

Bad advice has a smell. Not always at first. Sometimes it arrives wearing a clean shirt, carrying a clipboard, and speaking with the confidence of a man who has once successfully assembled a barbecue. It can come from a boss, a cousin, a stranger at a petrol station, a gym instructor with frightening calves, or an uncle who begins every sentence with, "What you want to do is..."

The trouble is that bad advice often sounds decisive. Good advice tends to include caveats, context, and the phrase "it depends," which nobody wants to hear when they are late, broke, embarrassed, sunburned, or standing beside a wedding cake that has begun to lean. Bad advice, meanwhile, marches in with its chest out. It says, "Trust me." It says, "I've done this loads of times." It says, "You don't need a professional." Those are famous last words, right up there with "hold my drink" and "the dog seems friendly."

The funniest true stories tend to live in that thin crack between confidence and disaster. Not tragedies, obviously. Nobody wants a laugh at real harm. The sweet spot is inconvenience with a soundtrack. A ruined dinner. A job interview with hair dye still developing. A romantic gesture that summons the fire brigade. A family holiday redirected by one person's firm belief that the satnav "doesn't understand shortcuts."

That is why bad advice is such rich material for any comedy podcast, funny podcast, or funny stories podcast that knows how to let a story breathe. The advice is the fuse. The person taking it seriously is the match. The explosion is usually a casserole, a pigeon, or a hotel manager asking everyone to please stop using the decorative fountain as a cooling system.

The confidence tax

A friend of mine once worked in a small office where the printer jammed so often it had practically become a colleague. One Monday morning, after the machine swallowed half a contract and began making a noise like a fork in a ceiling fan, the office manager said, "Don't call IT. You just have to talk to it."

She meant this literally.

According to her, machines responded to energy. "Firm, but respectful," she said, placing both hands on the printer as if comforting a horse during fireworks. The junior account executive, eager to prove himself and still new enough to believe offices were rational ecosystems, leaned toward the machine and said, "We really need page six, please."

The printer beeped.

"See?" said the office manager.

Then it released one blank sheet, one crumpled sheet, and what appeared to be a hot, accordion-folded version of the company's insurance policy. The junior account executive, now fully committed to diplomacy with office equipment, spent the next ten minutes negotiating with it while three grown adults watched in silence. When IT finally arrived, the technician opened the tray, pulled out a paperclip, and said, "Why is there lipstick on the control panel?"

Nobody answered.

Bad advice makes people pay what I think of as the confidence tax. It is the price of accepting certainty from someone who skipped the boring part where expertise is built. The tax can be financial, social, or deeply physical, like when someone tells you that chilli oil is "basically moisturiser" because they once used it on their elbows in Greece and felt "very alive."

The confidence tax is why funny true stories often begin with someone saying, "He sounded like he knew what he was talking about." That phrase should be printed on warning labels.

"Put it in rice" and other folk medicine for electronics

There is a whole category of bad advice that survives because it is easy to remember. Drop your phone in water? Put it in rice. Stain your shirt? White wine fixes red wine, unless it doesn't, in which case now you have a cocktail blouse. Locked out? Use a credit card, because apparently doors in real life are built by the same people who make cereal box mazes.

The rice one deserves special attention. People love it because it feels like a tiny domestic ritual. You baptise your phone in toilet water, panic, then bury it in basmati like a Viking funeral for data. I once watched a man at a barbecue drop his phone into a paddling pool while trying to film a sausage rolling off a paper plate. Within thirty seconds, four guests had shouted "rice!" with the urgency of medics calling for defibrillators.

The host did not have rice. He had couscous.

Someone said, "Same thing."

It was not the same thing.

The phone spent six hours in a casserole dish full of couscous, emerging with moisture under the screen and tiny grains wedged in every port. For weeks afterward, whenever he plugged it in, it made a faint grinding sound. The phone never fully recovered, but the video did. The sausage rolled, paused at the edge of the plate, and dropped into the grass with the solemn inevitability of a historical event. Worth it? He said no. Everyone else said yes.

This is the pattern with many funny real life stories: the advice sounds reasonable because it resembles something useful. Rice can absorb moisture in some settings. Credit cards can open certain weak spring latches in films and terrible rental properties. But the leap from "sometimes plausible" to "universal law" is where the clown shoes appear.

The uncle school of automotive repair

Cars are magnets for bad advice because they contain just enough visible parts to make amateurs dangerous. A kettle hides its secrets. A car lifts its bonnet and says, "Go on then, genius."

