

LESSON 3

Blow the Whistle

Packing a positive attitude for your pursuit will always make it more pleasurable and satisfying. Establishing some accountability will help you stay on track.

BY DEBBIE

When you are touring by bicycle, you never know what to expect when setting out each morning. All you know is that you will encounter something new and interesting, and perhaps learn something in the process. On one particular day during TheHopeLine Tour, we would encounter another new state and learn a trick to becoming a better person.

Despite a cool and overcast start, we had wonderful weather for the remainder of the day. An early-morning race with a pair of deer proved too much for us, yet we persevered for our third consecutive day of biking more than seventy miles.

Leaving Metropolis, Illinois, and cycling into Kentucky all in one day felt like quite an accomplishment. For some reason, I thought Illinois would be flat, but it isn't. We climbed up and down hills until we stopped

for lunch at mile forty-one. We also switched maps, leaving the Great Rivers South map and heading in the direction of the Underground Railroad route. Our new route and new direction foreshadowed a change I would make later in the day to improve our travel experience.

The end of our time in Illinois came at Cave-in-Rock, where we caught a ride on the free ferry across the Ohio River. No cars accompanied us on the ferry, just the two guys who operated the boat. As soon as we entered Kentucky, nothing awaited us except more hills—no people, no homes, and no crops for miles. Just like in other states along TheHopeLine Tour, we had the place to ourselves. The hilly terrain meant we had some challenging climbs, while the dense forest with no people around made for a lengthy and uncertain ride to civilization.

In our travels, we've used maps published by a nonprofit bicycle-touring advocate called the Adventure Cycling Association (www.adventurecycling.org). Those maps mentioned the possibility of loose dogs in Kentucky, so Tim had a bright orange whistle hanging from his neck, and I had one in the outside pocket of my handlebar bag for easy access. Mine offered the added benefits of serving as a compass and a thermometer. I had used the thermometer and compass more than the whistle, but I must admit I loved blowing the whistle on dogs that chased us.

At that time on TheHopeLine Tour, we'd already had to blow the whistle on dogs in Missouri and Illinois. I can remember thinking, *Kentucky dogs: be prepared! We won't be wasting our precious water squirting you or fending you off with our bicycle pumps.* The whistle would be the way to ward off unwanted canines in pursuit.

Before encountering any loose dogs, however, I discovered another use for the whistle, but you need the assistance of a spouse or a friend. I'm talking about breaking a bad habit I'd had at times on that trip... well, actually, two bad habits.

It all started on the prior day when I'd made a sarcastic comment and Tim blew the whistle as a referee would and shouted, "Unnecessary

sarcasm, fifteen yards!” He was joking, of course. However, after entering Kentucky, I thought, *What a great way to break a habit!*

So, I said to him, “If I complain about anything for the rest of the day, I want you to blow the whistle on me.”

It may sound strange, but my request for Tim to hold me accountable kept my grumbling in check. I set goals for myself every day, and many days, I pray that I will not complain. Day after day, I fall short. On that particular day, I thought blowing the whistle on my complaining would be a great way to break that horrible habit. And it worked!

Instead of complaining to Tim, I started thinking of ways to put a positive spin on things. My knee hurt, but instead of complaining about it, I thought about the beautiful sky. I was so sick of the endless hills, but instead of dwelling on it by talking about it, I said I was grateful for the lack of traffic on those hills! The fear of the whistle blowing with each complaint kept me from whining. I tested Tim while pedaling up a very steep hill and complained about it. Sure enough, he blew the whistle!

If you have a bad habit to break, ask someone to “blow the whistle” every time you indulge in that habit. The list of habits that could benefit from some whistle-blowing interference includes gossiping, complaining, swearing, being late, smoking...the list is endless. Chances are this behavior-modification plan will get you into shape rather quickly. You will be “a better you” once you’ve broken the bad habit and replaced it with a new, healthier one. Instead of complaining, turn it into gratitude. No one will blow the whistle on you if you’re grateful and full of joy!

Thirty-two miles into Kentucky, we ran out of sun. Yet we were glad to have entered state number eleven on TheHopeLine Tour. After climbing 4,700 feet of elevation, we were heartened when a woman at a convenience store in Sturgis reserved a motel room for us. The map listed none, but she knew of a place with cabins for rent. They had closed early, but she had an “in” and, therefore, so did we. Small-town Kentucky hospitality was in the air.

When we arrived at the cabin, we had more pleasant surprises: it was beautiful, the price was right, and the adjoining market packed us a home-cooked meal—which goes to show that when you stop complaining, things will work out well in the end!

Attitude. It has so much influence on the success of a journey and the fulfillment of a destiny—and whether you will be miserable or happy along the way. Make sure you check your attitude at the door to your pursuit.

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Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

PHILIPPIANS 4:8

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Personal REFLECTION:

1. Which bad habit would you like to “blow the whistle” on?
2. Can you think of anyone who could help hold you accountable in overcoming this bad habit?
3. Which is more agonizing: continuing to struggle with the bad habit or giving permission to a trusted individual to help you stop it?