

### **Survivorman. Not.**

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**S**till at university in Australia, I hadn't yet fully accepted my urban destiny.

I know now that I'm a city boy. I have the soft hands of a typist and not a single Do It Yourself or Survivor gene in my DNA.

But back then, I thought that perhaps I could still evolve into that Jason Bourne-esque man, the type who had 1 percent body fat and could survive in the outdoors for three weeks using nothing but three twigs and a handful of leaves.

In that spirit, I planned a solo three-day trek. I'd been bushwalking—that's Australian for "hiking"—before, so I wasn't totally ignorant of what I was proposing. And ten years earlier I'd got my knot-tying badge from the Boy Scouts. How hard could this be?

## Heavy

The scale said forty pounds, but in truth my backpack felt considerably heavier than that. I did know that approximately 90 percent of this weight was the first-aid kit. I was a little nervous about getting injured, so I was carrying remedies for all sorts of medical challenges, from snake bite to lightning strike.

But after a three-hour drive from home, I arrived at the start of the circuit I was going to walk and I was feeling good. The weather was fine and promised to hold. There were a few other cars in the car park, so I wouldn't be totally alone. And having done my research, I knew that this wasn't a difficult trek. It was just three days of doing it by myself.

The path started off clear and broad, but quickly it narrowed. After twenty minutes it had all but vanished. Indeed, I could figure out the way forward only by keeping a keen eye out for the knee-high grass that, in irregular intervals, some fellow traveller had tied knots in to mark the way. And then the knotted grass stopped as well.

Honestly, I was confused. The map seemed to indicate that the path was a big, obvious trail working its way up the mountain, and clearly the map was wrong. My path hadn't climbed up at all but had stayed pretty level, and it wasn't so much a path as it was a barely noticeable trail and ... ah. Hmmm.

I was lost.

## Forward or Back?

There were two ways forward from here. Well, one way wasn't forward at all. It would have involved trying to retreat along the path I'd come on. Obviously, as a man, I found this to be an unacceptable option.

The remaining route—bold, courageous and direct, a little like me—involved pointing myself directly up the side of the mountain. If I did that, it was inevitable that I'd cross the path and be back on track once more.

I don't have much memory of that climb. Just flashbacks. Balancing perilously on top of the moss-covered boulders of the waterfall. Trying to get through the impenetrable ti tree bushes by crawling on my belly and pushing the pack in front of me. Retreating from the impenetrable ti tree bushes on my belly and dragging the pack back with me. The creeping sense of foreboding and panic and aloneness.

Eventually I found the path. It was as wide and as obvious as the map had indicated. I, on the other hand, was scratched, bruised and exhausted. It had been just over seven hours since I'd left the car. I was broken. I decided to set up my tent for the night. Sure, I was making camp a little early, but I needed to recover and regroup.

With my cup of tea brewing over my campfire, I spied a fellow hiker coming towards me from the direction of the car park. He looked fresh. I hailed him. Not really wanting to talk about



my experience of the day, I turned the conversation immediately to how the walk had been going for him so far.

It was hard to really say, he told me. He'd been walking for only fifteen minutes.

### **What Has This Story Got to Do with the Coaching Habit?**

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I've been a manager and I've been managed. I've coached managers and I've trained managers to be more coach-like. In my experience, too many conversations between managers and those they're managing feel much too much like my ill-fated hike through the Budawang National Park:

- Too much baggage
- Too much certainty, thinking you know the destination and the path to get there
- Wandering off the path too quickly
- Working way too hard to get back on the path
- And being exhausted at the end, having got a lot less far down the track than you'd hoped you would

If that description feels true to you, then you'll be well served to build a coaching habit of your own. The questions

here are the ones that I've found to have the most impact, and I do believe that if you can make just these Seven Essential Questions part of your management repertoire and everyday conversations, you'll work less hard and have more impact, and your people, your boss, your career and your life outside work will thank you for it.

But the real secret sauce here is building a habit of curiosity. The change of behaviour that's going to serve you most powerfully is simply this: a little less advice, a little more curiosity. Find your own questions, find your own voice. And above all, build your own coaching habit.