

## Life Lesson from a Bad Haircut

When I was in college many years ago, there was a little barber shop right next to campus. I would go over there every few months and get a haircut. The barber was fast and cheap -- both of which were important to me at the time. Seems like it was \$2 for a haircut, or maybe it was \$5... and I'm pretty sure it looked about like a \$2 haircut when he was done -- but that was good enough for me.

The barber served his customers by the time-honored and gentlemanly "First In First Out" (FIFO) service model -- on busy days, you just had to remember the order of your arrival, so everyone always knew who was next -- or they could quickly figure it out. When the barber was ready for his next customer, he would simply say, "Next" (to no one in particular) and no matter how many men were waiting, things were quickly sorted out between them.

One day as I was approaching the barber shop, I heard two men yelling at each other. One of the men was the barber, and the other man I recognized as being a college professor -- professor of what, I do not know... maybe psychology or biology, or one of those other "ologies." They were really going at each other about something -- I never could figure out exactly what. Just as I arrived, the argument ended. The Professor stormed out of the barber shop and slammed the door! The barber hesitated a moment, then followed him out yelling something unintelligible (and probably unrepeatable). Then the barber stormed back into the shop -- again slamming the door behind him!

Something inside me said, "Maybe I should come back another time," or maybe it said, "Run!" But for some reason I did not move. Maybe I was scared. Maybe I wanted to see the rest of the show -- I wondered if the Professor would come back... I'm not quite sure what I was thinking at the time, but I stayed, and I tried to at least act like I was reading one of the stale magazines from the rack.

The barber slammed things around in the shop for a minute or two. Steam was spraying upward from his flaming-red face, neck, and ears. His eyes dashed wildly back and forth. Should he be handling sharp objects? I wondered if he was contemplating murder? Then I realized something that should have occurred to me before -- I was the only customer there, which meant I was next in line!

"Next!" he barked.

I quickly complied and climbed into the barber chair. He wrapped the protective cover over my body and tied it securely around my neck. I don't think he asked how I wanted my hair cut -- his mind was on other things. He proceeded to cut, whack, buzz, and snip -- all with a little extra zest on this day. He didn't smile or carry on idle chatter, he just cut hair... my hair. Maybe a little too much of my hair. I'm not really sure he even realized I was there -- he was in a "zone."

Finally, as if waking up from a hypnotic trance, he was done. He untied and removed the protective covering -- which seemed to be covered with a good bit more of my hair than usual --

and I quickly got up from the chair. I paid him the \$2 for the scalping, and I turned and walked out of the shop.

I learned a valuable lesson that day about haircuts, and about life. I made a mental note -- a reminder to myself -- and filed it away in the back of my mind under "Life Lessons." The note said: "Never get your hair cut by an angry barber." Actually, that lesson has come in handy a few times over the years. Give angry people a chance to cool off -- especially if you are next in line and they are cutting your hair, serving your food, or drawing your blood!

When I got back to the dorm room, I looked in the mirror. Then I found my ball cap and put it on... and wore it until my life lesson was a little less obvious.

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