

Uncommon Sense

Providing Clarity, Promoting Intelligence

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Issue: # 047

March 10, 2013

Greetings!

It's been a trying week. But never too trying to produce another issue of *Uncommon Sense*.

If you are a new subscriber, I welcome you! And if you are a long-time subscriber, I appreciate your loyalty. Feel free to share it on Twitter or forward it to those whom you think might find it of interest. They will be pleased you thought of them. And I will be pleased to get the word out there in greater numbers.

OK, let's get started.

Warm regards,

Ara Norwood



Self-Development

Structure Influences Behavior

One of the finest books I ever read was written by an MIT brainiac named Peter Senge. The book was titled *The Fifth Discipline* and it came out in the early 1990s. It was a captivating read, and remains to this day on [my Top Ten List](#)

Of the many engaging ideas I read in that book, one that has occupied my thoughts for many years was an idea he expressed in these words: "Structure influences behavior." I did not understand what that meant when I first read it, but as I've pondered the phrase many times, I believe I have come to appreciate its truth and its importance.

If "structure" (whatever that happens to encompass) truly influences behavior, then understanding what is meant by structure would be an important undertaking, because any time you can influence behavior you can lead. Influencing others is one of the foundational components of leadership.



If you are not getting the behaviors you desire, take a look at structure. Ask yourself if the current structure is contributing to the undesirable behaviors. If you can detect clear linkages, fix the structure. You'll influence (though not necessarily eradicate) the undesirable behavior.

The examples are legion:

- If a company is experiencing employee theft, and there are no security cameras in place, you have a structure (lax security) that is influencing some to steal, since they believe they can get away with it. Change the structure by installing cameras, and that problem will likely go away.
- You have an employee who is not very productive. That employee is also in a private office located in a trailer far from the other members of your department who are in close proximity to each other. Change the structure: move the non-productive employee from the outskirts of the facility back into the main environment where the rest of the team is, and productivity gains are a virtual certainty.
- You teach classes or give presentations to about 30 individuals. The room is set up classroom-style, with rows and columns of desks in a neat, orderly construct. But some of the participants naturally gravitate to the back row and also don't seem to be engaged. Change the structure: try rearranging the desks in a large circle where there is no back row. Now everyone can see each other equally and the non-participants will likely change their activity level.

The same applies to you as an individual. If your desk is facing a window or an open corridor with lots of distracting foot traffic going by, causing you to glance towards the door a little too often, change your structure. Move your desk so it faces a different direction. Your behavior will likely change.

The Elephant in the Room The Legalizing of Marijuana in Colorado

Colorado recently passed Amendment 64 which made it legal to smoke marijuana -- not just for alleged medicinal purposes, but for blatant recreational use. (The state of Washington passed a similar law.) I first drew attention to this in *Uncommon Sense*, Issue #40, which came out on November 25, 2012. In that column, I had written: "It will be fascinating to watch the drop in productivity and college prep test scores in these two states over the next decade."

A recent [news item](#) is showing that my concerns at the colossal stupidity of this law are more than justified, as more and more children are using marijuana in extremely high doses in Colorado.



The active ingredient in marijuana that causes intoxication is known as THC. A steady pot smoker who lights up once or twice a week usually has about 100 to 200 nanograms of THC in his system. A pot smoker who uses the drug on a daily basis has between 300 to 500 nanograms in his system. But now that Colorado voters have, in their immense wisdom, passed Amendment 64, far too many high school students being tested reveal that their nanogram count is 700, 800, and higher in terms of the levels of THC in their system. THC essentially fries the brain and impairs memory and judgment. And these kids are out on the road driving motor vehicles.

Over time, we can expect greater numbers of auto accidents, higher insurance rates, more deaths that were clearly avoidable, lower test scores, and huge drops in

productivity. Colorado and Washington have doomed themselves to sink into the tar pit of a self-imposed intellectual stupor.

Colorado voters will eventually rue the day they passed such a self-destructive law which will rob their citizens of productivity, effectiveness, and judgment -- unless, of course, such voters are themselves too stoned to notice.

Truly, we get what we deserve.

That is the latest elephant in the room.

