

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



902 I Was Happy the Day I got Fired

Have you ever been fired from a job? Was it because you broke a company rule? Did the rule seem strange? Did you end up glad you got fired? Let me talk a little story, next, on The Extra Point.

Many moons ago, I was a 20-year-old courier for a large Southern California company. It was the job I took when I left my first real boss and mentor, Big Ed.

It seemed like a good job. I was on the open road, driving hundreds of miles a day, meeting girls in all the offices, and making \$2.22 an hour. That was eight cents more than Ed could pay me, meaning fifteen bucks more per month.

It doesn't sound like much, does it? Gas was 29 cents a gallon, so that was worth three fill-ups. Nothing to sneeze at.

I was having fun, cranking up the radio and feeling free, delivering company mail 90 miles south of L.A. in the morning, and 90 miles north of L.A. in the afternoon. All my college classes were at night, and on the weekend I started dating one of the office girls I'd met along my route. Life was good.

Except for one thing. The Ford van I drove for the company had a governor on the engine that limited its speed to 55 miles per hour. Southern California freeways had a posted speed limit of 65, but that was more like a suggestion, because the real speed in those days was 75.

The couriers all had to drive in the slow lane, or we'd be blasted by horns all day long.

Worse than that, the company had installed a graphing device that kept a visual record of my daily speed, which management would check on. Although the van was limited to 55, my boss told me he wanted to see a constant speed of over 50, but less than 55.

He didn't want me to push the van to 55. Well, that was hard for me. My card routinely showed I was often at 55, because I was trying to stay in the flow of the slower freeway traffic. I'd get called in and scolded for it, and I wasn't the only one.

I told the boss that trying to make sure I was between 50 and 55 was a distraction, and my eyes were on the speedometer half the time — not the road. Most of the other drivers had the same problem, and complained.

Long story short, I had good comments on my performance from all the stations I delivered to. I was reliable, and never missed a day. When someone did miss, the boss would have to run his route, and he'd be in a foul mood by the time he finished. Reliable or not, good reviews or not, he kept coming back to the speed issue.

Every time he did, I slowed up, for a while, often as slow as 45 on the freeway. When I did that, I'd get back a few minutes late and clock out late, and he'd jump on me for that.

On a Friday afternoon, after getting back to the terminal and handing in my time card, the boss met me with the news that he was letting me go. I was actually okay with it, thanked him for what he taught me, and left. My mom always said to leave a good impression on the way out the door.

A week later, I started selling items to buyers in stores. I had never sold anything before, and my life changed forever. Some takeaways...

1. When you interview for a job, ask a lot of questions, including any special rules or requirements you'll have to follow. If I'd known about the speed issue and how this particular manager was going to deal with it, I might not have left the job with Ed.

(Con't.)

2. Ask what specific criteria your performance will be judged upon. I had good reviews, but the speed issue derailed me.

3. If you get fired from your job for some performance issue, it's not the end of the world. More than likely, it just means you weren't a good fit for the job, and the job wasn't a good fit for you. You will work again. It doesn't label you as undesirable.

4. Leave on good terms. Stay classy.

5. Losing a job gives you a unique opportunity to take a breath, look around, and consider your options. For some people, this is a turning point in their lives. It might work out that way, if it ever happens to you.

That's The Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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