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Late Claim Reporting Causes Suspicion

Our daughter, Katie Watson, was unable to find her engagement / wedding ring set. She looked high and low but no luck. Even though it was insured, it had sentimental value. She is part of our agency so she poked her head into my office for advice.

When it comes to filing an insurance claim, I suggested that she give it some time. “Missing jewelry often turns up” I said. We’ve paid a number of insurance claims only to hear back from the customer when the item was found. I told her to go about her life, confident that it would all work out.

After 6 weeks of looking, Kate decided to file an insurance claim. She heard back from the claim rep the next day. Rather than start the settlement process, he said the matter was being referred to another claim handler. Kate is a former claim adjuster so she knew that wasn't normal. She pressed for an explanation but didn't get anywhere.

It turns out the claim was referred to the Special Investigation Unit (SIU). That's the claim unit that investigates fraud. Since so much time elapsed between the date of the loss and the date of reporting, it raised a red flag. Kate was aghast. I apologized for giving her bad advice about waiting for the item to show up. Once Kate explained the situation to the SIU rep, the claim was settled. When it comes to prompt reporting, especially for missing jewelry, lesson learned.

Love, Marriage, and a Car Trip To Florida

Every December and April, my wife Lynn and I drive to and from Florida. We have a winter place there. She and our dog stay for the winter. Since I'm still working, I commute to and from Ohio (Southwest flies direct). We share the driving.

At the start of our most recent trip I decided to throw out a few ground rules. First, whoever is driving can't be talking on the phone, checking emails, or texting. In fact, the phone is not to be within reach. She readily agree but challenged me. “Like you're not going to read your work emails” she said. I solved that problem by having her read them to me.

My next request was about maintaining more distance between our car and the one ahead. Since we hear about them every day, insurance agents are sensitive to rear-end collisions. My wife agreed to stay back a little more. Sensing a bit of progress, I kept going. “If the car ahead brakes, how about if you brake too”. She doesn't like to brake much on the highway. I brake when the car ahead brakes which makes her a little crazy.

She had a request of her own. “How about passing slow cars in the right lane?” I have tendency to get comfortable in the right lane. Knowing that lane changes are another source of claims, I'm not in a hurry to pass. She, on the other hand, will drive in the left lane for miles. “The left lane is for passing” I remind her.

Sump Pump Makes Perfect Anniversary Gift



For some reason I decided to reward myself on my 41st anniversary in the agency. I noticed the sump pump at our house was running a lot, even when there was no rain. Plus I could hear a whooshing sound. I wondered if it was getting the pit completely empty. Or maybe it was just clearing the same water over and over.

I decided to have the situation reviewed by a professional. Sure enough, the old pump wasn't working right. That made it work too hard and run too often. Plus the old discharge lines had two 90 degree turns—see the upper photo. I'm no plumber that didn't make a lot of sense to me.



The new system, bottom photo, is faster and quieter. It runs far less often. Plus the discharge lines are now 45 degrees making for an easier path to the outside drain line. The backup pump runs on the same discharge line, no need for two.

As if a new pump wasn't enough of a present to myself, I replaced the battery backup. The new one is maintenance free. Plus it will run 100 hours on the battery vs just 6 hours on my old one.

My 42nd anniversary will be January 2026. Come to think of it, our house could use better security lighting.

My Granddaughters Can Learn From a UPS Driver



I recently had a meeting in the agency that included claims adjusters and safety experts. The topic turned to safety while making a left hand turn. I was particularly curious because both of our granddaughters make a somewhat dangerous left hand turn to enter their neighborhood.

One of the safety professionals was a former UPS driver. He said that UPS has a “no-left-turn” policy. If a left hand turn is required, the driver is not permitted to enter the intersection until clear to turn. In other words, stay behind the line, don't fill the intersection, and don't clear on red.

This UPS driver runs the northbound route on Sawmill Rd. Another UPS driver works the southbound route. By splitting the routes that way, turns are to the right.

My curiosity was peaked so I did a little research. Along with improvements in safety, I learned that UPS has saved millions in cost. No wasted time waiting to turn left and no fuel usage just sitting there. While the route might be a little longer, because a driver can turn right on red, faster drive times result.

Several times I've suggested that my granddaughters find an alternate way into their neighborhood. Unfortunately, there isn't one. Like UPS, maybe they can stay behind the line, avoid occupying the intersection, and eliminate the need to clear on red.

Both of our granddaughters know that opposing traffic may not stop when the light turns red. In fact, they know not to go when the first car runs the red light. Reason being, sometimes a second car is coming too. They are learning the traffic light sequence so they have a better idea when they can expect a green arrow.

Claim Decision Comes Down to Two Words



An agency customer operates a chemical plant. After arriving by rail, a liquid is held in a storage tank. When the liquid is needed, its pumped into the processing plant. There are multiple tanks on the “tank farm”.

