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Uncommon Sense

Providing Clarity, Promoting Intelligence

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Issue: # 072

March 29, 2014

Greetings!

I hope you are well on this fine Saturday.

I remember watching an interview with one of my favorite actors -- Hugh Jackman. The interviewer, a very prominent college professor whose research abilities left his subjects in awe, closed every interview by asking the same set of short, pithy questions to all of his guests. One of those questions was "What turns you on?"



I wondered how Mr. Jackman would answer such a question. He is such a class act, I was sure he would not say something salacious. He paused only briefly, and then answered with one word: "Food."

I agree heartily. Good food is a turn-on.

I hope the food-for-thought I am offering you in this issue of *Uncommon Sense* is also a turn-on. Sink your teach into this issue, savor its contents, let it digest, and hopefully you will gain much satisfaction on a variety of matters.

OK, let's get started.

Warm regards,

Ara Norwood

Self-Development

Leadership Staying Power

Many people aspire to be leaders. They would do well to consider the fact that leadership is a lonely proposition. There are costs associated with being a leader. Leadership is not for the faint of heart. All would-be leaders must count the costs and take into account the liabilities of leadership.

As I ponder some of the more consequential leaders of our past, people like Martin Luther, Brigham Young, and Winston Churchill come to mind. All three of those particular leaders faced enormous criticism, persecution, and daunting odds.

Luther was unhappy with the direction his own church had gone, and based on his own interpretations of the Bible, sought to reform the church - hence the launching of what became known as the Protestant Reformation - a movement that succeeded against daunting odds. Luther was condemned, persecuted, and attempts were made on his life by various persons. His was not a life of leisure. But he had staying power and because of that he changed the world.

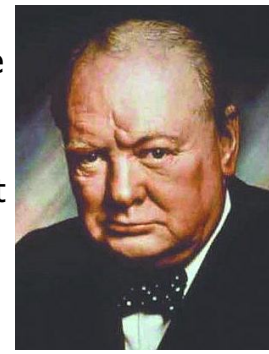


Brigham Young was another religious leader with a very different set of circumstances. Thrust into the leadership over the Mormon people after the murder of LDS Church President Joseph Smith, Brigham Young had to figure out how to move a body of several thousand Mormons across the plains with few resources, rampant disease, hostile Indians, and unfavorable weather, and then find a place that would be a permanent home for the Saints. A person without the steely determination possessed by Brigham Young would have folded at the enormous weight of the task at hand.



Winston Churchill possessed the same sort of iron will as Brigham Young and Martin Luther, but was faced with a challenge that would have global consequences. His adversary, Adolf Hitler, was a monster of enormous skill,

cunning, speed, and brutality. In fact, in all my study of history, I have never encountered an individual with the ability to mobilize the masses and organize with the pace and precision of Hitler. His blazing speed alone would overwhelm every foe except one: Churchill. Sir Winston was every bit as determined as Hitler was evil. In spite of the enormous adversities he was shackled with, Winston Churchill decided in advance that no setback would deter him, no failure would cripple him, and no opponent would defeat him. Churchill gave us one of the truly great performances of transforming leadership of the 20th century.



But all great leaders, and not just Churchill, Young, and Luther, pay a heavy price for great leadership.

So be advised that opposition is part of the warp and woof of our time here on earth. Opposition is literally weaved into our life's experience. As leaders stand up and step forward, they take the brunt of opposition like very few others and they must have the right constitution to conquer such unrelenting challenges. Opposition, strife, challenge, and taxing burdens are a way of life for the leader. But if the vision is compelling enough, if the outcomes are lofty enough, and if the prize is great enough, it is always worth the struggle.

The Elephant In The Room **The Left's Obsession with Race**

I should like, in this article, to explore some ideas that are both controversial and that touch on a rather sensitive subject - racism.

First, some points of clarity:

1. What is racism? Racism is preoccupation with another person's race (whether that person is black, white, Asian, Armenian, Hispanic, Hungarian, Israeli, or Icelandic.) Racism usually involves holding a negative view towards a specific race or ethnic group, virtually always outside of one's own race or ethnic group - an "us-versus-them" mentality.
2. However, what is often overlooked, perhaps because it seems to be less common, is that racism can also involve holding a preferentially *positive* view towards

a specific race or ethnic group, again, even when that race or ethnic group is foreign to the person holding the view. Thus, a person of the white race who entertains negative views towards Asians is in possession of racist views towards Asians. A black person (say, an African American) who holds preferentially *positive* views towards Latinos - simply because they are Latino - is also in possession of racist views towards Latinos. Of the two examples, if there has to be racism, I would opt for the positive variety, but truthfully, I have contempt for both views for reasons I will explain in my next two points.