I once knew a man whose uncle insisted that any engine problem could be fixed by "letting it breathe." This seemed to mean removing something, waiting, nodding gravely, then putting it back in a different order. When the nephew's old hatchback began overheating, the uncle arrived with a toolbox, a cigarette, and the moral authority of someone who had owned seven vans.

"Thermostat's probably confused," he said.

A thermostat, to him, was less a mechanical component and more a moody intern.

He advised driving with the heater on full blast, windows open, and the bonnet "not all the way shut, just resting." This, he claimed, would "draw the heat forward." The nephew, who needed to get to work and did not have money for a mechanic until payday, followed the instructions.

For twelve miles, the car looked as if it were trying to inhale the road. The bonnet bounced gently at every traffic light. Hot air blasted through the vents. Papers flew around the cabin. The driver arrived at work sweating like a witness under cross-examination, smelling faintly of coolant, and with eyebrows that seemed personally offended.

A mechanic later found a failing water pump. The uncle's response was, "That'll do it."

That is another hallmark of bad advice taken seriously. The advisor is rarely humbled by failure. They simply absorb the new facts into their mythology. If the car breaks down, that proves you did not follow the advice early enough. If the haircut is crooked, that proves you moved. If the cake collapses, that proves modern flour has changed.

Weddings, weather apps, and one devastating spreadsheet

Wedding advice is particularly risky because weddings create a fog of emotion thick enough to hide common sense. People who normally compare train prices for twenty minutes will spend £900 on chair sashes because someone said the room needed "movement." Families become temporary governments. Friends become unpaid logistics staff. Bad advice thrives in the champagne fumes.

A wedding planner I know, who has seen more human behaviour in marquees than most psychologists, once told me about a groom's father who was obsessed with weather. He had three weather apps, a printed forecast, and what he called "cloud instincts." The ceremony was outdoors. The planner recommended setting up the backup indoor space because the forecast showed a decent chance of rain. The groom's father disagreed.

"Rain won't come until after four," he said.

The ceremony was at two.

[larry podcast](#)

"How do you know?" the planner asked.

He tapped his spreadsheet.

The spreadsheet had no meteorological data, only past family events and whether it had rained at them. Apparently rain had never interrupted a family wedding, which he considered statistically meaningful. He advised everyone to "trust the pattern."

At 2:17, the sky opened with biblical enthusiasm. Not a drizzle. Not a polite British mist. A full theatrical downpour. Guests screamed. The string quartet tried to protect their instruments with napkins. The bride laughed, which saved the day from becoming a war crime. The groom's father stood under a tree, staring at his wet spreadsheet as if betrayed by a close friend.

The indoor backup was used for the reception. The ceremony photos, however, became legendary. Everyone looked delighted and insane. The bride's veil clung to her like cling film. The best man's speech began, "I'd like to thank the father of the groom for personally negotiating with the clouds."

Funny stories that actually happened often have this mercy built in: the thing that went wrong becomes better than the thing that was planned. Not cheaper. Not less stressful. But better as a story. A dry wedding ceremony can be lovely. A soaked one with a violinist playing through gritted teeth becomes family folklore.

The bad advice hall of fame

Some advice is too common, too resilient, and too funny not to classify. These are not scientific categories. They are field notes from kitchens, offices, cars, group chats, and the back corners of pubs where men explain mortgages to people who did not ask.

| Bad advice | Why people believe it | Usual result | |---|---|---| | “Just act confident.” | Confidence does help in small doses. | Someone confidently enters the wrong meeting and takes notes. | | “Nobody will notice.” | People want relief from embarrassment. | Everyone notices immediately, especially children. | | “Do it yourself, it’s easy.” | Online videos edit out panic. | Three trips to the hardware shop and one new swear word. | | “Use more garlic.” | Often correct, dangerously overapplied. | Guests taste tomorrow before dessert. | | “Don’t tell them, it’ll be fine.” | Avoidance feels like strategy. | It is not fine, and now there are emails. |

The phrase “nobody will notice” may be the most powerful of the lot. It has launched stained shirts into boardrooms, lopsided shelves onto walls, and home haircuts into school photo day. The person saying it means well. They are offering emotional morphine. But children, mothers, and receptionists at dentists have supernatural powers of observation. They will notice. They will name the shade. They will ask if it was deliberate.

The home haircut economy

The true golden age of bad advice may have been the period when large numbers of people decided, either through necessity or boredom, that hairdressing was mostly confidence plus scissors. Households became salons. Kitchens became crime scenes. Partners said, “How hard can it be?” and discovered the answer: harder than soup, easier than dentistry, still not a game.

