

Snowpocalypse: What I Learned through Making a Series of Bad Decisions

January 29, 2014 – First journal entry of the new year. I survived Atlanta's "Snowpocalypse" yesterday. I am thankful and full of joy this morning. Here's my story...

The National Weather Service issued a winter storm warning for the Atlanta Metro area on Monday, January 27. It forecasted one to two inches of snow the next day. Nothing freaks Atlantans out more than a good snowstorm. It can cripple the city. Why? The "city in a forest" has deep tree coverage and rolling hills. The above-ground powerlines become vulnerable to falling trees weighed down by snow; power can be lost for days. No one knows how to cope with the inclement weather. At the threat of snow, we all panic and rush to buy a loaf of bread, milk, and alcohol to endure the event, like it's the end of the world.

Our city is infamous for its horrendous traffic; it can take hours to get anywhere. The Atlanta Metro area has four major Interstates, I-75, I-85, I-20, and I-285, accommodating dense traffic volume. It also has miles and miles of two-lane, narrow, curvy roads that extend throughout the city. Since the Atlanta Metro area comprises multiple outlying suburbs, most people commute to work, accessing the interstates through the zigzagging artery roads. And, no one knows how to drive in wintry conditions – some would argue that Atlantans don't know how to drive at all.

Now, add winter weather to the commuting mix. When snow falls and roads become icy, travel conditions quickly deteriorate. The city government didn't have enough snowplows to clear significant thoroughfares, neglected to salt the streets

before the first snowflake, or encouraged residents to stay off the roads. Leadership was absent and didn't take the forecast seriously. The governor and mayor were attending a luncheon where the mayor was honored as the Associated Press's "Georgian of the Year." The mayor overconfidently tweeted, "Atlanta, we are ready for the snow." [1] We weren't.

I was overconfident too. I grew up in Colorado and didn't understand all of the fuss. I learned how to drive in all kinds of winter conditions; I wasn't worried if a bit of snow fell. While confident that the imminent storm was no personal threat, I sent a note to my team telling them to watch the weather and leave early if needed.

I drove to work as usual on Tuesday, an 18-mile, 60-minute commute. Most of the morning, I attended meetings, with my last one scheduled at Noon. I looked out the 16th-floor conference room window during the final meeting and saw giant snowflakes. The wind was picking up, and the storm intensified into what would ultimately become whiteout conditions. I looked down at the streets below and noticed that the intersections around the building were already jammed with traffic. My friend Paula called and encouraged me to leave the office. She warned me that any delay might mean I'd not make it home. I thought to myself, "Yeah, right. I'm from Colorado. I can handle this. Y'all panic. I got this." I decided to ignore Paula's advice, finish the meeting, and leave immediately afterward.

My Noon meeting unexpectedly lasted until 1:45 pm ... The weather conditions deteriorated even more, and traffic was snarled. From my vantage point on the 16th floor, I could see red tail lights for miles. I gathered my belongings to begin my trek home. I raced down to the parking garage and noticed a long line of cars waiting to exit. I asked the security guard what was going on, and he told me that drivers on the street weren't allowing cars to leave the garage. Traffic was at a standstill, gridlocked. Then came the bad news... It would take

90 minutes to get out of the garage and onto the side street.

"How long has the parking garage been backed up?" I asked.

"About 45 minutes," he said.

Ugh. If I'd ended the meeting at 1:00 pm and gotten in my car, I might have avoided the mess.

"Do you know why the traffic is so bad?" I asked.

The security guard said, "All of the businesses and schools closed simultaneously. Everyone is trying to get home or pick up their kids."

So, let me get this straight. A massive snowstorm and everyone downtown or in school were released at the same time? Are you kidding me? No wonder there was so much congestion. I turned around, returned to my office, and thought that the traffic would dissipate if I waited a little longer. Boy, was I wrong!

I sat in my office for the next three hours, trying to decide whether to spend the night in the office or risk driving home. I decided to go home and left at 4:45 pm. It was almost dark. Indeed the traffic would have cleared out by now.

I decided to get on I-75 because it was the most traveled path and thought it would be most clear vs. the side streets. It took an hour to go one mile. One of the most brilliant things I did before going further was to fill up my Toyota Camry's gas tank. The full tank gave me confidence that I wouldn't run out of gas as I made my way home. I packed water, a turkey sandwich, and vegetables. I also had an empty cup in case I needed to relieve myself. I knew it would take an ample supply of patience and prayer to make it home safely.