3. Racism - of the negative variety - is evil, pure and simple. To hold negative views of a person solely because of their race is morally reprehensible; to act on those views is even more wicked. If one is to hold negative views of a person, an unfortunate but sometimes inevitable reality, such views should be based on the flaws in a person's character, or their gross behavior, or their bad manners, or their degrading language, or the dangerous ideas that they entertain. It should not be based on the color of a person's skin.
4. Thus, racism is evil, but racism is also stupid. And I say that both for the negative variety of racism as well as for the positive variety. Anyone who views an ethnic group superior and favored (or inferior and repulsive) due to the color of their skin is a buffoon.

Now, I should make a few points of self-disclosure to try to blunt the inevitable claims that any race-baiters who read this will make about my own supposed racism. Let me focus on blacks for a moment, though what I say here applies to all races:

- I have had black guests stay overnight in my home.
- I work well with black men and women whom I reported to or who reported to me in professional settings.
- I dated a black woman (from Ghana) while in college.
- I deeply enjoy the music of various black musicians such as George Benson, Earl Klugh, Miles Davis, Herbie Hancock, Jimi Hendrix, Donna Summers, Chaka Kahn, Seal, Natalie Cole, Patrice Rushen, and Lenny Kravitz. Likewise, I admire the acting abilities of certain black actors such as Will Smith, Denzel

Washington, Vanessa Williams, Sidney Poitier, Morgan Freeman, James Earl Jones, Jada Pinkett Smith, and Laurence Fishburne. And while they all happen to be black, I would enjoy their music and their acting whatever their racial make up consisted of.

- I am not particularly interested in a person's race. I am, however, interested in things like a person's culture, and a person's values, and a person's character, and a person's talents.

With that background behind us, let me state that I detect something both bizarre and baffling going on with those who lean Left-of-Center in this country. There is a strange outlook and obsession with respect to race -- particularly towards African Americans.

I'm not sure I fully comprehend why this is. But let me try to paint a picture of how these mystifying tendencies manifest themselves:

Although I didn't hear him say it directly, conservative radio talk show mogul Rush Limbaugh evidently predicted long before this year's Academy Awards took place that the movie *Twelve Years a Slave* would automatically win the Oscar for Best Picture. Limbaugh was certain this would happen solely because the movie had the word "slave" in the title. He insisted this would cause the racially hypersensitive Leftists that dominate Hollywood to run to the voting booth to name it Best Picture as predictably as a moth races toward the flame. And he was correct in that prediction.

It was interesting that this year's MC of the Academy Awards, Ellen DeGeneres, made an early wise-crack to the audience regarding the film's likelihood of winning:

"Possibility No. 1, *12 Years a Slave* wins Best Picture. Possibility No. 2, you're all racists."

It is even more interesting that more than one voter openly admitted



they [never even saw the film](#) but voted for it to receive Best Picture honors anyway. Undoubtedly there were others among the voters who did not admit it but who did the same thing.

Now, I have no problem with any of the nine nominees for Best Picture winning the top honors. Frankly, I saw only one of the nine nominees (*Captain Phillips*), so I am in no position to gauge the quality of the other films or compare them to one another.

However, when you have active members of the Academy submit as their choice for Best Picture a movie they have never even seen, and that movie contains a title like *Twelve Years a Slave*, it's hard to arrive at an alternative conclusion than that they cast their vote simply because they felt the need to avoid appearing racist -- which frankly, strikes me as, . . . racist.

And that, my friends, is the latest elephant in the room.

Shameless Plug **Training Sales Professionals**

Some of my recent work has found me helping sales professionals grow their skill sets.

That makes perfect sense. Most companies are very prepared to invest in the development of their sales teams because the ROI is so easy to measure. Unlike leadership development, or management training, or programs in innovation, negotiation, customer service, and the like (all of which I do) sales training can be measured by how future sales figures compare with past sales figures.



