

The Accidental Compliance Professional

Lesson 11. Nightmare on the Papaonga River

“Oh no. It broke!” said Gene, my friend Dan Roach’s dad.

We were sitting in our boat at the banks of the Papaonga River, which runs through a remote area of Ontario, Canada. It was dark, *very dark*. I couldn’t see what Gene was talking about, but I knew whatever broke was really important. This was the most animated I’d ever seen Gene. He was usually such a cool customer—he’d spent his career in mining and eventually became a steelworker’s union negotiator. Being a negotiator for the steelworker’s union was a long slog through the woods that involved solving never-ending problems. I waited for Gene to speak again and maybe give me a little more information—being quiet right then seemed like a good thing.

Finally . . . “The gas line broke,” he told us.

It had been a very long day: Gene, Dan, and I had started traveling at the crack of dawn and now it was the crack of dusk. We were in the middle of nowhere, because Dan and I were looking to buy a remote property in Canada. We looked at many places over close to five years, but the property off the Papaonga River was the one I wanted. However, I wasn’t going to buy it without my partner in crime—Dan—who had a problem with the property: there was no road to the lake the property was on. Dan wanted to be sure we could get there without using an expensive sea plane, so we were searching for other access routes. We tried to see if we could walk in from the end of a logging road, but that ended in what I would simply refer to as “the endless swamp disaster.”

Now we were trying for water access. After driving on logging roads all afternoon, we found an old overgrown road that seemed like it might head in the right direction. We walked in front of Gene as he slowly drove his truck behind us. Thick brush higher than our heads covered the road and we could barely see 10 feet in front of us. Fortunately the road ended only a quarter-mile from the Papaonga River. From there, we would use a boat to cover the last 5 miles by water to the property. It was very cold and misty, and we were 50 miles from the nearest light bulb, cell tower, or store. We had hauled our boat and supplies from the road’s end to the riverbank down a small slippery cliff, through more thick brush, and across a small swamp. But now the boat engine wouldn’t start with a broken hose. We were going nowhere, and we were far from help. Then suddenly, Gene had an idea.

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