And it did. My journey home took 12 hours to drive 18 miles. I experienced complete standstill traffic in many spots and extremely icy conditions on hills. Driving was like playing "Frogger," an old video game where the object was to cross a

river avoiding traps, hazards, and enemies. I dodged stalled, wrecked, or abandoned cars working my way up I-75. Conditions were significantly adverse at Moore's Mill and West Paces Ferry exits. Many cars and trucks couldn't gain traction. It was difficult to start after a complete stop going uphill on ice. I almost got stuck outside of Moore's Mill switching lanes, and my tires wouldn't grip initially. Adrenaline kicked in. My heart started beating rapidly as I shifted gears and worked to advance my car. Thankfully, I quickly gained control and moved forward. Because of my traction issues, I made the hard choice not to aid other travelers. I watched people with good intentions get out of their vehicle to push another car or truck out of harm's way only to become immobilized themselves. I know that sounds cold, but I knew that if I stopped to help someone, I'd risk being stuck as well. My mission was to get home.

After traveling 10 miles in 11 hours, I crossed the Chattahoochee bridge into Cobb County. Traffic thinned. It was like making it through the gauntlet with a few lone survivors and one last test. The scene ahead of me looked like the end of the world with more stalled cars in the middle of the road. Dimly flashing hazard lights everywhere indicated a vehicle that was abandoned; drivers gave up, got out, and started walking. The ice grew thicker as the pavement disappeared. No traction was possible. All I could do was downshift to keep control of my speed and keep moving. I knew I may not get started again and would need to abandon my car if I stopped. Thankfully, I made it over the bridge, exited on Delk Road, and slowly crawled home. Unlike the city of Atlanta, Cobb County cleared and salted the roads. It took only 30 minutes to travel from the exit to my house.

Snowpocalypse was worse than you can imagine... See for yourself. Watch the CNN report, "Storm Paralyzes Atlanta, Causes Chaos": <https://youtu.be/Uwc2pidiJKo>

After the taxing ride, I arrived home at 4:30 am. This was all

caused by schools and businesses releasing their folks at the same time and during the start of the storm, no salt on the roads, and a lack of city government leadership. But I take personal responsibility for making a series of terrible decisions that led to my delay. I exercised awful judgment. Should I have left at Noon and heeded Paula's advice? Yes, but I ignored her call to action. Should I have left after the meeting at 1:45 pm and endured the parking garage delay? Yes, but I was impatient and further delayed. Should I have stayed the night at the AOC? Maybe, but I was overconfident that the ride home would be troublefree because I was an experienced winter condition driver. I take personal responsibility for these inept decisions. Not once did I pause to anticipate conditions or circumstances, let alone pray about what I should do.

Despite all my bad judgment, I am very thankful that I made it home and for those that prayed for my safety. It was a great exercise in patience, prayer, and trusting the Lord as I worked my way home. A great analogy for life. And this is just my story. There are countless others. I think about kids on school buses stuck on the road trying to get home. I remember all of the folks who wrecked or abandoned their cars... Or, people spending the night in places like Home Depot because they couldn't go any further.

As a side note, I did make one sound decision that night. Remember the cup I mentioned? I used it and learned that having an empty cup comes in handy in these types of situations, if you know what I mean ☐

Have you ever experienced a set of circumstances like I did? Have you made one wrong decision that led to another, and the outcome wasn't what you planned? If so, know that you can weather the challenges you face, learn to make better decisions, and experience positive results by applying the below principles:

Exercise Good Judgment. Make the right decisions using good judgment. What is judgment? It's "the ability to combine personal qualities with relevant knowledge and experience to form opinions and make decisions. It is what enables a sound choice in the absence of clear-cut, relevant data, or an obvious path." [2] It's the ability to anticipate, see parallels and patterns in data or circumstances that lead to positive decisions or outcomes. To develop good judgment, you'll need to become a good listener, seek diverse thoughts, and gain experience making decisions. The choices you make build upon each other; they compound over time. They also have a ripple effect, impacting those around you – your family, friends, company, community, school, and place of worship. Decision-making is so vital that I want to focus your attention on the simple process for a moment.

Did you know "various internet sources estimate that an adult makes about 35,000 remotely conscious decisions each day [in contrast, a child makes about 3,000]? This number may sound absurd, but in fact, we make 226 decisions each day on just food alone, according to researchers at Cornell University. As your level of responsibility increases, so does the smorgasbord of choices you are faced with:

what to eat

what to wear

what to purchase

what we believe

what jobs and career choices we will pursue

how we vote

who to spend our time with

who we will date and marry

what we say and how we say it

whether or not we would like to have children

what we will name our children

who our children spend their time with

what they will eat, etc.” [3]

The more complex the decision, the more thinking you’ll need to do. When faced with an important decision to make or a problem to solve, I recommend following the below steps:

