

# GO BIG OR STAY HOME

## *The Ups and Downs of a Commercial Disaster Restorer*

*"When you're out on the road..., you're just constantly looking forward, constantly working. You don't really stop to look at where you are or where you've been."* Chris Cornell

*"Travel is glamorous only in retrospect."* Paul Theroux

In another life, both Chris (a rock star) and Paul (a writer) must have been restorers. How else could they have nailed what we go through when we go on the road? Talk to any grizzled veteran about Andrew, Gloria, or Katrina, and you will be regaled with tales of never-ending work, months and months of fun times, and millions of dollars of cash being given out by clueless adjusters like Willy Wonka giving out chocolate at his factory. Dig deeper, though, and you will find out some sobering details about jobs going upside-down, adjusters never issuing payments, and lawsuits lasting



years (if not decades). You will hear of horrible conditions, unreliable vendors, and endless blight and despair within the communities affected. More recent tales will tell of working in New York City, the capital of the universe, after Superstorm Sandy, sleeping on the street in a car for three weeks, eating only what could be gotten from a can or a seedy street vendor, and working in the basement of a huge Wall Street building with no power, heat or elevators.

That last one was me. Even though I lived only about 20 miles west of Wall Street in central New Jersey, my work schedule left me little time for rest, so I parked myself in my Acura TSX, itself parked on aptly-named Water Street in downtown Manhattan, catching some ZZZ's in between meetings and work tasks. Start at 6am, done around midnight, only to have to check in on three other buildings in the area before shutting it down for the night. Four hours straight was a God-send, and rarely took place in the first month. Having worked on Wall Street for over 25 years, this was never the nightlife that I had experienced, imagined or planned for. Yet there I was, blanket and canned goods in tow, bumming it on the mean streets of New York.



Well, I made it there, so as the song goes, I can make it anywhere! Having entered the industry in 2009, many veterans called me the jinx of the CATs (the term for catastrophic losses like hurricanes and massive floods). From about 2008 until Sandy, there had been an historic lull in hurricane activity for the US, so I bore the brunt of the blame. Part of my business was to assist in large loss, and even though there was plenty to go around, it



was always a “one-off” event- some sort of pipe break or sprinkler malfunction, never a real regional event. Now that Sandy had come and gone, I could shed the moniker of the “Jinx Guy” and get on with my coaching and support.

Since 2009, I have spent hundreds of nights in a strange bed (or couch, a few times) in a faraway town. I have worked in scores of facilities, from hotels to office towers, warehouses to assisted living centers, strip malls to mega-malls. As a consultant, I never signed up a single client, never committed significant company resources to a project, or never had to manage a home business while working on the road. Instead, I always supported the magnificent individuals within our industry who make those commitments every day.

When a restorer goes on the road, whether it is for CAT work or just a large loss outside of their regular market territory, he or she makes a huge decision, fraught with risk, uncertainty and fear. I am there to help lessen all of those conditions. I get to see the human experience first-hand, as these conditions will either break a man or bring out his best. If I am successful in what I do, the restorer will leave the project with a great learning experience, a solid

understanding of what they have done, and (hopefully) a nice profit for their efforts.

How many of you have thought (or dreamed) of working on the road? How many of you wanted to pack up the company and head out to North Carolina or Florida this past Fall? How many of you did just that? If not, what kept you from going?

**Reality check. The road is not for everyone.** More companies go out of business on the road than succeed. The old saying fits too perfectly here: *“Those failing to prepare are preparing to fail.”* Just hooking up the trailer and heading down the road is a recipe for sure demise. I can’t tell you how many of our brethren have done that, because the “war stories” were just too compelling.

**Planning, preparation, and patience. Those are the three keys to successful road work.**