A man I know asked his flatmate to trim the back of his hair before a video job interview. The flatmate had once clipped a dog and felt qualified. The advice came from a third friend on speakerphone, who said, “Start longer than you think, then blend.”

Good advice, technically. But “blend” is doing a lot of work there. It is a verb that contains an apprenticeship.

The flatmate began with caution, then corrected the caution, then corrected the correction. Within twenty minutes, the back of the candidate’s head looked like a golf course after a fox fight. The front remained untouched, giving him the appearance of a normal professional from one angle and a Victorian orphan from another.

“Just don’t turn around,” said the flatmate.

It was a video interview.

Halfway through, the interviewer asked him to close the door behind him because of noise in the corridor. He stood, turned, and revealed the landscape. The interviewer paused for the tiniest moment, the kind of pause that contains an entire opera, then carried on. He did not get the job, though to be fair, he also described Excel as “emotionally dense,” so the haircut may not have been the deciding factor.

The home haircut story survives because it has stakes just high enough to matter and low enough to laugh at. Hair grows back. Pride takes longer, but it also returns, usually with a hat.

When travel advice goes feral

Travel produces crazy true stories because nobody is at their best when hungry in a place with unfamiliar parking rules. Add bad advice and you get chaos with souvenirs.

A couple once told me about a holiday in Italy where a man at their rental apartment advised them to visit a “secret beach” that tourists never found. The directions were poetic rather than useful. “Follow the road until it feels wrong,” he said, “then keep going.”

This should have ended the conversation.

Instead, they wrote it down.

They drove for nearly an hour along roads that shrank from two lanes to one lane to a philosophical suggestion. The rental car, a tiny manual Fiat with the emotional range of a wasp, struggled uphill. At one point they had to reverse for 300 metres because a farmer in a tractor approached with the calm of a man who knew exactly which vehicle would surrender.

Eventually they reached a cove. It was beautiful. It was also not secret. It contained about eighty people, a snack bar, and a sign advertising pedal boats in German. The “secret” part, apparently, was that parking cost €18 and the machine accepted only coins minted during the reign of a specific moon.

The couple spent the afternoon on towels bought from a man who appeared from behind a rock at the first sign of foreign confusion. On the drive back, they found a main road that would have taken twelve minutes.

The advice had not been malicious. It had been local in the most dangerous sense: accurate only if you had lived there since birth, understood seasonal goat movement, and considered a cliffside track “basically fine.”

That is a useful travel rule. When someone gives directions that include feelings, memories, or livestock, ask a second person.

Restaurant recommendations from people with no taste buds

Food advice is intimate. People reveal themselves when recommending restaurants. Some care about flavour. Some care about value. Some want lighting that forgives. Some think the best restaurant is the one where the waiter remembers their divorce.

The worst recommendation I ever followed came from a taxi driver who insisted that a certain seafood place was “where the locals go.” That phrase has trapped more tourists than wet cement. We arrived to find an empty dining room, laminated menus, and a lobster tank containing one lobster that looked like it had lost a legal battle.

The waiter recommended the house special. We asked what it was. He said, “Mixed.” That should have prompted evacuation. Instead, guided by taxi-driver confidence and hunger, we ordered.

The dish arrived under a metal dome, which always suggests either fine dining or a practical joke. Beneath it sat a beige arrangement of seafood parts in a sauce the colour of old envelopes. The prawns had the texture of pencil erasers. The mussels refused to open, which I respected. Halfway through the meal, a family came in, looked at our plates, whispered among themselves, and left.

When the taxi driver picked us up later, he asked how it was.

“Interesting,” we said.

He nodded. “Yes. Very traditional.”

Some advice is not wrong exactly. It is calibrated to someone else’s standards. A person who likes quiet restaurants may recommend an empty one without considering why it is empty. A person who values portion size may send you to a place where the lasagne weighs as much as a printer. A person who says “authentic” may mean delicious, or they may mean there is a goat skull near the till.

The social courage scam

“Just be honest” is excellent advice in principle and occasionally catastrophic in practice. Honesty without timing, tact, or context is not virtue. It is a dropped piano.

A woman I know once asked a colleague whether her presentation slides were “too much.” The colleague, recently inspired by a self-help book and a podcast episode about radical candour, took the advice to be honest with missionary zeal.

“Yes,” he said. “They look like a ransom note made by a committee.”

