

Dead Peckers' Corner

Leadership opportunities can be found in all kinds of places. Sometimes they pop up in the most unusual of circumstances and you adopt the role without even thinking about it.

Not too long ago, I led a group of motorcyclists on a ride. We started out in downtown Asheville, North Carolina. Traffic was heavy enough that even with GPS, safely and correctly leading the group through the lump of spaghetti masquerading as a series of closely clustered interchanges proved challenging.

15 minutes, and I've already had to make a half-dozen impromptu leadership decisions—each one with 5 friends mentally critiquing my every move.

So about 10am in the morning, we're somewhere north of Asheville, as our small group begins to work its way westward. We've left the big city rush well behind us, we've unwound ourselves, and eventually roll into a small town that the crush of time seems to have left alone. It's the sort of town where everything's almost sleepy, peaceful, with that small town 'clean' about it.

The main intersection has a store of some sort on one corner, a gas station on the far right corner, and sidewalks, street, and parking lots seem to be one integral piece. No rudely intruding curbs. If it weren't for the concrete sidewalk, you'd not be able to tell where the road ended and parking lots began. It's the sort of town where

everyone is mindful, polite, and big curbs aren't needed for the sake of enforcing civil obedience.

It really had been an absolutely beautiful morning so far. The days at this year's HSTA Sport Touring Association Rendezvous had quickly become routine: ride early, because by lunch time the energy in the clouds would build up, darken, and the second half of the day would have you riding through a very dense atmosphere...the sort of density you *wear* as opposed to just ride through.

So here we are, blue skies, some fluffy white clouds, and the heat of the day just starting to make itself known. We've all fueled up and rolled our rides off to the side, out of the way. Relaxing, standing in the hot sun, I note there's this group of men sitting across the street, lining a stone wall, sitting under the only readily available shade to be had.

After a bit, keeping to ourselves by the bikes, it occurs to me: Why am I standing in the sun like this, I'll just mind my business, and go sit down on that wall under the trees.

So it's only about 30 feet from our bikes to the shade. As I meander over and start sitting down, one of the fellas starts trying to stop me from taking a seat. "Hey, you don't want to sit here..." He's the chap, fifth from the left in the picture.

Sometimes, you just need to take a risk.

So here I am, sitting a couple feet from the last guy in the line, and this friendly looking fellow stops in front of me. Leaning over, just loud enough for the others to hear, he says, “I tried to stop you from sitting here. You know what they call this don’t you?” Looking down the row to my right, I see this line of older guys all leaning past the one in front, looking at me. “No. What?”



They call it *Dead Peckers’ Corner*.

I just *couldn’t* contain myself. I burst out laughing. It only took a second, looking at these older guys, to see just what he meant. We introduced ourselves briefly; I sorely wish I could remember the chap’s name. These guys were all here, enjoying themselves, sitting, chatting, and enjoying the morning.

This chap, we’ll call him Bob, proceeds to tell me how the oldest among them is well through his 80s. Bob seems downright proud to let me know it’s the locals who’ve labeled the corner *Dead Peckers’ Corner* on their behalf. So there lays part of the story.

Now, see, it's real comfortable in the shade...

I called across the street and invited another of our riding party to come on over. After all, it's comfortable and cool, why stand in the sun? So, we've all been laughing, and he comes on over. Sure enough he takes a seat and up pops Bob, "I tried to stop your friend... You *know* what they call this here place now, don't you?" "No, what?" A whole new round of laughter burst out welcoming the new member to the club.

One, by one, we encouraged all but one of the group to come join us. Each time, the cycle repeated itself. I figured if we all seemed to be having such a good time, I'd eventually get the entire group to come have a seat. Yep. Except for that one hold out, Hal.

So, here's four of us, all sitting on a wall with silly smiles on our faces. "Hey, *HAL*, come on over!" Now, at this point, why he's still standing all alone in the sun I'll never know. Sure enough, with a hint of guardedness on his face, Hal comes on over...

It was a truly special moment for all of us. We got to enjoy a nice seat in the shade, join a respected local club, have a friendly joke at our own expense, and a great laugh. It wasn't just me, I suspect there's a reason I've had a few requests for the picture...

If it weren't for being willing to take a risk, albeit a teensy-weensy one, along with the ability to convince others to follow, a great time that was...would have never been. Being a leader isn't just about title and position. Most often, it's about seeing an opportunity and being open to take advantage of it.