

The Best Advice Never Looks Like It

I've received some excellent advice in my life.

Most of the time, it doesn't seem like great advice. It seems like simple, obvious stuff I already know, or close enough. Then six months later I have the, "Ohhh, now I see. Wow. That was great advice."

I don't know if this is because I'm arrogant or dense, or if this is an inevitable process. Information without enough context isn't that useful. If a marathoner tells you that the last few long runs in your training regime will be harder than the race itself, you'll smile and nod. It won't seem that useful. Six months later, when you've got just two more weekend long runs at 20 and 22 miles each before the marathon, it will be the most comforting, inspiring advice imaginable.

This is why it's hard to recognize good advice.

Bad advice, I think, is easy to recognize. It just feels stupid right away. Your gut knows it's off. You can read misaligned motives and incentives. It makes you grumpy, and not in a challenge you want to rise to sort of way.

Good advice usually doesn't feel bad right away, it just doesn't feel that amazing. It becomes more profound with each passing unit of time+experience. Not all simple-sounding advice turns out to be profound. Some of it turns out to be no more than meets the eye. But some of it gets better with age like a fine wine.

Makes me wonder what great advice is currently marinating in my brain that I haven't yet recognized as such.