



## Surviving the Impact Zone

I was thinking about surfing yesterday. In particular, the natural rhythm that is inherent in surfing. Waves come in sets (i.e. waves grouped together) followed by lulls (periods of calm). Life is like that sometimes; a flurry of activity followed by calmer times.

The excitement arrives with the sets. Sometimes you get a great ride; other times you experience a wipeout. Often wipeouts are no big deal; they're part of the surfing experience. However, if you wiped out on one of the early waves in a long set, you can end up caught in the place where all the remaining waves are about to break. The technical term for this place is the "impact zone."

As I thought about it, I realized that my life has contained periodic stays in the "impact zone." It's not a lot of fun, but it seems to be part of being alive just like wiping out is a part of the whole surfing experience. *How I handle my stay in life's impact zones defines me as a person.*

With surfing, there are two distinct categories of responses to being in this difficult place. The first is a situation where I can act to save myself or to create a change of position. Basically I assess the situation, make a decision, and swim like crazy. This works when my swimming will take me out of the impact zone or at least to a place where the impact will be less severe. [Big wave surfers say that a set wave "detonates" in the impact zone, just to give you an idea of the intensity level of this experience.]

Most of us do pretty well in life's impact zones when our actions will get us out of trouble. It's often a bit of a mad scramble, but we'll be OK in the end.

However, it's the second category that is the tough one. This is the situation where my actions will not save me or create a change. In fact, if I try to swim like crazy, I'll use up my reserves of air and strength ... and still be in the impact zone. Surfers who assess the situation incorrectly or exercise bad judgment often end up in the impact zone while being exhausted and out of breath. At its best, this is most unpleasant; at its worst, it can be fatal.

So, what to do when you are stuck in the impact zone and nothing you can do will change that situation? For me there are two clear steps:

1. **Gather my resources to me.** [Let's define "resources" as natural strengths and skills.] While contemplating surfing, I realized that I have three major resources. The first is air. If I've got the time, I suck in a big lungful (or several). Air is about to become precious and I gather as much as possible while I can. The second is my ability to relax in the water. If I'm struggling or tense while being pummeled, I'll use up my air very quickly. Relaxing gives me more time under the water and time is a key factor here. Finally, I gather my experience to me. Spending time in the impact zone is a part of surfing. I've done it before. After lots and lots of practice, I've learned what works and what doesn't, when to struggle to get another breath and when to wait. Especially in big surf, experience is invaluable.
2. **Endure it.** Basically I hang in there and survive it. No one, even the best surfer in the world, is graceful in the impact zone. As I'm getting clobbered and tumbled, I try to remember that, "This too shall pass." It may seem like it is taking forever, but a lull will come and the waves will stop pounding me.

Here's the key point: *What resources do you have that you can gather to you when you're in one of life's impact zones?* Just a tip from me: It will help if you contemplate this *before* you are in the impact zone. If you are looking up at one of life's set waves as it is about to detonate on your head, it's probably a bit late for contemplating or gathering.

*Can you cultivate the habit of drawing upon your resources?* This is a learned skill and, like any skill, it becomes more powerful and effective the more you practice using it.

A final paradox of being in the impact zone is that you are completely alone during this experience and, in a strange way, you've got lots of company. I've never met anyone who hasn't spent some time in life's impact zone. All of you have been there and know what it is like; it's part of the human condition. My hope for myself and for you is that you'll be more and more skilled during your stays in the impact zone.

Hope this helps. And remember, take a deeeep breath...

Doug

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