

On Balance, Compensation, and the Last Straw

The juxtaposition of “balance”, “compensation”, and “the last straw” in one title may seem strange to some people, but - as he has said - Webmaster sees connections where others may not. Webmaster has also said (elsewhere) that he values language immensely and takes particular pride in using words and phrases as precisely and efficiently as possible. In many cases a given word or phrase can have slightly different meanings - depending on the context - and often multiple meanings. And so it is in this case. In this case, Webmaster is moved (while not moving very well), to write this piece because he has been sitting - and thinking. About the last straw, and how he got to this situation of poor balance, essentially because of his ability to compensate. [In order to keep this piece acceptably brief, Webmaster will not go into all the details - more of which are included in one of his books (see the “OTHER” page of this website).]

In this case the last straw was added some time in the Fall of 2013, when Webmaster was completing his part of the Opposition battle to defeat the Costco Special Exception Application (S-2863) in Montgomery County, MD. The exact nature of the last straw is unclear, but Webmaster presumes it was having to sit for endless hours (or so it seemed) in endless hearings about the application. Which was manifestly absurd because anyone could plainly see that the location of the proposed gas station was not appropriate and the Applicant had not met the Burden of Proof. Or perhaps the last straw came when he was preparing for one of the unneeded hearings. Or worrying about them. In any case, during this case his right leg seemed to give out. Of course it only seemed this way. What actually happened - according to his Physical Therapist - was that his ability to compensate for his poor balance had lead to a series of compensatory alterations in his gait. And these in turn had lead to improper use (actually abuse) of several muscles. And these muscles in essence had - as he was pushing a grocery cart - finally told him, in essence, “that’s the last straw”!

While thinking about what has transpired since Fall, 2013 until now (Spring, 2015), Webmaster has been trying to ignore (or rather compensate for) the continuing soreness in, and weakness of, that leg. And he has been trying to balance his anger about the last straw and the reality that one only reaches the last straw (in cases such as this) after a very long series of compensations. Sitting at the dining room table and rubbing his leg, he mused on the various issues of balance and compensation that had lead him to the last straw. He was, in part, trying to balance his anger at Costco for their role in his continuing problem, which is *now*, simply put, trying to undo all the inappropriate compensations so that he can walk again, with minimal discomfort. Which, as it turns out, is not going to be easy because his poor gait is - ultimately - related to his balance problems, which started a long time ago, and are getting worse with age (and he is aging every day). As his PT puts it, he must learn to walk (properly) again. And he must do so while fighting his “lizard brain”, which almost always wins, even with someone as “sharp” as Webmaster. So it is proving to be a very tough slog (pun intended).

Now Webmaster tries to retain his balance and part of that is maintaining a balanced view of what has happened to him - to cause his balance problems to get

worse faster than is the case with many other people - as they age. There were of course many things that happened in the course of his life (which is the subject of the book mentioned above) but it seems to him that there are a few things that were most causative (with respect to his balance problems and the poor compensation issues that followed). First and foremost was the execrable medical care he “received” at Duke University Medical Center. This was in the mid-1970s when he was on the faculty at Duke (known to most faculty as “DOOK”). While DOOK is widely purported to be an excellent medical center, it has serious issues with balance. Chief among them is that, while it *may* do a good job in cases where it can burnish its reputation, it does a lousy job in many others. Simple ones. This was well known to faculty. Webmaster could give many examples. But you only need one. Take his brain tumor for example. Please. DOOK misdiagnosed it. Big time. But that was actually a blessing in disguise, because, had they diagnosed it correctly and operated on him, Webmaster would probably be dead now (he would have been dead back then!). At least that is what certain knowledgeable people say.

So the undiagnosed brain tumor grew and Webmaster’s balance got worse. But worse still, was the fact that the “powers that be” at DOOK, were also manifesting poor judgement as to balance. Which lead them to deny Webmaster promotion to tenure - despite the fact that most of the faculty in his department REALLY wanted him to get tenure. For a variety of reasons, but basically because he continued to balance his duties very well: research, teaching, and “university service”. But the powers that be (or that were at the time) gave only lip service to the notion of balance. What they really wanted was research that generated grant money - **lots** more money. And that was not going to happen, because Webmaster valued doing all three things pretty well more than he valued doing just one thing really well. So he did not get tenure, which was a bigger problem for DOOK than for him. It pissed Webmaster off, and he told them so - in writing and posted for all to see. Then he got out of Dodge - or rather Durham. As he saw it, on balance that was the best way to compensate - at the time.

Webmaster took a job at USUHS, where his brand of academics was valued - at the time. His tumor continued to grow and his balance got worse and he compensated as best he could. But very quickly it was the last straw - again. The tumor was finally diagnosed. And then serendipity! Webmaster’s chairman was a neuroanatomist and had trained one of the world’s foremost surgeons specializing in removing the kind of tumor afflicting Webmaster. Which he did and Webmaster was much improved. But not his balance alas and so he continued to compensate - even more as it turned out. By the late 1980s his balance problems were again severe and it turned out that the tumor had regrown! This time it was fairly quickly diagnosed and surgically dealt with, but post-surgical complications were extreme and very nearly **THE** last straw. Yet again he recovered and yet again he employed all his skills at compensation to deal with the now chronic balance problems. But the powers that be at USUHS had changed and yet again he had to deal with their failure to value proper balance. Which he did, albeit at the cost of considerable effort. And was of course again pissed off.

By the mid 1990s Webmaster was finally beginning to understand the enormity of the balance issues and the cost of dealing with them. [Interestingly, this coincided with

the time when Webmaster started becoming Webmaster.] He found a way around the problems the powers that be at USUHS had created for him (he was by now a master at compensating) and this put many things back in balance for a while (but probably not his physical balance). In any case, by the early 2000s it had become clear that it was time to retire from academia. While he could easily do the job for which he was being compensated (barely), he realized that he could not do it the way HE wanted to do it. For him the balance point was never what his bosses thought of him, but rather whether he was satisfied with the job he was doing. And while he was satisfied (barely), he recognized that he could not do any better - given the situation at USUHS and the rest of academia. So once again he got out of Dodge: he retired from USUHS.

However, after a brief retirement (to recharge his batteries), Webmaster returned to the fray - with all guns blazing. He took on the role of Webmaster for the SCGC and the rest is history - up until now. Now he is fully in balance with respect to many things and is working on his physical balance problem. Which is, precisely because of his ability to compensate, his most pressing physical problem. But he does not intend to let it be the last straw. He has many more projects and a "hitch in his giddy-up" is not going to stop him.

One of the many things he is doing is re-balancing a number of old accounts. They say that revenge is a dish that is best served cold. Well this is extremely cold. So cold that the people at whom Webmaster is pissed off may never read this (although he hopes they will - if they are still alive). But a balance sheet is perhaps in order here. Webmaster is pissed off at the clowns at DOOK. He is pissed off at the clowns who came to run USUHS. He is pissed off at the clowns who perpetrated S-2863 on him. And that, curiously enough, includes both the Hearing Examiner who so annoyed him at the end (but who ruled in favor of the Opposition) and at himself for being so stupid as to even pretend to be a lawyer during those endless hearings. As Webmaster sees it, all the lack of balance and the inappropriate compensation and the multiple straws that nearly broke the camel's back are enough to piss off the Pope!

Now Webmaster is, obviously, not the Pope. But it is not a good idea to piss off Webmaster. Because he will, eventually, regain his balance. And extract proper compensation. And that **will** be the last straw.