

Losing more than a shoe stuck in the mud

by MARK PAVILONS

?Difficulties in life are intended to make us better, not bitter.? ? Dan Reeves

We all feel stuck at some point in our lives.

Sometimes, this feeling is a signal that we need to change, or react differently to the challenges we're facing.

It's been said the road to success and the road to failure are the same. It's how we construct these paths that matters most.

Maybe it was the dreary weather or muddy back yard. Maybe it was losing our oldest dog or my wife breaking her ankle. Maybe it's my PSA tests and scans. Maybe it's life in general.

I've been feeling off lately and while I pick myself up by the bootstraps every day, there are times when I'm not really here.

Like a teenager, I?hit ?snooze? more times than?I should, believing the day can wait just a little bit longer.

You can try reaching me, but I'm likely decades away in the past, thinking about this and that.

I'm in one of those giant inflatable ?hamster? balls for humans, scratching my way to move and get ahead. My face hits the side of the smelly vinyl wall and my feet end up over my head. It's worse than being stuck in the mud.

I start to panic, breathing warm, unfriendly air and realize I'm all alone being tossed like a salad.

Well, not really. I'm with the many faces of Mark, but they don't offer a lot of comfort because they're constantly bickering amongst themselves. There are Id, Ego and Superego, too, in the mix, but they're not much help. Too conflicted, I?gather.

The hamsters may enjoy this kind of activity and for them it's freedom. I do not, and for me it's stifling. People stop, point and laugh at my predicament. You'd think somebody would stop and help.

You feel like you're stuck and can't get out or move forward.

Our ancestors (forefathers) in the pre- and post-industrial era were used to the drudgery of the day, where the only way out and up was breeding and family ties.

I'm bogged down by thoughts of cancer, coupled with my repetitive motion carpal tunnel syndrome. When it flares, I am reminded of my mortality and yes, frailties.

But it's been said that ?feeling stuck is an invitation to grow; don't resist it, embrace it.?

Okay, I'm surrounded by it, so what do I do now?

I?explore all avenues, lean on shoulders and shed tears in silence. Most don't bear any edible fruit at all.

I remember my dad's dying words when he told me to look after my beautiful family.

I don't know just how successful I've been. There are physical measurements of relative security ? a home, a solid nurturing

environment, steady job. But we're by no means wealthy and I feel somewhat deflated, demoralized, by my lack of success.

Sure, being "successful" brings a multitude of definitions and different meanings among our species. Most of us will agree that success has nothing to do with financial wealth, but rather riches in terms of love, family, blessings and health. Being successful means winning the race, or least maintaining your pace for a lap or two.

It means a certain amount of peace.

Yet, bouncing around in my self-made prison, the goodness is shed, falling away and clinging to the plastic surfaces. These mental bars are just as strong as steel ones.

For years, I didn't even realize I was being held hostage, because the captor was me. I was the one doing this.

I didn't pay admission for this form of rolling entertainment. My "sphere" was finely crafted through years of blood, sweat and tears.

I realize life is too short to feel sad or disempowered.

Martin Luther King Jr. once said that disappointment is finite, "but we must never lose infinite hope."

We must anticipate the dawn and draw upon the light within. We know the storm will pass, as surely as the sun will rise. I am reminded that being stuck and choosing to stay that way are much different. I can relinquish my power and give in to weakness and depression. Or I can thrive, see each new day as a problem to solve, and continue to make inroads, even if they are just one step at a time.

The old adage, two steps forward, one step back, seems to plague me lately. Every day can be a good day, and one filled with hope, joy and opportunity.

Each day can also bring setbacks. When you're a seasoned pro (that's what I like to call my 60-year-old self), you find ways to deal, to compartmentalize.

An upcoming PET scan may show nothing at all, or it may set the stage for a new challenge, a new course.

They say there's no point in worrying about something until you have to.

While true, when you're a fatalistic worry wart, you can't help it. It dominates your every thought.

I don't really consider myself strong, even though I've dealt with a lot and come out the other side.

When I'm out and about, at events in the community, I see many people who are strong. I see many dedicated volunteers. They are the very definition of strength in the face of adversity.

They permeate a certain courage and tenacity.

I wish they could bottle the stuff and pass it around.

When it rains, we grab an umbrella. As Dolly Parton once said: "... if you want the rainbow, you gotta put up with the rain."

The sun will come up tomorrow, that you can bet on.

Each rung on the ladder can bring us closer to the top. From there we have a good look around and see where we've come from.

Enjoy the view, people!