1. **Define the decision to be made.** This may be the hardest part. Write down the decision to be made or a problem to be solved. Why is it essential to make or solve? What if you don’t decide or solve the problem? What if you delay? Is what you articulated the actual decision that needs to be made? How do you need to refine it? How will a sound decision benefit you and others?
2. **Identify alternatives.** Brainstorm multiple options, gather information, and engage those who need to be involved in decision-making or problem-solving. List the pros and cons of each alternative and predict possible outcomes. Ask questions like Which option will produce the most significant results at the lowest cost? How difficult will each choice be to implement? And, are the alternatives congruent to your or your key stakeholder’s values?
3. **Choose the best alternative.** Evaluate each option and choose the one that will produce the highest return or good. Understand the risks you are taking, be able to explain how you made the decision, and move forward. A sage once told me, “a wise man makes a decision and doesn’t look back.”
4. **Implement your choice.** Develop a plan, secure the

resources, gain support, and put your decision into action. Monitor its progress. Not all decisions result in positive outcomes. Some decisions are plain wrong. You'll make mistakes. If you fall off the horse, get back on. Have the courage to make changes when needed. On the flip side, some of your decisions will be sound and will produce positive results.

5. **Reflect on your choice and outcomes.** Post decision and implementation, take time to think about what happened. What worked? What didn't work? What can I do differently next time? How can I apply what I learned? As Peter Drucker said: "Follow effective action with quiet reflection. From the quiet reflection will come even more effective action."

Developing good judgment requires experience, reflection, and applied learning. If you follow the above decision-making process consistently, you will make more and more decisions that produce positive outcomes over time. You'll see patterns and parallels that you didn't see before. You'll develop the ability to anticipate results and synthesize information at a whole new level. And you'll make a positive difference in the world around you.

Be Tenacious. When I got in my car and started home, I realized that I had made a series of bad decisions and didn't exercise sound judgment. But I realized that I still needed to get home. I had to make good decisions that would enable my safe return. Even though I made mistakes, I didn't let them stop me. Thankfully, I didn't give up and stayed with it. Don't give up when you've made a wrong decision or experienced a negative outcome. Learn from your mistakes. Find the inner resolve, dogged persistence, and single-mindedness to keep moving forward. Meet your objective, complete the play, or finish the race. I am reminded of the following illustration about reaching the finish line despite adversity:

Hours behind the runner in front of him, the last marathoner finally entered the Olympic stadium. By that time, the drama of the day's events was almost over, and most of the spectators had gone home. This athlete's story, however, was still playing out.

Limping into the arena, the Tanzanian runner grimaced with every step, his knee bleeding and bandaged from an earlier fall. His ragged appearance immediately caught the attention of the remaining crowd, who cheered him on to the finish line.

Why did he stay in the race? What made him endure his injuries to the end? When asked these questions later, he replied, "My country did not send me 7,000 miles to start the race. They sent me 7,000 miles to finish it." [4]

Like the Tanzanian runner, set your mind to reach the finish line. Don't let a few bad decisions or mistakes get in the way. Learn from them, make better decisions, and you'll eventually experience positive results.

Pray. I've heard people say that the only thing they can do is pray. For the believer, praying is the first and most important thing you can do. Seek God for his protection, guidance, and wisdom. Ask him what to do, wait on him, and he will show you. Regarding my Snowpocalypse experience, I was way too confident in my winter condition driving experience. I took things into my own hands and experienced an unfortunate set of circumstances. But when I got on the road, I quickly surmised that it would take more than my driving skill and experience to get home. I turned to God and asked for his help. I had multiple conversations with him along the way—time to think and reflect. I also prayed for stranded passengers as I passed them. Looking back, I am convinced that the Lord protected me and enabled me to arrive home safely.

Snowpocalypse was a paralyzing weather event in the Atlanta Metro area. But the great thing about the city government is

that people learned from their mistakes. The next time snow and ice were forecasted, the city went into action mode. They announced school closures early, pre-treated the roads with over 3,000 lbs. of de-icing materials, and encouraged everyone to stay off the streets. Residents followed the leadership's direction, and Atlantans avoided the problems incurred during Snowpocalypse. Personally, I learned the need to make the right decisions, endure adverse conditions, and the power of prayer. If you learn to exercise good judgment, are tenacious in challenging circumstances, and don't give up and pray, you will experience positive results.

Do you want to learn more about making sound decisions and becoming a leader others will gladly follow? Visit my website, prestonpoore.com, today!

Cheers,

Preston

[1] The Washington Post, *Four lessons Georgia learned about snowstorms*, February 13, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/four-lessons-georgia-learned-about-snowstorms/2014/02/13/db1b2b5a-94cd-11e3-83b9-1f024193bb84_story.html

[2] Harvard Business Review, "The Elements of Good Judgment," Sir Andrew Likierman, <https://hbr.org/2020/01/the-elements-of-good-judgment>

[3] Roberts Wesleyan College, Leading Edge Journal, 35,000 Decisions: The Great Choices of Strategic Leaders, <https://go.roberts.edu/leadingedge/the-great-choices-of-strategic-leaders>

^[4] Swindoll, Charles R. Swindoll's Ultimate Book of Illustrations & Quotes. Nashville, TN, Thomas Nelson, 1998, p. 210.