

How Not To Die In A Human Stampede

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We're living in the golden age of humanity.

At least survival-wise, where everything is safe, regulated, civilized, disinfected, we have enough food, no natural enemies and all that, today's article is about something relatively grim: staying alive in a stampede. A human stampede, that is.

See, there aren't many situations in "the current year", at least in the "first world", where you can contemplate the possibility of mass casualties, except from a terrorist attack or a mass shooting Las Vegas style.

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However, people still attend rock concerts or NFL games, yet almost no one is thinking about a contingency plan in case he or she gets caught in a human stampede. The sheer thought of a human stampede seems ridiculous to most people in the civilized world by the way. We're much better than that, and all that "normie" palaver.

You see where this is going, right?

We're talking about a serious and realistic survival scenario, where a relatively peaceful crowd goes berserk and engages in irrational behavior, for good reasons or for no reason whatsoever.

The worst thing about human stampedes, which by definition take place in crowded areas, is that they can be triggered by banal and non-threatening events, like fireworks or a woman screaming or whatever. Basically, the most insignificant and benign thing can make a crowd of people reach a "critical state" almost instantly. Then explosion follows. Then, all hell breaks loose.

Let me give you a couple of examples

Just last year, in Turin-Italy of all places, more than thirty thousand fans were gathered in the main square to watch a soccer game, as Juventus-Turin was playing in the European Champions League. Soccer is a big thing in Europe and draws huge crowds, but then, a firecracker sparked what it's commonly called a human stampede, which translated into more than 1500 injuries[1], some of which were very serious. Fortunately, no one got killed, but that was pure luck.

Why were people so scared of a firecracker? It's pretty simple: Islamic terrorism. I imagine people in the US attending a rock concert or whatever would be just as scared hearing a firecracker going off, as we have our own problems with mass shootings. Another example: the year is 2010, July, and we're in Germany at (oh, the irony) the Love Parade. 19 people were killed[2] and more than 300 were injured (some severely) during a human stampede that occurred as a huge crowd surged through an entrance tunnel in Duisburg, near Dusseldorf. Everything happened due to panic, chaos, and maybe trance music, who knows.

In the same year, in 2010, 345 people were killed[3] and more than 300 injured in Cambodia, at the Water Festival.

Again, for no apparent reason, people just panicked and trampled over each other. It is obvious that human stampedes tend to happen during public events (music festivals, sporting events etc) where there's mass attendance and, another important common denominator: there's a narrow, single point of entry and exit, where panicked massed of people trample over each other. In Cambodia was a bridge, in Germany was a tunnel, you do the math. And after people panic and there's not enough space, crowd dynamics take care of the rest.

How To Stay Calm In Stressful Situations

1 Control Your Breathing

When we are anxious or feeling stressed, we tend to take quick, shallow breaths. This can further exasperate our chances to stay calm as fast, light breaths can make us feel light-headed, dizzy and panicky. Try slowly inhaling a normal breath through your nose filling your lower lungs, holding it for a second, and then slowly releasing it through your mouth. Continue this gentle breathing pattern in a relaxed, slow manner until you feel calmer.

2 Avoid Caffeine

The last thing you need when you feel you are losing control, overwhelmed or stressed is caffeine. Caffeine is great when you need a boost, giving you a quick burst of energy, but it is a central nervous system stimulant that can cause anxiousness and jitters, further stimulating an already over stimulated brain in a stressful situation.

3 Stay Positive

Having a negative attitude in a stressful situation is a sure fire way to enable the moment to completely overwhelm you. Let go of negative thoughts, employ positive thinking and you'll find the situation less stressful.

4 Look At The Big Picture

The next time you find yourself in a stressful situation, take a step back and ask yourself: Is this going to matter to me tomorrow, next week, next month or a year from now? The answer is usually that it won't! As Richard Carlson said: "Don't sweat the small stuff!".

5 Focus On One Thing At A Time

Multi-tasking can certainly increase efficiency but it can also make life more complicated and often more stressful than necessary. Try focusing on just one job at a time and finish it before moving onto your next task and watch as your stress levels reduce and life becomes easier.

That's why you must understand crowd dynamics in a panic.

The most obvious thing to do if you want to avoid unpleasant situations, such as human stampedes, is to stay away from crowds. That's the "everything in life is location" mantra. Always avoid crowds. And I don't mean sporting and/or religious events, or music festivals only. People got crushed and killed trying to get into stores and buy cheap crap they don't need on Black Friday, or when they thought they've heard gunshots in a club or whatever.

