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# Uncommon Sense

Providing Clarity, Promoting Intelligence

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Issue: # 007

July 4, 2011

## Greetings!

Today marks the anniversary of the founding of the United States of America. 235 years have now passed since the signing of the Declaration of Independence, launching one of the truly bold, noble, and ambitious experiments in human governance. Our republic, founded on such ideals as *e pluribus unum* (from the many - one), liberty, and In God We Trust, remains to this day a beacon of light and hope for millions of others the world over who wish to immigrate here.

I am grateful to be a part of this shining "City on a Hill" and I hold in the deepest respect the Founding Fathers such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and Benjamin Franklin (and others) who were men of enormous magnitude, deep intellect, and awesome courage. They didn't always agree with each other, but in spite of their differences, they managed to pull off a feat that, 235 years later, gives us all reason to celebrate.

I wish you a most splendid and safe Independence Day!

Warm regards,

Ara Norwood

## Planning and Execution

People who are effective are that way, in large part, because they plan to be. Planning is an

important component of the successful individual. When coupled with the all-important component we call *execution*, the two combine to produce a formidable achiever. There are many ways to engage in the planning process. Here is how I do it:



First, I do something very cerebral: I review my personal mission statement, my governing values, and my key roles. As I presume, unless you've had this publication emailed to you from a friend, you are a subscriber to *Uncommon Sense*, you undoubtedly received a complimentary copy of my special report "11 Ways To Beat The Odds: A Primer For Successful Individuals." You'll recall the first thing I spent time on in that publication was identifying your values. Perhaps you need to go back and review that content. Either way, effective individuals begin the planning process by contemplating and reflecting on their core values as well as their mission statement (if they have one - and they should) as well as the key roles they play in life.

Roles are not that difficult to figure out. It's much more daunting to craft a compelling mission statement, and it probably takes more concentrated thought to adopt the small handful of values you will claim as personifying you. But roles are relatively simple to identify. Just think through the major roles of your life at this current moment in time that are important to you. You can combine them any way you wish. Some people like to separate family roles as follows: *mother*; *sister*; *wife* - as three separate roles, while others are content to group all three preceding roles under the single role of *family member*. Same goes for roles in one's professional life: some might break out aspects of their job into separate roles (i.e., *Manager - Research*; *Manager - Coach*; *Manager - Projects*) whereas someone with a different temperament may chose to group all of those aspects of their job under the single role *Manager*. Either way is fine, but I would caution you against adopting too many roles. Seven

seems to be close to the limit of what most people can handle. I myself have eight, which I consider to be a bit extreme.

Next, once you have reviewed your mission, values, and roles, you want to address the question of goals. Goals are the major accomplishments or achievements that motivate you. The process of setting goals can take on many dimensions, as the major goals may be of a nature that they take a fair amount of time to accomplish. A prominent political figure may set a goal to become the Presidential Candidate for the Republican Party of the United States. Depending on when that goal is set in relation to when the next election season surfaces, achieving such a goal may be a two or three year process. Likewise, a person of modest means may set a goal to purchase an expensive car, say a Jaguar XK convertible. Once committed, the achievement of that goal may require 9 to 18 months of planning and saving.

But any major goal is going to require the achievement of a number of smaller, more manageable tasks, and it is those smaller tasks that an effective achiever identifies and commits him/herself to accomplish in a given window of time. I like to focus on a weekly basis. I look at each of my roles and I ask myself what sort of goals or tasks would I like to accomplish within that week for each role I play. After careful consideration, I write them down. Committing them to writing is critically important, as having them in front of me throughout the week enables me to stay focused and do the things that need to be done to attain the goals.

A quick tip on goal setting. Consider these two sentences:

*I have to do this.*

*I choose to do this.*

Consider how you feel when you utter each of those two sentences. Chances are you feel much more empowered by the second sentence.

I recommend you keep that in mind as you set your goals for the week.

Over time, you will find that you are accomplishing far more than you have in the past.

And that gives you much to celebrate!

## The Secular Religion

I spotted an interesting development at the *New York Times*, one of the most vociferously and blatantly Left-leaning papers in the country. The story involves an organizational change in the office of Executive Editor. Bill Keller, who had been in that role since July 2003, announced he would be stepping down to become a full-time writer for the paper. He is to be replaced by Jill Abramson who will assume the chair in September - the first woman to do so in New York Times history.



I think it interesting and informative what Ms. Abramson had to say of the promotion, which she likened to "ascending to Valhalla." (Valhalla is the name of a mythical place that, in Norse mythology, dead combatants go to live after they are slain - sort of the pagan equivalent of the Christian idea of heaven.) I don't wish to make too much of the comment by Ms. Abramson, but it's hard not to wonder if she used the term "Valhalla" rather than the more normative term "heaven" for fear that such a term would make her sound religious, or, heaven-forbid, Christian.

