

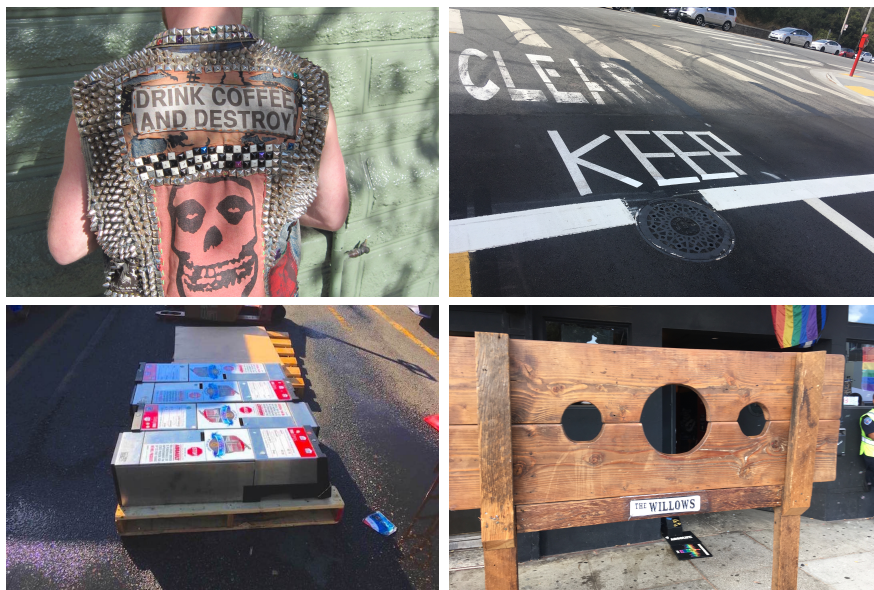
Sit Back and Watch the Show



The most challenging aspect of any motorist and operator of large equipment on the road is keeping aware of the 'what if' possibilities. *What if* that bus in front of me, stopped in the zone, goes out of service? Did I leave enough space between my coach and the stopped coach in front of me if that car breaks down or has a fight on board? A big no-no in the operation of a bus is to never have to back up. In life, of course, if I make a decision that appears to lead to an unforgiving situation, the challenge arises to

Drink coffee and
destroy the old
you—keep clear
of others who
draw you down
—like at the
fare-box—
otherwise, you'll
end up in stocks

*Driver Doug- Douglas
Meriwether*



decide to continue, or backtrack. The bigger the decision, the harder it is to surrender to the humility that I need to go back. So too with larger vehicles, comes the fact that getting in to a jam is more difficult to escape once I become boxed-in.

The joy of driving a small Zip car becomes clear in congested situations. The fluidity smaller cars have in traffic is almost a given. That being said, my most embarrassing moments come when my bus is stuck in an intersection or my tail is blocking the crosswalk after the signal has changed to green for the crosswalk and cross street. Usually, I scan the sidewalk ahead to see who is waiting, and based on previous stops on how the leading coach departs, I make the choice to pull-in to the zone behind another coach with the probability I can usually clear the zone space before the light changes. The contradiction of my error becomes glaring, in the form of the horn from cross traffic cars, that cannot turn right behind me. To my horror, I see pedestrians leaving the crosswalk to walk behind my tail in to the intersection space needed by a turning car to pass behind me from a turn. This resulting accident is one of the most common to Muni.

In a way, pedestrians become a friend in that their walk space puts an added cushion on my rear. Not knowing the mood or state of the cross traffic when the light does change, is a blind spot that can and often does, lead to trouble. If I am heavy and late, and the bus in front is also heavy, and the intersection is a busy pedestrian and vehicle cross, like 16th and Mission, I have learned that this is not a good time, to stay put nearside on a stale green.

And so too with life, if things are moving fast and I feel light and free, I rarely stop to think about any negative consequences arising from having to know a *what if*. I have

come to believe that not to decide is to decide: not to move ahead even if the light is green.

Not to decide is to decide. What the hell does that mean? It has always struck me as a cop out. This is where being behind the wheel of a bus has helped me in my life in other decisions where I could not guess the outcome. This is a paradox that took me a long time to be able to integrate in all areas of my life: when running late and running heavy, the impulse to move up, or to push the envelope and try to cut down on waiting time, very rarely pays off.

My coworkers and trainers would mention this time and time again as a precursor to an accident, and only when I have seen this over a long period of time, did I finally get the message. Usually when I am in the lead, and another coach moves in too close to me, I immediately have to forgive myself because I have done the same thing myself. I can change my stopping distance at the next stop to indicate that I don't want him to follow me. The best thing I can do would be to pull my poles and get out of their way. They usually smile and move on up.

The most frustrating thing about all of this is when my follower wants to tailgate, but they don't want to move-out in front. I have to muster all the courage and serenity I have to not let them affect my driving and decision making. I did learn early on, that seeing the rear end of the bus in front of me is not a happy day. Being a free range chicken is a lot easier than having a train of trolleys in front, or worse, in front and in back.

This becomes the most challenging aspect of not "winning" the race--when there are too many buses bunched together. The master of this principle will immediately adjust her speed and time in the zone by leaving the door open and pausing before moving forward, keeping the one block spacing rule in mind. And this rule is the clearest for me to see. The one block spacing rule is the best rule for avoiding an avoidable accident.

I tend to be too much an all or nothing guy, with little head space for a steady, easy course. Pacing myself in all my comings and goings has been a lifelong challenge that I did not relate to this rule. By doing several small steps in a series of activities, such as writing this chapter now, then going to the store for groceries, and then having a stretch and a snack, creates a world that I would not uncover once I get in to the hour-by-hour zone of being stuck doing one thing. I don't work for more than 6 hours straight through.

I did not see how the idea of surrender was actually what I was doing by pacing myself in doing a term paper, studying for a test, working out in the gym: my sleepless cramming for a test, a torn rotator or tennis elbow, or pigging-out at a breakfast bar, were all the endgame chargeable "accidents" resulting from a pattern of not

surrendering. So surrender can actually mean pacing myself based on what others are also doing.

What does a person say after having a collision or accident? The answer is: *I didn't see you!*

The car just came out of nowhere. — blah, blah, blah. So I make sure that I am checking side to side, left-right-left, so there is no guesswork about who is encroaching on my lane, my territory. And tracking rate-of-speed is the best way to guess when a motorist is going to make a foolish move that isn't safe. Impatience can usually be seen a mile a way when sight lines are clear. But in congested, built-up San Francisco, we usually have limited sight distance. Buildings come right up to the corner, or there is almost always a beer truck, bakery truck, or parcel delivery truck parked on the curb or double parked, right up against a crosswalk or corner. And this is where considering, *The Bigger You Are, the Harder They Fall*, really becomes important. The transit



professional has a word for this when this happens: it is called billboarding. You can't see the forest for the trees, and there is little reaction space to avert a threat that comes from behind the obstacle. Use of the friendly toot, or light flash can be useful, but the bottom line is to adjust by slowing down.