

Groundhog Day

In the movie Groundhog Day, Phil Connors is stuck in a time loop. He wakes up to the same song, the same weather, and the same small-town routine, again and again. Every day is exactly the same. At first, he fights it. He grows angry, reckless, frustrated with the fact that no matter what he does, the day resets. Over time, as he comes to terms with his situation. He realizes that even though the world and the people in it stay the same, he is capable of change.

If that doesn't sound familiar to the life of a cop, I don't know what does.

Yes, every call is different and every situation is new. You should never drop your guard, never get complacent or think you know exactly what is going to happen. But, we experience a lot of repetition. The same calls for service, the same problems, the same types of people making the same mistakes, day in and day out. If you've worked the job long enough, you start to recognize the rhythm of events. You spend 10 seconds on a call, and you already know how the story played out. You already know the excuses, lies, and justifications before they're given. You already know, how this particular story ends. It can feel like Groundhog Day on shift. Sometimes that's where the frustration sets in.

Marcus Aurelius must have been reading the mind of a patrol cop when he said:

“Evil: the same old thing. No matter what happens, keep this in mind: It’s the same old thing, from one end of the world to the other. It fills the history books, ancient and modern, and the cities, and the houses too. Nothing new at all.”

— Marcus Aurelius

That line could have been written by a veteran LEO sitting in a patrol car at 2 AM, responding to another domestic, another theft, another senseless act of violence. If you let it, the repetition of human nature, that evil, can wear you down. You can start to believe that nothing ever changes, that you're just a cog in an endless machine. You can become cynical. You can stop trying.

It doesn't have to be that way. Phil Connors spends most of Groundhog Day fighting against the repetition. But once he accepts it, something changes. He stops resisting and starts improving. He learns to play the piano, he reads, he helps people. He turns what once felt like a curse into an opportunity. Knowing what to expect, becomes a superpower. He intentional learns skills and adopts habits that help

him with the situations and events that he knows he will face during that day. We can do the same thing, once we know what to expect, we can make our goal to handle it well. Be better at dealing with the cycle of events. No we can't change other people and the shenanigans they get up to, but we can change ourselves and become experts at dealing with those things.

You don't need to be stuck in a time-loop, have a ton of life experience, or be super old to see the patterns and understand the cycles that play out. You just have to pay attention.

“Look at the past—empire succeeding empire—and from that, extrapolate the future: the same thing. No escape from the rhythm of events. Which is why observing life for forty years is as good as a thousand.”

— Marcus Aurelius

We are in a period of rapid change right now. World events, tragedies, strife, emerging technologies. But really, it's the same old thing. People being petty, ignorant, selfish, and greedy. People seeking power. People living their lives in a haphazard way causing trouble for those around them. Nations fighting over resources. Fear and uncertainty about the future. People telling lies. There is change, but again it is the same as it ever was. Everything going on, is nothing new.

Friends, we have a lot more in common with Phil Connors than you might think. Just like Phil Connors you face a choice, every single day.

1. You can become bitter, disengaged, and resentful because “nothing ever changes.”
2. You can recognize the patterns and use them as opportunities to grow, improve, and lead.

The calls will keep coming. The faces may change, but the stories won't. We can either let that reality crush us, or we can use it to become sharper, more disciplined, and more impactful. We can learn from history and use that wisdom to navigate our lives, and inform our responses to situations.

Yes, evil is the same old thing but so is the ability to learn, grow, utilize experience, and change your focus.

When the alarm clock goes off tomorrow, and the job feels like Groundhog Day...again, remember that you are not powerless in the cycle. You have the choice to rise above it and be the kind of person who makes a difference no matter how many times the day resets.

Get out there and make the best of your time-loop story

Amor Fati
Sgt. Steve