Shameless Plug

Readers Sound Off

Thanks for issue #046. The "ham" story reminded me of my mother and the two words she pronounced differently. Sangwich and Frunch Room. (Sandwich and Front Room) It took me quite a while to catch on...early teens maybe. Great story! Congratulations on your upcoming speaking engagements! You will be great! EB, Los Angeles, CA

Here is a thought: you most often talk about the 'Left'. How about writing a blurb on how we are defining what a Leftist is as compared to a Progressive (i.e. when does one stop becoming a Leftist and become a Progressive?). Also, as we slide down the scale from being a Leftist to a Progressive how does that match with what is Socialism and ultimately Communism. I think we have forgotten what is a Capitalist versus what has transpired in Western Europe who we think of as Capitalists but really are Socialists. Then there is India which is governed by a large branch of government which is Communist! ...Just a thought. CM, Mt. View, CA

Wow... I learned this principle years ago in my first business. It took me about 5 years to stop being insecure and I noticed then that my own business improved, realizing that my insecurity was toxic to me not the competition. Later about 7 years into that same business I realized that competition is actually my friend, it makes me a stronger business person, keep my thinking level and tied to reality of the customers. Just this past month, our nonprofit has observed one of our directors detaching because of insecurity as explained in your short story. Just last night, I finally replied to the director. This story

explains it even better. Thank you. LR, Kern County, CA

Your article, "The Boiled Frog Continues" (Issue #43) provides great insights to what is coming throughout the world. The current societies are following in the foot steps of many societies of the ancient world. I am not just thinking of the Greeks and Romans, but also of the peoples that inhabited the land of Canaan, prior to the Israelites entering it. History reveals the depravity of the minds of these people. MB, Castaic, CA

Good writing. I hope you are well. PC, Sherman Oaks, CA

From Ara's Journal

The Power of Music

I revisit a theme I touched on early last year in Issue #20: the power of music.

This weekend found me at a conference where a choir performed both days. I remain in awe of music's power to edify, led by a true artist of demanding standards, Richard Rich, and featuring a soloist of unusual capacity, grace, and sensitivity, Stacey Smith.



Men and women of brilliance find a way to compose works of art using a unique blend of rhythm, melody, harmony, dynamics, timbre, and lyric that is an auditory marvel. Soul-stirring strains from a soprano, a cello, a harp, or a flute evoke a range of emotions, a mélange of memories, or a tapestry of possibilities.

Some music makes me want to march, such as Checkfield's *Echoes of Ancient Battles*. Some music, such as Aaron Copeland's *Our Town*, brings a sense of repose and comfortable familiarity. Some compositions, such as Pat Metheny's *Letter from Home*, makes me want to weep, while others, such as Mark Sloniker's *In The Passage of Time*, brings about a deep sense of the sacred. And some music, such as *The Host of Seraphim* by Dead Can Dance, is so mysterious as to bring about a mixture of feelings that are not possible to untangle into a single strand. Still

other music, such as Suzanne Ciani's *Tuscany* or John McLaughlin's *When Love Is Far Away*, can only conjure up feelings of longing and desire.

Given music's power to impact our internal state, it seems to me to be a rather important thing to monitor carefully what music we allow to enter the crevices of our consciousness. I wish to guard the entryways to the stage of my mind and be responsible for what I allow to enter my internal world. Perhaps that is why I have made it a practice of collecting uplifting music in many genres. I guess when I turn on the car radio, I have to be mindful of the fact that I am subjecting myself to someone else's values and agenda. I have to pay attention, and not blithely go along for the ride.

The World of Words

Morose

Building Your Power of Expression

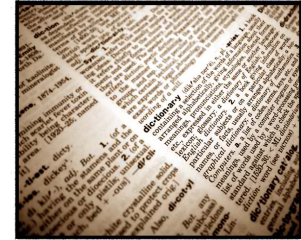
Morose, adj

Pronunciation: mə'rōs, mō-

Meaning: This word is used to describe a person who is sullen or ill-tempered. A person whose disposition is one of gloom and doom would be a person of a morose character.

Usage:

- *I have tried reading Edgar Allan Poe, but I simply find his works to veer towards the morose.*
- *Snap out of it! Stop being so sour and moody! You are far more morose than is warranted.*
- *You've mischaracterized the protagonist. Glum he is not. He hasn't a morose bone in his body.*



New subscribers, the Special Report "11 Ways to Beat the Odds" should have been sent out to you already. 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,

