

Murphy Was An Optimist

The Benefits of Risk Management and Planning

Edward Murphy was a major in the US air force in the 1940s. His particular gig was developmental engineering testing experimental designs. As you can imagine the outcome of many of these experiments was unknown and given military applications the consequences of something going wrong could be catastrophic. History is a little hazy on the exact phrase that Murphy coined but it's generally agreed to be "If anything can go wrong it will". It's also thought that Murphy added "at the worst possible time", presumably after a particularly unexpected turn of events.

In any event Murphy was the last thing on my mind when I recently decided to take my newly acquired dirt bike trailer, said bike and roof top tent on a 2 day shakedown mission. I chose Kenilworth in the Noosa hinterland. Like many small communities the town has seen an influx of day trippers, campers and tourists as Aussies rediscover country living. The show society runs the camp ground, complete with powered sites and an amenities block.

My plan was to set up camp and do a couple of days trail bike riding in the adjacent forestry. The area is renowned for challenging tracks and spectacular vistas. What could possibly go wrong. It's true there was a severe weather warning current and ominous clouds overhead but who trusts forecasts anyway. It is also true that the managing director declined my invitation to take part in the adventure. The romantic prospects presented by a roof top tent offered little appeal and she trusts the Bom more than I. Given the effort I had gone to affixing a "if its rockin', don't bother knockin'" sticker I set off somewhat deflated, so to speak. Upon arriving at the camp ground I was greeted by a volunteer who seemed surprised that I didn't have a reservation. After some discussion regarding the merits of booking in advance it became clear that there were plenty of sites available and I was directed accordingly. Now, I don't know how many of you have any experience with roof top tents but let's be clear, the marketing that suggests the set up is all plain sailing is just plain misleading. In any event I got the thing about half erected (story of my life) when my new friend the volunteer saw fit to advise me that I was on the wrong site. While the notion of a specific position in an empty paddock seemed odd my friend was not for turning. As luck would have it a fellow camper gave me a hand and we soon had the trailer and attached penthouse repositioned.

At this stage a bit of mild precipitation ensued albeit the sun continued to shine. I unloaded the bike and headed into the forestry. The plan was to ride in areas I knew and hopefully not crash and become trapped under the thing in the middle of nowhere. As tends to be the way I ended up a fair way further than planned, at which stage the proverbial bottom fell out of the sky. The tracks turned to mud and it got bloody cold. I'm not sure what's worse, being drenched or trying to ride at a speed that manages the twin challenges of impending hypothermia and the sting of heavy rain.

Happily, I made it back to camp although it soon became clear that my awning provided a less than weather proof cover for chairs and cooking gear. No matter, a hot shower and a walk up to the pub for lunch. The Thai chicken curry sounds good and just what's needed when inflicted with severe cold. Now, I'm not blaming the chef. Maybe the events of the day had predisposed me to intestinal challenges. What I do know is that there are times when no matter how close the amenities block is, it's not close enough! Oh, and now it's raining heavily.



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Within a few hours things had settled down and I decided to crack a beer. Like minded campers joined in and despite the ongoing deluge and events of the day spirits were high. Of course, things were about to take a turn for the worse. The concept of the roof top tent involves a traditional tent like structure mounted many feet from the ground and accessed via a near vertical ladder. The climb in is a breeze while the climb out involves reversing out of a zippered door, finding an available ladder rung and carefully descending. This is all well and good in broad daylight with clear weather and a clear head. The whole process gets a bit more challenging in pitch darkest with rain falling, slippery ladder rungs and judgement impaired by the demon drink. Throw in an old blokes bladder and the risk of personal injury through numerous nocturnal ladder climbs rises accordingly.

I'd like to say I dodged that bullet but.....a twisted knee, bruised ankle and a range of cuts and abrasions stand testimony to a misjudged descent. Of course, at the time of the injuries a combination of alcohol and exhaustion effectively anesthetized the experience. Sadly, in the cold hard light of day the extent of my folly was clear to all. I'd simply forgotten Murphy and suffered the consequences. On the drive home with a wet half folded up roof tent flapping in the breeze I had cause to reflect on what went wrong. I reckon pretty much everything. The sad part is that a bit of preplanning could have saved me a lot of grief.

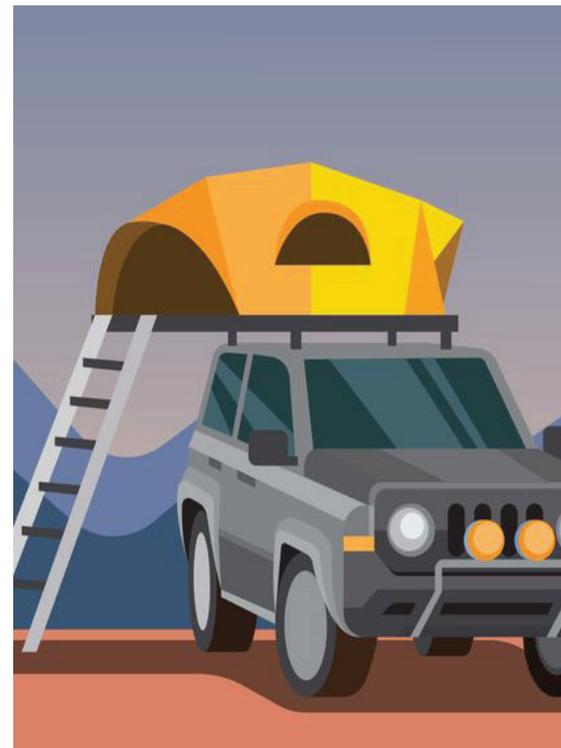
So, what have I learned and can any of this be applied to business? Let's reflect. I started by ignoring expert advice, in this case the BOM and the MD. Then, I failed to clearly understand and clarify an instruction, in this case the location of the camp site. Having set up I was determined to go for a ride. Having invested effort in getting to that point I ignored my own better judgement and failed to abort an activity that turned out to be dangerous.

Not sure what I learned from the Thai chicken curry, other than a riff on an old proverb....."keep your friends close and amenities closer".

The decision to mix booze with roof tent camping, in the rain, was just plain dumb. However, research suggests that human decision making is sometimes impaired and overly optimistic when the person involved has endured some sort of challenge from which they have emerged largely unscathed. That's my excuse and I'm sticking to it!

Disciples of the Murphy philosophy plan for the best but are ready for the worst. Sounds like a perfect mind set for today's world.

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