

Uncommon Sense

Providing Clarity, Promoting Intelligence

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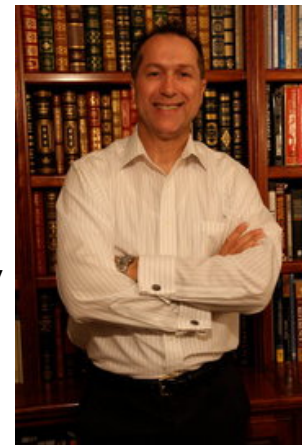
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Greetings!

I just returned late last night from a ten-day trip to Europe. I brought my twin 17-year old daughters with me and was impressed that they were so taken with the beauty of the art we encountered in The Louvre, as well as the majestic presence that is St. Germaine.

But being back on U.S. soil finds me energized -- as I don't feel a hint of jet-lag at this time. I've got lots to do and I am excited by this issue of *Uncommon Sense*.



I lead off with a guest editorial by my friend and colleague Scott Edinger. The piece originally appeared earlier this month in the Harvard Business Review Blog, and is reprinted with permission. Scott's heart is as big as his mind is vast and he has much to contribute to this world. We are the lucky recipients of his wise counsel. Read his words (and mine) and profit from them.

Okay, let's get started.

Warm regards,

Ara Norwood

Get Ready to Fail by Scott Edinger

You will fail. It's inevitable, so you might as well begin preparing for it now. The failure may be small, like, say, making a mistake on a client engagement. Or it may be quite grand, like losing a job you valued. How you handle that failure can raise or lower the risks of failing again - and shape your legacy as a leader.

Some people handle these setbacks well. Others not so well. In my work, I've observed several common themes among those leaders who tend to cope particularly effectively with the inescapable.



Acknowledge the failure and put it in perspective. You can't begin to bounce back from a mistake if you don't admit you've made it. As obvious as it sounds, it's clearly not always easy to do. [Research shows](#) that owning up to their mistakes is the key factor separating those who handle failure well from those who don't. Those who were derailed perseverated and didn't talk to others about it. They made little attempt to rectify the consequences. Those who weren't derailed did the opposite: They admitted their mistakes, accepted responsibility, and then took steps to fix the problem. And afterwards, they proceeded to forget about it and move on.

Look for causes, not blame. If you've caused a problem, the good news is that you have control over that cause. By focusing on finding the cause(s), rather than assigning blame (with all the value judgments that go with that), you take control and move to prevent similar failures from happening again. Thinking in terms of causes rather than blame is similar to adopting what [Carol Dweck describes](#) as a "growth-oriented" rather than a "fixed" mind-set. A fixed mind-set tends to leave us helpless and ready to wilt in the face of a challenge. A growth mind-set puts us in a position to press on toward success.

Before you wrack your brain to think up an appropriate response, take a break. Get away from the task at hand for a while and let your brain refocus. None of us is designed to work 24/7, but in the wake of failure, it's often hard to stop thinking about what's happened. As counter-intuitive as it sounds, this is probably the last thing you should do. Engage in other pursuits. Spend time with loved ones, read, or simply get some rest. Physical activity is a plus (we're all familiar with the effects of endorphins on brain activity). It doesn't matter how long of a break you take: five minutes, five hours, five days. The point is to let your mind wander. You'll be amazed at what you come up with.

Get some help. Feeling down is normal. Prolonged periods of depression and despair are not. If you find you can't get into that growth-oriented mind-set no matter how much of a break you take, find some way to express your feelings in the company of someone you trust. That could be a friend, a colleague, a mentor, or a therapist. There's no shame in seeking help when you've suffered a setback. And therapy no longer carries the stigma of being damaged that it used to. To prove that, I'll admit here that I've gone to therapy at times in my life when I've felt particularly down, and it has helped immensely. See, no stigma.

Refocus your efforts and take action. Nothing will make you feel quite as good as taking action and finding even a modicum of success in that action. It may take some time to reach that success, but you certainly won't have any until you start trying. One of the ways we feel better is to exert influence and control over a situation, and creating a plan of the actions we intend to take is a surefire way to start feeling that control. Create your plan and get specific about what you'll do to reach your new goals. While you can't change what's happened, you have options for the future, and as you refocus your efforts, think about what would be best from this point forward.

No matter how you dice it, failing is a drag, and none of us likes it. Yet we all have to face it sometime. If you prepare yourself, and know how you will deal with it when you do fail, you'll be able to bounce back that much faster.

