

A few months ago, I was visiting with my good friend, Sam Brown, the father of one of my great hometown friends, Luc, who many of you know as the barefoot guy from Long Walk. I think of Sam as one of my biggest mentors, and always look to him for guidance, wisdom, easy conversation, and a fresh new perspective on just about anything. During this particular visit, Sam was asking about some of the classes I was taking in college, particularly physics, which I was really enjoying. I remember telling him how fascinated I was with the study of waves, how something that was never composed of any real matter could present itself in various mediums such as water, instrument strings, light, and even a baseball bat, flowing or vibrating up and down, up and down.

After hearing me explain my fascinations, then came the Sam Brown perspective. He replied something along the lines of, "You know, I think the idea of waves keeps you from being depressed in life." At first, I was very confused by this. I had really no idea what Sam was talking about. So, I asked for clarification. Sam, of course, was referring to waves in a much more metaphorical sense than I. He went on to describe the idea of viewing your life as a wave. In life, too, we go through ups and downs, tons of them. We have our highlights, and we have our lowlights. Times when it seems everything is going our way, and other times when it seems we can't do anything right. Viewing life as this back and forth flow of relative ups and downs, we can know, even when we are at our worst, that if we keep grinding, things will pick back up, and we can use the low points to propel us to new highs. This was a very refreshing new perspective for me, and the idea resonated in my head for quite some time. By analyzing our faults and mistakes, I've become a big believer that we can rebound from the saddest, most frustrating times in our life, and use them to reach new heights. It is a perspective like this that got me out of one of the toughest times in my life from the past few years.

Two years ago, when arriving at the University of Maine, I did not know, with much certainty, what I wanted to study. What I was sure about, however, was that I very much wanted to continue pursuing sports in some form and devote myself to a craft, aside from my studies. But UMaine didn't really have any sports teams suited to my skillset and interests. The tennis team was club level and hardly ever competed. I wasn't interested in the ski team, as my passion for ski racing had faded greatly after four years of racing for my high school team. However, I was still very passionate about freestyle skiing and had gotten decently skilled at jumping and sliding rails over the previous couple of years. With this in mind, I made freestyle skiing my independent, unofficial collegiate sport with the goal of making gnarly videos, occasionally competing, and overall, progressing my aerial skills to their maximum potential, and becoming the most complete freestyle skier I could be.

As that first college ski season got underway, things went well for me. I skied nearly every day over winter break, and my jumping skills had never been better. After break, however, things got a bit more frustrating. Between going to class, and being an hour farther from a ski mountain than what I was used to in high school, I didn't get nearly the amount of time on skis necessary to facilitate the kind of progression that I desired. The way I saw it, this just meant that I had to ski extra hard on the days I could get out and really stretch my comfort zone more than usual.

On one particular day, February 1st, 2014 to be exact, I was doing exactly that. I was taking advantage of a weekend day at Sugarloaf Mountain Resort. I was stretching my comfort zone for sure, greatly pushing myself on all three of the bigger jumps that were set up that day,

the third of which I had originally deemed unhittable due to lack of speed, and its unnecessarily brutal nature. On this day, pushing the limits was seeming to work out for me, as my tricks were coming together seamlessly. My friends and I decided to pull out the video camera, which always seems to take the madness to another level. I skied up to the top of the jump line, determined to put down a good run. Off the first jump, I threw a switch 540. I had struggled with this trick a lot earlier in the season, but today, I landed clean. On the second jump, I threw a more technical cork 720, again landing clean. At this point, in my head, I knew that one more clean maneuver would easily make this the most complete and technical jump run I had ever put together. Skiing up to the last jump, I was determined to do exactly that. I popped off of the jump, and set my rotation for a 540, a trick that had become automatic for me this season. I floated through the air, and 2/3 of the way through, I look to spot my landing. I see the ground rushing up at me far earlier than I ever wanted or expected. SLAM. The ground quickly let me know that I didn't have nearly enough speed for this jump, and I essentially fell about 20 feet to flat, rather than the sloped landing area a couple feet farther. I landed sideways, awkwardly, and with much more force than normal legs are designed for, leaving me sliding down the landing in excruciating pain, and instantly tearing the ACL in my right knee, leaving meniscus tears, bone bruises, and fractures all through the joint. I knew pretty quickly that this was bad.

When the extent of the damage was confirmed through MRI, I knew what was ahead of me. Reconstructive knee surgery, months of rehab, and worst of all, no skiing for the rest of this season. And with knees being such a crucial part of a skier's body, I couldn't help but feel that I may never be able to ski at that same level again. To make things worse, this would be my second orthopedic surgery in three years. Injuries were really becoming my thing. I really started to feel like I couldn't win and that skiing was getting the best of me.

For about a month, I beat myself up, mentally, over the silly decision to push myself so hard on a jump that was clearly so dangerous. If I had been smart and just steered clear of it, I would have enjoyed the best ski season of my life. How could I have been so stupid. However, continuing this mindset of regret, as I soon figured out, wouldn't lead me to anything but depression. As Mr. Vinnie said earlier today from *Psyching for Sport*, "Self damnation serves no purpose." In order to rise up from this brutal experience, I had to reflect on it, and use the knowledge gained from my mistakes to improve my craft, and become a wiser athlete. It was a hard thing to convince myself of, that I could become a better skier from this experience, but I had to believe, as it was the only way to motivate myself and keep good spirits.

So I began my journey. Six months of physical therapy and gradual easing back into sports. After the summer of rehab passed, winter finally came, and I eased myself back onto my skis. After about a month of weekend skiing, I found that my knee was getting very strong, and finally seemed ready to take on the impacts involved in hitting jumps. I continued this progression of gradual ease, to see how much my knee could handle. I threw away my old approach, and took calculated risks, only really pushing myself when the conditions were good and I was very confident that I could safely pull off a maneuver. What surprised me, was that this new approach was working quite well. I was able to get through the next ski season injury free, I was becoming a much better skier than I ever was before the injury, cruising the mountain with a newfound respect for the potential damage that it could cause to my body. It wasn't long before I could easily put down a run that far surpassed the one that I had nearly

completed the year before. I was able to successfully use my mistakes to develop an improved approach to skiing, and thrive with it.

This same approach of valuing your mistakes, and using them to thrive, can be used in almost any situation. In social situations, for example, many of us have areas in which we struggle. Whether it be making friends, talking to girls, or just holding a simple conversation, we all make a fool of ourselves from time to time. But rather than dwelling on these shortcomings, view them as lessons. Figure out where things went wrong, and change your approach for next time.

Here at camp, during duties in particular, I'm sure we've all made many mistakes. But rather than harping on those mistakes, we use them as learning experiences. It is through those mistakes that we learn how to set a perfect table, correctly rig a 420, or effectively lead a group of our rowdy peers to make their dorm perfectly tidy and inspection ready. We try different approaches. Some fail miserably while others succeed, and it is through this process that we slowly develop our craft.

In closing, I know that we all will continue to make mistakes in our lives both big and small, both here and away from camp; it's just part of human nature. But when you do make mistakes, don't dwell on them. Try this approach: identify your mistakes, find value in them, and then use them to thrive.