

January 2010



2010! It seems like only a couple of months ago we were recounting the major events of 2008, yet here we are, 12 months on, beginning another year in which the only thing we can be certain of is that there will be more uncertainty! So for now, let's not talk about the GFC, economic recovery, organisational restructuring, or even talent building. Instead, let us consider the tipping point, as experienced by our fictional jobsearch candidate and inveterate blogger. Tipping points have been described as "the levels at which the momentum for change becomes unstoppable", or "the point at which an object is displaced from a state of stable equilibrium into a new, different state."

A Traveller's Tale: How I lost my job and found another one

Tipping points and sticking points: from mobilisation to action, then back to introspection

Hello everyone! I bet you're surprised there's no thought provoking, how-to-prepare-for-the-year-ahead type of article to kick-start the year. Well what d'you know, I am too... Surprised, that is! Apparently, the forward thinking cohort are "having a break" and as I know you've had the occasional peek at my job search tweets, rather than be seen as out of touch and uncommunicative, I thought I'd share some thrills and spills with you. (My consultant thinks I shouldn't, but hey, others have had movies made of their Motorcycle Diaries, so why not!)

In the weeks leading up to Christmas, I went to a family gathering on a property some two or so hours out of town. Having spent a pleasant afternoon, greeting old friends and making new acquaintances (networking anyone?), sitting in the sun by the side of a lake, swinging lazily in a hammock, and sharing food, wine and easy conversation, I found myself heading towards a motley collection of motorised bikes on and around the verandah of the house. Their owner, attuned, like any good host to his guests' needs, offered me a ride. I climbed onto a quad bike, he explained its workings, and off I went, a bit jerkily to begin with, but soon racing around the paddocks in a state of exhilaration.

I parked the quad and looked longingly at the dirt bikes. Encouraging me to have a go, our host gave me a brief intro and prepared me for take off. But something about my ride on the quad seemed to have given him an inkling of a less well known side to my character, so muttering something about a "speedster", he slammed a helmet onto my head and pulled the chin strap tight - the helmet was a size or two bigger than befitted what is evidently my peanut sized brain.

I waved goodbye and took off in the direction the bike was pointing in - towards the lake and over a patch of land which I later learned, used to be a veggie garden. The soil here was dry and uneven, with leftover roots, dips, ridges, bumps, and even some fallen over fencing festooned with barbed wire - all of which I was completely unaware of. My ride was brief. I had just enough time to notice I was heading for the lake and contemplate turning around, when I hit a bump and my right hand slipped on the handlebar grip, opening the throttle to something resembling full speed. I felt myself sliding off the back of the bike while still holding onto the handlebars - a lightning flash wish that none of those watching would put me on *Australia's Funniest Home Videos*, then... "look mum I'm flying" - and over the handlebars, making a crash landing on my left shoulder.

Lying face down in the dirt, I hear people asking if I'm okay, can I move, sit up, etc. They help me up and my left arm feels like a dead weight. Back on the verandah, my arm cradled in a sling, listening as various people recount their impressions of my stunt ride, the tentatively exploring fingers of my right hand make their acquaintance with the pointy end of my collarbone, which seems to have become untethered. After a couple of hours drive back to town and three hours in the ER, a doctor confirms that I have a fractured left clavicle, puts me in a brace and suggests I get myself a comfy chair, some strong painkillers and a bottle of gin, and prepare to do time! Clearly, I had experienced a tipping point!

It has been said that in order to learn, we must change, and in order to change we must learn. In connecting the dots and identifying the lessons learned from two recent personal tipping points - being tipped over the handlebars and being tipped out of my place of work (and very nearly tipped over the edge), I've learned:

- That I have a propensity for risk-taking - at times planned and well considered and at times impulsive and ill considered.
- That willingness to experiment is an essential ingredient for learning and developing (and that there is no pleasure without pain!).
- That impulse does not equate with spontaneity or receptivity to new experiences.
- That to have determined your direction and know something of your environment is of vital importance.
- That the speed with which change occurs, determines, at least to some extent, one's emotional sensibilities. Rapid loss of control evokes fear, but also a strange sense of inevitability, of acceptance.
- That action bears consequences... but so does inaction.
- That it is possible (and indeed okay) to become smarter through being stupid, to fall and be supported in getting up, to break but not be broken, to not always have control, to acknowledge fragilities and vulnerabilities, and to type with one hand!

Malcolm Gladwell says that "...*The Tipping Point* is a way of making sense of the world, because I'm not sure that the world always makes as much sense to us as we would hope.... Our intuitions, as humans, aren't always very good. Changes that happen really suddenly, on the strength of the most minor of input, can be deeply confusing. People who understand *The Tipping Point*... have a way of decoding the world around them."

And yes... I do know he was talking about something else altogether, but it does seem to have some relevance!

Meanwhile, I continue to "single-handedly" scan the job boards and keep working on my target list but... more about all that in the next post!