Scott Edinger is a thought-leader and change-agent extraordinaire, specializing in helping clients succeed in areas such as strategy, leadership, and sales. You can visit him online at www.edingergroup.com.

What Is America?

What is America?

If your first thought is along the lines of: *America is a country located in the western hemisphere*, think deeper.

Yes, America is a geographic land mass, and yes, America

is a sovereign nation consisting of 50 states, but America is more than that.

America is an idea.

The gist of the idea consists of the following 3 notions:

America is about freedom. But not simply freedom from tyranny. America is really about liberty - the ability of its citizens to make noble choices, and to not be infringed upon unduly by the government.



America is about God. Our founders ingeniously sought to form a new kind of society that blended the sacred and the secular. The idea was to have a secular government but a God-based society. Some of you reading this may be thinking of the phrase, "Separation of Church and State." If you are, can you tell me where that notion is found? Is it in the Declaration of Independence? Is it in the Constitution? Is it in the Federalist Papers? Is it in the Bill of Rights?

It's actually in none of those. This bears repeating: the idea of separation of Church and State is not in *any* of our founding documents.

The phrase comes from Jefferson in a personal letter he wrote in 1802 to the Danbury Baptist Association. A fuller rendering of his statement is as follows: "... I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' thus building a wall of separation between Church and State."

The notion of the separation of Church and State does not mean, as so many people mistakenly assume, that religion is to be banned from the public square. Rather, Jefferson and the other founders believed that the State (i.e., the federal government) must not establish a single state-sponsored religious denomination (as occurred in Great Britain with The Church of England being the official government-endorsed religion.)

America is about Nationalism. Again, this may seem conflicting to certain people (usually liberals who are

enamored with the United Nations). The motto on all our coins, *e pluribus unum* ("from the one, many") conveys the important notion that it doesn't matter what one's origins are, if they want to be an American, they come here, learn our language, adopt our values, and they are then Americans. Whether their origins or ethnicity comes from Japan, Guam, Brazil, Albania, Mexico, Bulgaria, Spain, or Canada, we form one nation called America from those many.

Always remember: America is not merely another country. America is an idea -- an idea that must be preserved.

From Ara's Journal

I'm curious about what new technology is doing to our ability to remain human.

Max DePree's wonderful book, *Leadership is An Art*, relates a compelling story about an associate of his who lived for a time in a small African village. In DePree's own words:



Electricity had just been brought into the village where he and his family were living. Each family got a single light bulb in its hut; a real sign of progress. The trouble was that at night, though they had nothing to read and many of them did not know how to read, the families would sit in their huts in awe of this wonderful symbol of technology.

The light-bulb watching began to replace the customary nighttime gatherings by the tribal fire, where the tribal storytellers, the elders, would pass along the history of the tribe. The tribe was losing its history in the light of a few electric bulbs.

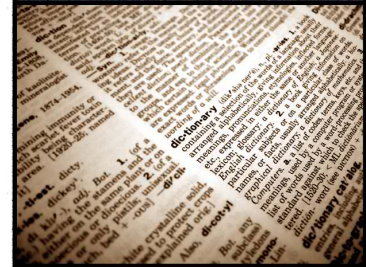
This story helps to illustrate the difference between scientific management and tribal leadership. Every family, every college, every corporation, every institution needs tribal storytellers. The penalty for failing to listen is to lose one's history, one's historical context, one's binding values. Like the Nigerian tribe, without the continuity brought by custom, any group of people will begin to forget who they are.

Having just returned from Europe, I noted something there that I've seen here in the U.S. -- a tendency of most people, young and old, to be obsessed with their mobile

devices. All of this was at the expense of normative human interaction. I wonder if this relatively new technology is causing a coarsening of humanity, and a loss in our ability to relate to each other on a deep and humane level. Sure, gadgets can make us more efficient. But are we losing something very fundamental in the process?

The World of Words

Building Your Power of Expression



Cantankerous, adj.

Pronunciation: kan'ta ng kærə

Meaning: If you've ever come across a mean-spirited, crusty old sort, you might refer to him (or her) as cantankerous. The word refers to someone who is ill-tempered, bitter, or generally grumpy in their demeanor.

Usage:

- *You've become a crusty, cantankerous old fart!*
- *The Gorgon was of a cantankerous disposition, and in possession of fearsome powers.*
- *It's not that I'm cantankerous, it's that I'm always right!*

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).

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

Sincerely,

Ara Norwood
Leadership Development Systems