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In This Issue

[Information Overload](#)
[Bad Rap](#)
[Ara's Journal](#)
[World of Words](#)

Quick Links

[Ara's Web Site](#)
[Facebook Page](#)

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Issue: # 041

December 15, 2012

Greetings!

It's a sobering day as I write this. We've all been horrified by the news of yet another mass murder, this one at an elementary school in Connecticut.

Yet while we recoil from such horrors, we have to carry on with our lives, hence this issue. In spite of feeling quite low from the tragedy, I need to try to bring you both good advice and wise perspective. And you need to act on it.

OK, let's get started.

Warm regards,

Ara Norwood



Dealing with Information Overload

Let's face it: we live in a world loaded with complexity. We work at a very different pace than did our forebears. Life can be overwhelming at times. The amount of data hurled at us can be so overwhelming as to cause some of us to simply shut down and not know where or how to begin to manage all the variables we are dealing with.

So how do we deal with information overload?

Here are a handful of ideas:

- Periodically, go through your emails. Determine if there are emails automatically sent to you on a regular basis, probably because you are on

someone's database. Chances may be high that you no longer read or need some of the emails. If that is true, unsubscribe to those you don't need. (Just don't unsubscribe from *Uncommon Sense* or you'll miss out on valuable advice like that.) You'll likely see a noticeable difference in the amount of email you get - much of it unnecessary



- Learn to say no. You'll find that many people try to drag you into their agenda, asking you to join them for some pet project they have, or travel to places that may not really require your presence, or ask you to volunteer for some "worthy cause." All of this eats into your time - your scarcest resource.
- When involved in some project that seems daunting, ask yourself two simple questions:

What is the bottom-line outcome I am trying to achieve?

What is the simplest way to get there?

Stay focused on those two questions and you'll avoid a lot of extraneous time-wasting processes that lead you away from your objectives.

Information overload tugs at us all. But it need not derail you if you simply follow the advice I have offered here. Oh, and for a different perspective on managing Information Overload, [click here](#).

Bad Rap

I recently finished a course I teach at a local community

college. I always start off each semester at the first class session by allowing the students to ask me anything they want. I usually get few takers on day 1. But I repeat the exercise on the last day of class, and the students know their questions need not be bound by the subject matter of the class we are finishing. Thus, I usually get more questions as the students are less intimidated or shy by the end of the semester. And the questions are really quite varied and rather interesting.

One of the questions I received this go-round was from a lovely young lady who claims she is a rapper. She asked me why I don't consider rap to be music. I gave her an off-the-cuff response that I think made my point rather well. I wish to polish that answer here.

I don't consider rap to be music. But regardless of whether rap can technically qualify as a musical form, I don't have fond views of rap, and do not allow it to be played in my home. I consider it, instead, to be a vicious, ugly, incompetent, and crude form of expression, and those who avail themselves to it do little to elevate their moral character.

I am aware of the counter-arguments offered to the effect that not all rap music is bad. To which I respond: since so much of it is associated with filth and debauchery, why would any thinking person wish to write a piece of "clean" music and put it into a form that is traditionally associated with all that is vicious and crude? Why not take that musical idea and put it into a different form, like a 12-bar blues, or a ballad, or a tune with a bossa nova feel? Why default to the gutter as your form of expression? I think the decision to incorporate a song into a rap form speaks volumes about the person making such a decision.



I said rap music is, among other things, incompetent. Let me explain. Whatever can be said about the "cleverness" of the rapper who finds a way to cram lyrics into a rhythmic, syncopated, somewhat-rhyming format, if you take away the lyrics altogether and simply listen to the

"music" alone, you find that the skills of the "composer" are really quite primitive. There is nothing in the way of variety, or depth, or intelligent use of harmony or imaginative use of melody, etc. What remains is little more than a shallow tinkering that drones on and on *ad nauseum*.

Going further, even if one were to ignore altogether every offensive, vile, or trashy word or concept contained in the lyrics, one would quickly see that the outcome is usually bereft of any meaningful or elegant expression. Again, I say this while giving a temporary pass on the filth that is present in almost all rap lyrics. Even the "non-filth" is meandering, unintelligible gibberish.

