

Why Losing My Luggage Was the Best Part of My Trip

By: Pat Lynch, Ph.D., President

I experienced a major “aha” during a recent trip to the Bahamas when what I initially perceived to be a nightmare taught me a valuable life lesson.

The purpose of the trip was business, but since I had never been to the Bahamas I decided to go two days early to spend some time relaxing at the beach. When I reached the Nassau airport, however, I discovered that American Airlines had lost my suitcase. So there I was in Paradise, with only the business clothes I had traveled in to my name. Stores already had closed for the evening, and I was told my choices were to take the bus downtown the next day to shop for appropriate beach wear or to hope that my luggage showed up in the next two days.

My first reaction was to focus on the loss and the inconvenience it was causing in my life and the plans I had made. Instead of going to the beach, I would have to spend the morning shopping for replacement clothes. (Since shopping is possibly my least favorite pastime, this task did not represent a sliver lining to me.) You might imagine some of the unkind thoughts about American Airlines that were going through my head! As I continued fuming over what felt like a personal affront, I became more and more upset. Suddenly I thought, “Wait a minute; time out! What am I doing? I have a choice here!” I remembered that though I had no control over others’ actions, I always have control over how I choose to view them.

By focusing on the injustice of the situation, I had lost sight of my goal of enjoying the beach. This perspective caused me to dwell on the past, which I couldn’t change, instead of identifying a Plan B that would get me to the beach as soon as possible. Once I became aware of my unproductive point of view, I chose to release my attachment to my lost clothes so I could re-focus on my goal. Lo and behold, obtaining suitable replacement clothes was not as onerous a task as had been described to me! In addition, I experienced several other positive outcomes: (1) I talked with several wonderful people I wouldn’t have met otherwise, (2) they went out of their way to help me, and (3) most importantly, I realized how my unconscious attachment to easily replaceable things was keeping me from enjoying the Paradise that surrounded me. As a bonus, my new perspective enabled me to realize that I didn’t need all the clothes I had packed: for the vacation part of the trip, shorts, a t-shirt, and sandals would take me wherever I wanted to go. In fact, the realization that I didn’t need MY clothes was very liberating!

For those who like happy endings, I am pleased to report that this adventure turned out quite well: in addition to the positive experiences listed above, I love my new board shorts, my suitcase finally showed up, and the lesson learned almost made me forgive American Airlines. ➔

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