

How to Go Around or Over the Bumps in the Road



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This holiday season has been a hectic one for me. The eve of Thanksgiving Day, I drove a few hours to visit family in West Virginia, and I hit a buck on the highway going 70 MPH. Miraculously my boyfriend Alex, my dog Hugo and I were not hurt, but the hood of my beloved Mustang, Kitty, was crumpled like a soda can. The force of the impact shunted the hood and body backwards into my front tires, the passenger door was cracked, and wires and liquid were hissing out onto the asphalt like livid snakes. The nice man who towed my car remained hopeful, but said the car would probably be declared a loss. It was, and instead of indulging in holiday activities, I spent the weeks leading up to Christmas looking for a new car. Thankfully, my holiday ‘bump in the road’ taught me a few lessons about dealing with unpredictability.

- **Ask for and graciously accept help:** A handful of family members and friends jumped to my aid after the car accident and during the period leading up to the purchase of my new car. At the Center, we believe that effective risk management inspires confidence from your stakeholders, who will rally around you during difficult times if they can see that you have done the best work that you can possibly do given the circumstances. This belief holds true—both from my professional experience at the Center and my recent personal experience! Keep your key stakeholders informed about the progress you’re making to advance your mission, and when a crisis hits, you’ll find them at your doorstep offering to help in the most wonderful ways.
- **Don’t get stuck on one solution:** During my car search, I realized that there was more than one answer or car to fit my lifestyle, and once I achieved this state of flexibility and calmness, I was able to find a vehicle that met my needs and my budget. In the wake of unexpected, downside events, we guide our [clients](#) to explore myriad solutions and decisions so that they don’t feel pigeonholed on a single pathway to recovery or redemption. If you remain flexible and open to what comes your way, you’ll be more likely to make the right choices, and you might even find a silver lining hidden within the Big Bad.
- **Evaluate your decisions based on real data:** During difficult times, it feels impossible to slow down and understand on what’s going on around you, or take time to reflect on what you have done to manage the effects of the crisis. Though time is sparse, it’s critical to keep gathering information and evaluate your decisions and actions based on that information. Just like you might read consumer reviews, and have a used car checked out by a mechanic who doesn’t work for the seller, [crisis management](#) is iterative and warrants continual data collection and repositioning. Focus on discerning what is real available information versus what is hearsay or speculation.
- **Reflect on ripple effects:** When a crisis or difficult situation lands in your lap—sometimes quickly and with force—it’s tough to see the big picture or think about the long-term effects of decisions you make in the moment. Buying a car may seem like a relatively small decision compared to moving across the country, buying a home, or getting married. But any decision made during a time of uncertainty should

include consideration of long-term and potentially unintended consequences. This line of thinking is always necessary when facing difficult circumstances at your nonprofit; align every decision and action with your mission, and think about different ways your actions could play out over time.

- **Trust your gut:** In the end, I found that trusting my gut was the best way to navigate the car-buying process with my sense of humor intact. Gut instinct also plays a huge role in coping with unexpected, upsetting events at a nonprofit. You know the difference between what's right and what's wrong. Even if a decision is made privately, if you feel any guilt or shame, consider what your stakeholders might feel if your decision was unearthed somehow. Trust your gut, do the right thing, and communicate transparently with your stakeholders to continue shoring up their confidence in your leadership.

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