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***Skill 5: Give Up  
All Hope of a  
Better Past***

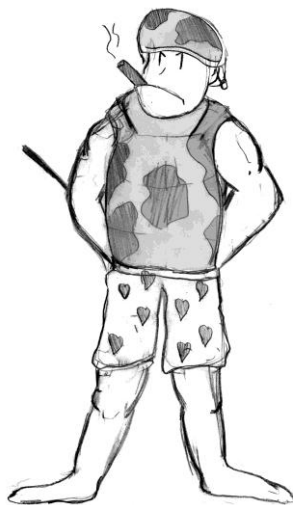
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**Example.** The commander stands before the troops and says, "Comrades in arms, we have been thrown back today, but tomorrow we are going to liberate the hill, strongly defended though it may be. The blood of our countrymen has consecrated it, and we must not allow their sacrifice to be in vain."

**Preferred story:** *"Yesterday twenty of our soldiers died for no good reason"*

**Disliked story:** *"Yesterday twenty of our soldiers died trying to take the hill, but our later victory made it all worth it"*

**Fixed reality:** *In the unalterable past, twenty soldiers died on Monday trying to take the hill, and their deaths will remain a fixed part of history, whether or not any more soldiers die on Tuesday trying to take this particular hill.*



1. You bought forty jars of all-natural peanut butter when you saw it deeply discounted at Costco. Admittedly, you did have "peanut butter" on your list, but you usually only buy one jar at a time. You haven't tried this particular kind, but whatever you taste when you first put the spoon in your mouth, you're determined that you'll darn well enjoy it.

**Disliked story:**

**Preferred story:**

**Fixed reality:**



## **Answer to 1.**

**Disliked story:** Bought a cupboard full of yucky peanut butter.

**Preferred story:** Cleverly purchased good peanut butter in bulk.

**Fixed reality:** You bought a year's supply of a peanut butter you haven't tried, and it's either tasty or yucky; if yucky, pretending to like it and choking it down won't get your money back.

2. For your college, you select State U over Slightly More Prestigious U because your private joy is writing, and you think you'll really enjoy State U's writing courses—they have several famous authors on the faculty. Unfortunately, the morning you get your list of available courses, you see that last year's writing faculty has departed and been replaced by random English professors. Do you sign up for Crafting the Short Story at seven in the morning?

**Disliked story:**

**Preferred story:**

**Fixed reality:**



## Answer to 2.

**Disliked story:** You wasted your choice of State U on a writing program it abandoned—you should've gone to Slightly More Prestigious U.

**Preferred story:**

You chose State U for its writing program and, by golly, took those writing courses!

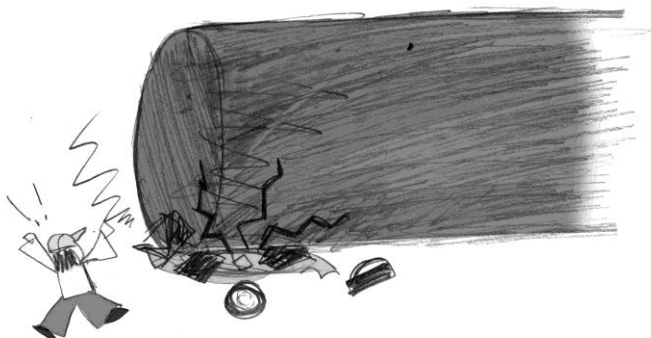
**Fixed reality:** You enrolled in State U, the famous authors left, and you now have a choice of courses—the writing ones probably aren't very good compared to the others.

3. You've always wanted to take a trip across the country someday. It so happens that your car has just met an unexpected and painful-to-think-about demise at the sadistic hands of a concrete guardrail. You don't currently have quite as much vacation time saved up as you wanted to take, and if not for the car accident, you'd probably have taken the trip later, when it could last longer. But wouldn't it be neat to have bought a new car just for your trip?

**Disliked story:**

**Preferred story:**

**Fixed reality:**



### **Answer to 3.**

**Disliked story:** You accidentally crashed your car. This was pointless, unpleasant, and there was no hidden reason it was secretly a good idea.

**Preferred story:** Thanks to that wonderful car accident, you got to have a new car just for your cross-country trip!

**Fixed reality:** You crashed your old car, creating a need to buy a new one immediately; you must do this whether you take your long-awaited trip now or later. If you take your long-awaited trip now, you won't have enough vacation days to make it as long as you wanted.



4. You fired your marketing guy, Fred, for incompetence - Fred kept hitting "reply all" on e-mails, and came up with patently ridiculous angles via which to present the product to customers. Now, having chosen and hired a replacement employee, Lara, it's time to write her first performance review.

**Disliked story:**

**Preferred story:**

**Fixed reality:**



## **Answer to 4.**

**Disliked story:** Foolishly fired Fred, even though the replacement employee was just as bad.

**Preferred story:** Sensibly fired Fred, and now have Lara, who is doing much better marketing than Fred did.

**Fixed reality:** You already fired Fred, you already hired a replacement, and that replacement won't be any better or worse if you bias her performance review.

5. You drive down to the city for a rare in-person meeting with the co-workers you usually only interact with by phone, but find when you arrive—via a text which you of course would not have dreamed of checking while driving—that it's been canceled. You're a busy person and don't have enough time to have wasted a trip—so it's time to see what else the city has to offer!

**Disliked story:**

**Preferred story:**

**Fixed reality:**



## **Answer to 5.**

**Disliked story:** Didn't check texts before leaving, and drove to and from the city pointlessly.

**Preferred story:** Drove down to the city, which is useful because now I can check out the city.

**Fixed reality:** You drove to the city and you'll have to drive back. (However, you can now do city-related things more cheaply than usual, if the “purchased option” of doing city-related things is worth it.)

6. You work hard on a blog post, and you want to believe it's really good. After all, you'd feel pretty silly if all those hours didn't produce a nice, useable post. So, when you go to ask your friend for comments on the draft, you find yourself asking leading questions, trying to get them to say good things and not bad things about your post.

**Disliked story:**

**Preferred story:**

**Fixed reality:**



## Answer to 6.

**Disliked story:** Spent long hours producing a blog post that has flaws and may need even more rewriting.

**Preferred story:** Spent long hours producing a perfect blog post which all your blog readers will soon admire.

**Fixed reality:** The blog post already exists, and is already good or bad -- changing the signals your friend gives you about it won't change the post's actual quality, any more than jiggling up and down on the scale will change your weight.

7. You choose Motel 6 over the \$20-cheaper Nowhereville Motel because Motel 6 has a pool. Alas, it's unusually chilly the next morning. But then you have a sudden epiphany—in which you realize that swimming on chilly mornings is especially pleasurable and invigorating! Right?

**Disliked story:**

**Preferred story:**

**Fixed reality:**



## **Answer to 7.**

**Disliked story:** Spent \$20 so you could swim at Motel 6, but then it was too cold to swim.

**Preferred story:** Sensibly spent \$20 to enjoy the Motel 6 pool, which was extra worthwhile because of the chilly, invigorating morning.

**Fixed reality:** Your \$20 is gone. You are at Motel 6. You have the purchased option to swim in the pool on this chilly morning, or not.