



Jim Bob Solsbery
Down-home Humor. Uptown Attitude.
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Laugh Your Way Out

By Jim Bob Solsbery

It is my belief that we make conscious choices each and every day that determine our happiness. It's not so much about what happens to us, but how we choose to react to it.

My core belief, "Humor is more than making people laugh – it is an attitude," is a tool I use regularly. Let me explain how this works when applied to circumstances that tend to stress us out or make us difficult to be around.

A while back, my wife, Jan, and I flew out of Midland, Texas to attend a conference in Salt Lake City, Utah. Both the flight out and the flight back home were very trying for us.

The flight out went off exactly as the airline itinerary said it would – no lost luggage, no missed connections, and no late departures. Instead, the problem was that I am horrible at adjusting to time zones! I thought Utah was two hours behind Texas time, instead of one, and had calculated that our scheduled Utah arrival time of 6:10 p.m. meant it would be 4:10 p.m. Texas time, meaning only five hours of travel time. I quickly learned that I was mistaken.

To make a long story short, when we departed Texas at 11:00 a.m. and landed in Albuquerque at 11:00 a.m., I knew I needed a lesson in "time zone management." It was then that I learned that what I had calculated to be a one hour lay-over in Albuquerque was actually going to be a four hour lay-over. My initial outburst was, "How could I have messed that up and ruined our day?"

Well, I might as well "come clean" with you. Sometimes my wife has to remind me to practice what I preach – to look for the humor in every situation. I think her exact words were, "We can either be miserable, or we can have fun – the choice is YOURS!" It was a very nice way of her saying, "If you are going to be grumpy, do it somewhere else, and preferably, with someone else!" I got the message loud and clear.

We ate, shopped, ate again, shopped again, and laughed a lot. We heard the song, "It's Five O'clock Somewhere," and took it as an omen to relax in the bar. We were having so much fun; we nearly missed our connecting flight. We didn't. We arrived in Salt Lake City at 6:10 p.m. – right on time!

Now, for the rest of the story – the trip home! We were scheduled to leave Salt Lake City at 11:55 a.m. and arrive in Midland at 3:40 p.m. In spite of my time zone ignorance, I knew this was a good thing!

We were waiting in the airport terminal having a great visit about what a wonderful time we had, when we heard the announcement, "Flight 2615 to Albuquerque will be slightly delayed." This was followed by two more announcements increasing the delay and making it crystal clear to me that we would miss our connecting flight in Albuquerque.

I caught myself feeling irritated, but not wanting to backslide, I told Jan, “Looks like we are in for some more fun on the flight home. Let’s just decide right now to laugh our way out!” In hindsight, it was a good thing we made that conscious decision. The next announcement was, “Would the Solsbery passengers please report to the counter?” We knew this was not going to be good.

The gate attendant said, “We have re-routed you, and you should be landing in Midland at 7:35 p.m. You will get on your original plane when it gets here, but instead of getting off in Albuquerque, just stay on it all the way to Houston. In Houston, you will change planes and fly to Dallas. In Dallas, you will change planes and fly to Midland. You shouldn’t have any problems – piece of cake!” I remember being impressed by the attendant’s positive demeanor – he had me convinced!

“What about our luggage?” I asked. He assured us our luggage would be re-routed right along with us. Jan and I both laughed out loud. I don’t think the attendant knew quite how to react – he expected us to be upset.

We finally departed two hours after our original departure time and arrived in Houston at 5:35 p.m. After arriving, we discovered that we would be required to change terminals and go through security again. The friendly gate attendant in Salt Lake City failed to mention this. We had to figure this out on our own.

Sweating and out of breath, we made it to our gate at 5:50 p.m. and could see our plane – still there and passengers were boarding. Things were looking up! I handed the agent the large stack of tickets we had now accumulated and jubilantly said, “We were afraid we weren’t going to make it, but we did!”

She looked at me as if to say, “You have got to be kidding!” She tapped on her keyboard and said with disdain in her voice, “Yes Mr. Solsbery – you WERE confirmed on this flight but we just gave your seats away. You were NOT on time!” We just stared at each other for what seemed like an eternity. I fought the urge to colorfully explain “why” we were not on time and where she could put her airplane. Finally, I broke the tension with a broad smile and said, “Okay, what next?”

As if she had flipped a switch to her “A-game” customer service mode, she smiled and said, “Not to worry, we have another flight to Dallas at 7:05 p.m. Of course you will miss your 7:35 p.m. connection to Midland, but the good news is there is a 9:05 p.m. flight and you should reach your final destination at 10:45 p.m. – right on time!” I realized her “right on time” was a little different than my “right on time” – a seven hour difference to be exact!

The 7:05 p.m. flight left at 7:20 p.m. I discovered that day that time does not mean much to airlines. In Dallas, the 9:05 p.m. flight to Midland left at 9:20 p.m. (I could see a pattern developing here.) We arrived in Midland at 10:50 p.m. – still laughing, and I guess, by the airline’s definition, right on time!

On the way to luggage pick-up, we laughed about the fact that there was no way our luggage would be there, and we programmed ourselves not to care.

At the baggage carousel, we hung back as the other passengers gathered up their belongings. One by one, they picked up their bags and left. It eventually came down to us, one irritated lady, and one lonely, little unclaimed bag going around and around the carousel. It wasn't ours and it wasn't hers, and she was mad. We were literally laughing out loud. She whirled around and snapped, "What is so funny about us not getting our luggage?" I said, "Ma'am, we are just glad WE are here!"

A baggage attendant appeared, got her name, and asked her to go to the ticket counter and file her lost luggage paperwork. He asked our name. When I said, "Solsbery," he grinned and said, "We've been wondering where y'all were. Your luggage has been here for hours. It's at the ticket counter!"

Flabbergasted, we made our way to the ticket counter and sure enough, they had our luggage. I asked the lady who gave us our bags, "The next time I fly your airline, can I pay for a ticket and then have you tag me as luggage so I could get to my destination on time?" All I can say is that some people do not have a sense of humor.

We had used our sense of humor all day, and it was up and running. Senses of humor are like that – once they are initiated during the day, they generally last until bedtime. It was clear that the lady at the ticket counter had not used hers all day, and it was in "sleep mode." I had assumed after the tongue lashing she had just taken from the lady in front of us, she would welcome my jovial demeanor. I guess we should never assume.

We have taken many trips in our lives, but never have we had more fun traveling than we did on this trip. It reaffirmed our agreement with Maya Angelou's statement, "Change the things you can and change your attitude about the things you can't!"

On the flight out, nothing went wrong. It was simply that we perceived that the events would take place one way (based on my being time-zone challenged), and reality took them another. On the flight home, nothing went as we, or the airline, had planned. I feel sure the airline never intended for us to circle New Mexico once and Texas twice.

We made a conscious decision that day to be happy. The real lesson of the day was learned by watching the contrast of other people who evidently made the conscious decision to be miserable.

Bottom-line, the choice is ours. We decide what type of day we will have. How we react when life is not giving us what we expect defines our happiness. Sometimes, you just have to "laugh your way out!"