Due to an implosion, the photo shows the damage to tank 4. Repairs were not possible and a new tank would run \$336,000. An insurance claim was submitted. In the meantime the plant continued to operate on the remaining tanks.

The insurance company did its investigation. In their opinion, the cause of the damage was collapse. They considered the tank to be an “outdoor fixture” as defined by the policy. Since outdoor fixtures are not covered for collapse, the claim was denied. Upon receipt of the denial letter, I sent this message to the claim adjuster.

Our customer was able to run at full capacity without tank 4. That meant a replacement tank was not needed. The policy provides for a cash out settlement based on the value of the damaged tank. Instead of \$336,000 for a new one, the claim was settled for \$102,601.

When I think of an outdoor fixture in a commercial property policy, I think flagpole, light pole, utility box and the like. Unlike a typical outdoor fixture, the Tank Farm is listed on the application. I think a strong case can be made that the tank is a building or structure, not an outdoor fixture.

The claim rep said she wanted some time to further review. I took that as a good sign. I took nine days but the insurance company sent a reply. Instead of an outdoor fixture, they agreed to consider tank 4 to be a “building or structure” which is covered for collapse. The initial claim decision was reversed and coverage granted.

Roll Tape—The Use of Cameras in Commercial Trucks

If you were responsible for a fleet of over 100 trucks, would you want cameras onboard? If so, would you want them forward facing to record the road ahead? Would you also want the cameras to be driver facing? Or maybe both forward and driver facing? These decisions can be critical when it comes to safety, efficiency, and insurance costs.

When it comes to forward facing cameras, it’s a clear “yes” from my resources in the insurance and legal community. Cameras are invaluable when it comes to accident investigation and assignment of fault. Quite often the truck driver, a professional at his craft, benefits from the video. His story tends to hold up on camera. What if the camera shows our driver to be responsible for the accident? Not great news but good to know. That enables the claim and legal professional to settle the claim fairly and timely.

While truck drivers may get comfortable with forward facing cameras, maybe not as much when the cameras are on them. One of our customers relayed a story about a driver that was dozing off behind the wheel. In another case, the driver looked in the direction of the passenger seat just before hitting an overpass.



Vacation Toys

Our daughter Katie Watson and her husband Adam took their children to Arizona for a vacation. They rented ATVs for a 2 hour trip through the desert. There was lots of paperwork including the transfer of liability to Katie and Adam.

As you might expect, Adam turned to his insurance-agent-wife for confirmation of coverage. Like just about anybody in that situation, she scratched her head and thought “I don’t know”.

Fortunately, the trip went off without incident. However, Kate couldn’t relax for a minute. “What if” is the motto of an insurance agent.

Still Not Gregarious

About 40 years ago I wrote my first construction account. It came from a cold prospect call. The buyer was a very nice woman. She explained that her family was starting a general contracting company and needed an agent.

Once the policy was written and delivered, we made an appointment for me to meet her husband. Midway through the meeting, he offered his opinion about me. “You’re not particularly gregarious” he said. “I thought all insurance salespeople were gregarious”.

In a way, he’s right. Before starting my career, I failed an insurance selling test. I think my personality didn’t match up well with that of a successful insurance agent.

Anyway, my meeting with new customer got back on track. After reviewing the coverage, we started the wrap up. “Young man” said the husband, “we don’t change agents very often, So don’t screw it up”.

This customer has grown to be one of my largest and best accounts. So far, no screw ups.

“Hello, Georgia 511, How Can I Help You?”

On a recent car trip just north of Atlanta GA, my wife and I came upon a flashing sign on I 75. It said “Accident 8 Miles Ahead—Right Three Lanes Closed”. We soon found ourselves in stop and go traffic. The far left lane was still moving. Then traffic stopped. After about 45 minutes I dialed 511 to reach the Georgia traffic hotline.

I listened to the prompts and asked for a live operator. His name was Ron. Once I told him my whereabouts, he knew the reason for my call. “There is an overturned vehicle and an overturned tractor / trailer blocking the road. In fact, there are two trailers, both overturned. It will be about an hour before the road is clear”.

Ron was a talkative sort. Maybe he thought I wanted companionship during my wait. “Another hour wait isn’t too bad. There are no fatalities, otherwise it would take much longer to clear the scene. I recently waited 12 hours on a highway. Slept part of the time.” He was right. With no offense to my wife, I welcomed the conversation.

“Would something like this likely be caused by a careless lane change?” I asked. Ron said that cars often cut off trucks at high speeds. Motorists underestimate the length of time it takes a heavy truck to stop. These two trailers were each hauling 20,000 pounds of cargo. “There is no way a truck can stop in time when a car cuts in front of them” he offered.

Once our trip resumed I paid special attention to cars weaving in and out of traffic. Some cutting right in front of large trucks. From insuring trucks of all sizes, I have come to admire the work of a professional truck driver. And I have a better understand of why they don’t like cars.

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