Now, there are 2 scenarios when it comes to getting injured or killed during a human stampede: you can die from trampling (the most "popular" cause of death in such situations) or from compression asphyxia. What's that, you asked? Well, when it comes to high densities of people per square meter, 7 or more that is, people can get squeezed to death during stampedes, whether in a pileup or upright. And believe me, that's a very nasty way to meet your maker, not to mention utterly stupid.

The thing about panicked crowds is that they generate incredible amounts of energy, and once a human stampede is in motion, just like a train, it's almost impossible to stop. Just 7 people pushing together in the same direction will generate 1,000 lbs of force, and that's enough to topple a brick wall by the way. That's why people may get crushed to death even while standing up during a human stampede.

Situational awareness is key in avoiding human stampedes

While the best thing to remember is to stay away from potentially dangerous crowds, there are some tips and tricks you must learn in order to avoid and even to survive a crush, a crowd surge or even a human stampede.

The most important thing regarding situational awareness is to always make a mental map of your surroundings, as in to get familiar with the terrain, and no matter where you are at any point in time, to be perfectly aware of bottlenecks (such as tunnels/bridges/tight spaces) and alternate exits if SHTF. Ideally, you should be well familiarized with your surroundings BEFORE the human-stampede begins.

For example, if you're going to attend a music festival of sorts, make sure you learn where the exits are. Even if you're at a club, you should be aware of where the rear/emergency fire exits/windows are. Because, you never know what's going to happen, right?

When SHTF, most people tend to follow each other, that's "crowd dynamics" in motion, and usually, they'll try to exit a given venue using the same point they've entered it, because it's the "familiar

route". Fewer people are going to use alternative routes, hence that's the proper way to safely exit the premises in a SHTF scenario. How to avoid a human stampede, you asked? When it's the best time to go for the exits? The general rule of thumb is when you start to feel uncomfortable. Follow your instincts, if any. If your gut is telling you to "bugger off", just do it, even if you don't really want to leave. Don't postpone the decision, you may regret it later.

So, to recapitulate

Have an exit strategy whenever you arrive at a given event, and be aware of all exit locations; moreover, as soon as you notice the crowd becoming too dense, follow your instincts and get the hell out of there, seek open space. Most people don't realize they're in mortal danger until there's too late.

If you're in immediate danger of getting caught in a human stampede, take cover, if possible. If you're indoors, look for a closet or a side hallway, if you're outside, look for a vehicle, or a tree you can climb on, anything available to shield you from the moving crowd. If taking cover is not an option, keep moving, don't try to resist the unstoppable force of a human stampede, it will only drain your energy, and physical stamina is critical if you want to stay alive. However, that doesn't mean you have to blindly follow the direction of the crowd.

You must try to pursue a diagonal trajectory to the flow of the crowd, thus trying to reach the edge of the "human-river", in order to prevent getting stuck (and injured/killed) in a bottleneck, like a narrow hall or a doorway or whatever.

Remember how I told you about people dying from compression asphyxia?

The proper posture in a stampede is arms up, like a boxer! If you keep your arms up, you'll be able to push out against people crushing you, and thus you'll be able to breathe. Always stay away from chocking points, I can't emphasize this enough. Choke points like bridges, doorways, hallways, tunnels, any imaginable space that may restrict the flow of people.

Usually speaking, these narrow places will lead to the nearest exit, but that's what makes them dangerous. If you fall down, try to get up as quickly as you can, don't be afraid to ask for help. Stay away from fences and walls; contrary to popular wisdom, this is a really dangerous strategy; as crowd pressure builds up, you may get crushed like a bug. Literally.

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Think twice before going to crowded events, and keep in mind that human stampedes occur more frequently than you think, but they're kept quiet by organizers, as this kind of news affects tourism and the "money flow".

Another sad truth is that many people die in stampedes after falling because they get no help from their fellow men. Lack of compassion, that's why they die. Most people are not good Samaritans, and regardless of what the experts claim, pushing and shoving in a stampede are not involuntary actions.

Also, no matter how good crowd control is, and how well organized the respective event is, with clearly marked exits and all that, nothing changes the human condition. Some people are purely stupid, or plain evil, and that will always cause problems in a crowd.

That about sums it up for today.

I hope you enjoyed reading the article. If you have questions or comments, don't hesitate to use the dedicated section below. Good luck, have fun folks!

Resources

[1] <http://www.newsweek.com/turin-how-false-alarm-left-more-1500-injured-during-champions-league-620910>

[2] <https://www.theage.com.au/world/stampede-at-love-parade-kills-19-20100725-10q1z.html>

[3] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/nov/23/cambodia-water-festival-phnom-penh>

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