard-earned money on, or perhaps you don't talk to your spouse enough, never tell you're "deeper" thoughts and feelings, or you're not sociable enough at parties.

Happily married people have these conflicts too, yet they remain happy. How? The difference between "distressed" and "nondistressed" marriages seems in part due to the kinds of strategies you use to handle these conflicts.

Many different styles or coping strategies are commonly used such as:

- * "Seeking advice" — asking the advice of friends, parents or relatives about how to get along in a marriage;
- * "Emotional discharge" — letting off steam by yelling, shouting, slamming doors, etc;
- * "Positive comparison" — you compare your marriage to other couples who are in worse shape (therein ignoring or denying your own problems);
- * "Negotiation" — trying to find a fair compromise through discussion and give-and-take;
- * "Resignation" — keep your hurt feelings to yourself; give up on the idea of trying to change things;
- * "Selective Ignoring" — try to ignore any difficulties and think only about the good things.

Which of these are effective and reduce stress? Which ones are ineffective or increase stress?

A recent study in the Journal of Marital and Family Therapy tried to find out which methods of coping are used in distressed as opposed to nondistressed marriages. Distressed couples were those that rated their marriage lower than average, reported more conflicts



PSYCHOLOGY TODAY

with DR. ARNOLD RINCOVER

than average, expressed more unhappiness, and reported more stress.

In general, the results showed that distressed couples were less confident about solving marriage problems, they tended to avoid or ignore marital problems as much as possible, and they had relatively poor strategies for solving their problems when they did have to deal with them.

Specifically, three strategies differentiated distressed from nondistressed couples — negotiation, positive comparisons, and resignation. No clear differences were found in terms of selective ignoring, emotional discharge or seeking advice.

Interestingly, optimistic comparisons and negotiation were both associated with lower marital distress, while resignation was associated with increased distress. Yet, optimistic comparisons would seem to include an element of denial or ignoring the problem — you may feel better by finding other couples who are worse off, but you don't really solve your problems. Or do you? Perhaps it allows people to rethink the situation, deciding it isn't really a problem at all, or it isn't important in the bigger scheme of things (or compared to other people).

The task at hand is to learn new, effective skills — communication training, negotiation skills, social skills — that may help you to solve those problems and improve the relationship.

Performing on the road with my ventriloquist sister

Just days before last Christmas, I hit the road for a short tour. What me, a performer? Forget it. Carry on reading.

My one and only sister who lives in Montreal is a ventriloquist. Through circumstances we won't bother getting into here, an agent signed her up for a weekend of three shows in western Ontario.

My sister, an oddity, no doubt, because she neither owns a car nor knows how to drive one, recruited my chauffeuring services for those days. How could I refuse my favourite sister?

We left home (mine not hers) early Saturday morning in search of her first gig in a village community hall that welcomed us with a crowded, ice-covered parking lot. (We chauffeurs have a lot of worries.) Burdened with puppets and props, we entered a roomful of strangers. My throat was drying up and butterflies fluttered in my stomach. And I wasn't even the one destined for centre stage.



ON THE HOMEFRONT

with ESTHER CALDWELL

It's at this point that I started to chalk up the reasons why I would never perform. Firstly, large numbers of people (Any more than two at one time) terrify me, especially when I don't know them. It is difficult enough for me to mingle, let alone stand out in the crowd. My sister, however, confidently burst upon the scene and located her contact person.

A performer has to be adaptable to survive. I would have been too picky to settle for the long, skinny room that was presented to my ventriloquist sister as the show room. She dumped her gear on a small platform already

crowded with an old upright piano, a Christmas tree and a mountain of presents. She dragged over a long table and positioned it in front of the platform.

Since I was unfamiliar with her set-up routine (and I was, after all, only the chauffeur), I kept out of her way, serving as bodyguard for the three puppets that curious children were eager to touch.

It must be difficult for a performer to precede the BIG ACT. Santa Claus, of course, was due to arrive and hand out the presents as soon as my sister wrapped up her show.

Another reason for not performing. I like to get what I ask for. In her contract, my sister had requested a microphone that she could attach to her jacket. Instead, she ended up with a floor microphone that limited her mobility. I would have dissolved in tears, but she soldiered on. At a later show, no microphone was available. Just how far was she expected to throw her voice?

That forty-minute show took a lot of me, especially at the conclusion when I tried to maneuver my large van out of the parking lot where late arrivals (probably the jolly, old man himself) had sandwiched me in.

We had a night to recuperate before heading off to our next destination the following afternoon. Our first gathering at a curling club consisted of a group of bored, exhausted employees who couldn't wait to leave the company Christmas party for their afternoon siesta. The children were equally sombre.

The final show of the day was a three-ring circus. How the small children sitting on the floor at the front of the large auditorium were expected to focus on the puppets when adults were milling about moving furniture, carrying on loud conversations, and passing out hot dogs, candies and pop was beyond me. Adults should be banned from these performances.

For my sister, it was all in a day's work. She's welcome to it. I'll stick to chauffeuring.