This was not false. The slides had seven fonts and a pie chart that seemed to be levitating. But the presentation was in forty minutes. Useful honesty would have been, “Let’s simplify the first three slides and make the rest consistent.” Instead, the colleague delivered a review so vivid that the presenter spent the next half hour changing fonts in a state of spiritual injury.

The presentation went fine, but the colleague became known as Ransom Note for the rest of the quarter.

The problem was not honesty. The problem was advice stripped of judgment. “Just be honest” works when someone has time to act on the truth and trusts your intentions. It fails when the truth arrives like a brick through a greenhouse. If the dress cannot be changed, if the speech starts in five minutes, if the dinner is already cooked, honesty should put on slippers and tread carefully.

Why bad advice makes such good audio

There is a reason a comedy storytelling podcast can build entire episodes around people making one poor decision after receiving one confident sentence. Bad advice creates a clean story engine. Someone wants something. Someone else offers a shortcut. The shortcut becomes a tunnel. The tunnel contains bees.

For a true stories podcast, the best bad-advice tales usually have three ingredients. The advice must be specific enough to quote, the listener must understand why someone believed it, and the outcome must escalate in a way that feels inevitable only afterward. “My brother told me to save money by transporting a mattress on top of a Mini Cooper using two belts and prayer” is already halfway to a segment.

The audio format helps because bad advice is often funniest in the original voice. “Let the printer know you respect it” is a sentence that needs tone. “Follow the road until it feels wrong” improves when delivered in the dreamy confidence of a man who owns linen trousers. A written account can describe the absurdity, but a funny podcast host can pause, repeat the advice, and let the audience hear the trap closing.

Hilarious true stories also benefit from witnesses. One person remembers the event as mildly embarrassing. Another remembers that the dog ate a napkin during the apology. A third remembers the exact phrase used by the hotel manager. Memory is imperfect, of course, and responsible storytellers should avoid dressing guesses as facts. But when several people agree that Grandpa tried to fix the dishwasher with barbecue tongs because “water respects leverage,” you are allowed to preserve the quote for future generations.

A small survival guide for suspicious advice

Not all bold advice is bad. Some of it saves time, money, and face. The trick is to recognise when confidence has outrun competence. Before taking advice that could affect your job, body, car, money, wedding, plumbing, phone, or eyebrows, run it through a quick sniff test.

1. Ask, “Have you personally done this successfully more than once?”
2. Ask, “What happens if this goes wrong?”

3. Check whether the advice giver benefits from you acting quickly.
4. Look for missing details hidden inside words like “just,” “easy,” and “basically.”
5. If the plan involves heat, ladders, seafood, hair dye, or lying to an official form, get a second opinion.

That list will not protect you from every disaster. Life is too creative. It may, however, reduce the number of times you find yourself standing in a hotel lobby at midnight explaining why your suitcase contains six wet shoes and a borrowed table lamp.

The joy of surviving your own foolishness

The best thing about bad advice stories is that they age beautifully once the embarrassment cools. At the time, they feel like emergencies. Years later, they become gifts. The ruined haircut becomes the photograph everyone begs to see. The terrible restaurant becomes shorthand for trusting men who say “very traditional.” The wedding downpour becomes proof that joy can survive weather and spreadsheets.

There is generosity in laughing at these stories, provided the laughter includes the person who lived them. We have all been the fool at least once. We have all trusted the wrong confident voice. We have all ignored the small internal librarian whispering, “Perhaps we should research this,” because the louder part of us wanted a shortcut, a bargain, a miracle, or simply for the problem to be over.

That is what makes funny real life stories more satisfying than invented jokes. They carry the grain of actual human weakness. We want to believe the uncle, the taxi driver, the office manager, the man with the secret beach. We want simple fixes. We want rice to save the phone, confidence to save the interview, garlic to save the stew, and a spreadsheet to hold back rain.

Sometimes, against all odds, bad advice even works. The shelf stays up. The shortcut saves time. The weird local restaurant serves the best meal of your life. That possibility keeps the whole foolish economy running. If bad advice failed every time, we would abandon it. Instead, it succeeds just often enough to remain dangerous, like a pub quiz team led by someone who knows a lot about flags but nothing about medicine.

So here is to the people who took bad advice seriously and lived to tell it. The ones who trusted couscous with a smartphone. The ones who negotiated with printers. The ones who followed roads until they felt wrong. The ones who drove with the heater blasting and the bonnet trembling like a nervous eyelid. They have given the rest of us something better than wisdom. They have given us funny stories that actually happened.

And if anyone tells you the solution is simple, cheap, and guaranteed, listen carefully. Not because you should follow it. Because it might be the opening line of your next great story.