But speaking of religion, the next statement out of her mouth was quite telling: "In my house growing up, the Times substituted for religion. If the Times said it, it was the absolute truth." It may be merely ironic that when she was working for the

New York Times as the Washington Bureau Chief, the Jason Blair scandal broke, which involved a Times reporter who had been guilty of both plagiarism and fabrication in his reporting for the New York Times.

But the Jason Blair scandal aside, one wonders how literally to take her account. As religion is meant to be a vehicle for spiritual transcendence and drawing nearer to God, transforming us from selfish, wicked individuals into persons of humility, faith, and goodness, does Ms. Abramson literally believe that she got such transcendent qualities by reading the New York Times, rather than attend, say, the local Jewish Synagogue or Lutheran Church in her neighborhood?

And does this experienced newspaper professional still believe, as she claims to have believed in her youth, that the New York Times prints the absolute truth on *any* news story? My question does not conceal a suspicion I reserve for the New York Times; *absolute truth* is an ideal I reserve for Persons other than fallible mortals.

If Ms. Abramson does still believe that the NY Times is a worthy substitute for religion, I think that would suggest that she is right in line with Leftist thinking on the matter. For many on the Left, the NY Times provides as much transcendence as they could ever hope to receive, as much as the Gospel of John or the Epistles of Paul provide to the typical Christian, or the Torah provides to the typical Jew.

This is because Leftism is just as much a religion as is anything found in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Leftism is a secular religion.

### Shameless Plug: Career Coaching

I received a call the other day from a man I deeply respect and look up to. He has been in a successful career for his entire adult life, and was a real achiever long before he became an adult.

But his call brought out the fact that he was now stymied in his career and needed some guidance. He sought me out for such guidance.

Considering who this individual is, and the esteem in which I hold him, I was humbled by his request for help. But help was (and is) being provided.

If you need a systematic shot-in-the-arm with respect to figuring out your career direction, consider [scheduling me](#) for a consultation. It may not be free, but the results can be breathtaking.

Email me directly to discuss how I can help:  
ara@aranorwood.com

## From Ara's Journal

Honestly, being a parent has its ups and its downs.

Sometimes I wonder if I'm cut out to be a parent. And other times, as I face the inevitable disappointments or unnerving things my kids can do, I am tempted to throw up my hands and think that I am done with this "parenting thing."

But then I remember an event that occurred perhaps 11 years or so ago. Let me try to describe it.

I had taken my family to spend a weekend at a cabin my sister-in-law had allowed us to use.

While I do not remember a lot of details about that mini-vacation, I do remember being alone with one of my daughters for a few minutes. She was only 5 or 6 at the time. We were out in the yard, where there was a swing set for kids to play on.

And I recall sitting on the swing with her on my lap, swinging very slowly back and forth. It was a slow, mellow moment, and kind of lazy and contemplative.

All of a sudden, and out of the blue, this little girl



just looked up at me. And then she smiled.

And that smile spoke of pure contentment, of a little girl feel safe and feeling love and feeling happiness.

Just yesterday, that same daughter, now age 16, sent me a text message on my cell phone. She is out of town visiting a friend and has been gone about a week. She texted me and said she missed me. I had been thinking about this episode I've just written about moments before she texted me, and I mentioned it to her. I was sure she would never remember it, as she was so young at the time, and it happened so long ago. But when I described the details of that moment, she replied that she remembered it vividly.

I guess parenting's ups do outweigh parenting's downs.

## The World of Words

### Building Your Power of Expression

**Bastardize**, verb

**Pronunciation:** 'bastər,dīz

**Meaning:** While the purists among us may fret that this word is a sophist attempt to disguise profanity, the word is actually perfectly acceptable. It is meant to convey the idea of corruption of something by adding new elements which change its character.

### Usage:

- *In quoting Shakespeare, please note that I am going from memory, so I hope I don't bastardize this too much.*
- *The would-be chef added ingredients that were so beyond the pale of orthodoxy that the dish was bastartized beyond recognition.*



- *The theologian's interpretation represented a bastardization of scripture.*

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Subscribers, the Special Report "11 Ways to Beat the Odds" is now complete and has been sent out. If you have not received it, please communicate that to me via email ([ara@aranorwood.com](mailto:ara@aranorwood.com)).

For more information on my work, follow me on Twitter ("Ara Norwood"), or on Facebook (keyword "Leadership Development Systems") or via my website: [www.aranorwood.com](http://www.aranorwood.com)

**Sincerely,**

Ara Norwood  
Leadership Development Systems