Then we get to the real problem with rap: the ideas and ideals it espouses. I was going to reprint the lyrics to one rap piece for this article, and my intention, when I came to an expletive, was to print the first letter of the word in question followed by a blank underline so that the reader would get a sense of what words the rapper was using. However, when I looked at a rap tune I randomly selected called "Rack City" by an "artist" named TYGA, I found I could not go forward with my plan. The vulgar and unseemly lyrics were so prevalent, that had I followed my plan, the rendering would have been a smattering of isolated letters (f, b, w, s) followed by lots of blank lines.

Rap lyrics seem to gravitate to all that is vile and forbidden: themes about illicit, violent sex to "objects" that happen to be female; the murdering of police officers; the raping of women; the raping of one's own mother; the torture of rivals just for kicks; the consumption of illegal drugs; the brutalizing of animals; and the notion that Hitler was a sensitive man. It's an upside-down world.

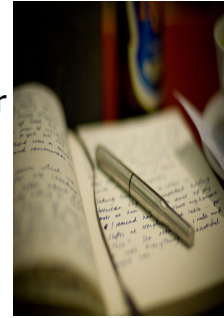
Music as an art form is meant to elevate, enlighten, and empower. Music is meant to inspire. Great music is a triumph of the human spirit. Yet rap does none of those things. It is a pronouncement of perversity and an indication of the dark, bleak, warped mentalities of those who promulgate it. It is not, as many rap apologists and sympathizers claim, statements of the struggles of growing up in urban America. Instead it is most often a mode of expression by violent thugs who wish to poison the general culture under the guise of musical expression.

People are free to expose themselves to whatever musical genres they wish, but they are not free to avoid the

inevitable consequences of such choices - either the uplifting of the human heart, or the putrefaction of the human spirit.

From Ara's Journal

We are reeling from another brutal, perplexing act of unspeakable violence where a deranged savage goes on a murder rampage. Not content with murdering his own mother in cold blood, Adam Lanza drove to the elementary school where his mother worked and murdered 26 more people - 20 of them children - before turning the gun on himself.



We grieve, we go into shock, we seek to understand how such things happen and how they can be prevented, some of look for targets to blame. People have their theories as to why such horrific acts occur: faulty gun laws, inability to detect and incarcerate the unstable, violent video games, poverty, people simply "snapping" (as if that is an acceptable explanation), yet I think deep down we know that there is little if anything that can be done to prevent such madness. Evil, narcissistic people will rear their ugly heads from time to time and commit the sin known as murder, even mass murder. Innocent people will leave their homes never to return. It can happen in our schools, in our homes, in our parks, on our freeways, at sporting events, in our courtrooms, on our military bases, and even in our houses of worship. It seems no place is particularly safe or off limits to the psychopath.

My heart - our hearts - go out to the victims and their families and friends. It is hard to contemplate the unimaginable wounds that some parents must endure when they come across the recently wrapped Christmas gifts they placed under a tree for their 5 year old son or daughter, and to realize that they will never see the joy and excitement on those innocent faces in ten days time.

Life isn't always a pleasant picture. There are times that we are beset by the reality of evil and the horrific consequences it leaves in its wake. This is one of those times, a time of solemnity, of sadness, and of mourning. There is no silver lining to an episode such as this. The loss is simply too great.

All we can do is look to God for healing and comfort. All

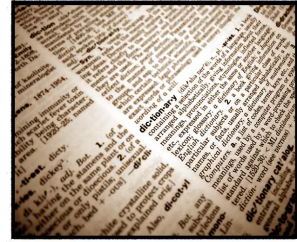
we can do is seek to spread light and goodness and compassion.

The World of Words

Building Your Power of Expression

Tautology, n

Pronunciation: tô'täləjē



Meaning: A tautology is the saying of the same thing twice, using different words. A statement that is tautological is generally not thought to be of good form, as the statement in question is padded with unnecessary repetition. You've said nothing new with a tautology; you've offered a redundancy. (See how easy it is to utter a tautology as I just did? A tautology about tautologies -- a meta-tautology.)

Usage:

- *Avoid tautology, which is the needless repetition of the same idea.*
- *It may seem tautological to suggest that getting money to poor people is the solution to poverty.*
- *Let me suggest that your final paragraph, which reads, "to chop and change," is rather tautological, as it just means "to change and change."*

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