Some of the feedback I have received from those sales reps who were in my programs included the following:

Jondra Eberhard wrote:

I truly believe that the most value I have gained in my time here came as a result of your two training programs. I have had twenty years business experience that provided

me the opportunity to attend many training classes. None compared to the lively, informative and professional programs that you brought to this company. The lessons you taught have stayed with me as I moved forward in my career - they helped develop me into a more effective sales representative. I listened carefully to your sound advice and put it into action. My manager noticed the difference, I see it in my numbers, and my only wish would be further education from you to guarantee continued success. So thank you for making a wonderful impact here.

And David Kane had this to say:

Your program helped me to finish at eight percent above my goal last year. After taking your seminar, I had a greater awareness of how truly important it is to listen and probe for the needs of the clients -- "the Language of Needs". This year I plan to continue the training I received from your class and become the best sales Account Executive at my company. Ara, you not only have my commendation but my thanks.

If your organization could benefit from a shot-in-the-arm for your sales force, drop me a line.

From Ara's Journal

The Fragile Nature of Friendship

This is a painful entry.

I lost a friend this week. A friend I've known and been close to for over 35 years. I met MJ back when I was about 19. She was in her 30s. A man I was studying classical guitar with rented a room from her, and eventually, she and I formed a friendship that was deep and profound. Ten years later, we lost contact shortly after I got married, but thanks to social networking we re-discovered each other a few years ago. A lot had happened to us both in the intervening quarter-century. We were the same in some ways but different - profoundly different - in other ways.



MJ always struck me as the most open person I had ever met - totally accepting of everyone, ultra-encouraging, profoundly empowering, . . . you get the picture. Married to a decent fellow and now in her mid-60s, she still came

across as idealistic and vibrant on many levels.

But I discovered that those noble attributes had now found their boundaries. Her acceptance of a person stopped cold when she discovered the person in question was politically conservative. Even someone she claimed a friendship with based on undying love and devotion; someone like me.

When we reconnected a few years ago, she became a subscriber to this publication. But it didn't take long for her to discover that her long-lost friend held to a conservative world-view, and this was so offensive to her that she first dropped her subscription, and then not long after that, dropped me as a friend. This was just over two years ago.

I believed I would not hear from her again. However, I was pleasantly surprised when she contacted me last October with a rather perplexing set of questions on an unusual technical matter that she felt my expertise was well-suited to address. And she was right. I helped her through that particular puzzle, much to her satisfaction. She then proposed something remarkable. She offered to renew our friendship, but there was a condition: we must never speak of political matters. I readily agreed.

However, she didn't always adhere to her own policy, as she has on several occasions sent me news stories that were steeped in politics - Leftist politics. And when I would offer to send her an alternate view of the issue in question, she plainly stated she did not want to see anything I might consider sending her, nor did she wish to hear my own views on such subjects. I detected in her protestations that there was some very deep vulnerability residing within her, and that were I to say even one sentence of a contrary view I may hold, it would affect her in a profoundly negative way. I found this both disquieting and peculiar.

Last week she forwarded me a blog post from a New York professor and Vietnam vet who is so anti-war, I suspect he may be opposed to the Revolutionary War. I let her know I was surprised she would send me such an item given her earlier mandate that neither of us discuss politics, and that were I to offer my own candid assessment of this anti-war activist, it might prove unsettling to her.

The lengthy reply I received from my friend just two days ago stated clearly that her own earlier request that we not

discuss politics "was a sham" (her words), in that she simply cannot be friends with someone who possesses differing views than those possessed by her. She opined that she and I need to be only with like-minded people - a view I find absurd on two counts: a) she and I are absolutely of one mind and one heart on most of the deepest issues of life, and b) I do not share her view that I also must limit my interactions to like-minded persons, as I find alternative views both instructive and enriching. The bottom line was that she felt there was no alternative but to terminate our 35-year friendship permanently and immediately due to the fact that I am a conservative.

My initial intention after reading her missive was to write back a detailed response that offered my assessment of her outlook while honoring her decision to say goodbye once again. After further thought, I decided to write a more concise reply that simply wished her well and honored her wishes. But on even further thought, I recalled how strident she was that I not offer any views of any kind that were contrary to her own, and how my doing so was more tortuous to her than nails on a chalk board. So in the end I opted not to reply at all - not in the sense of disdain (as in "not dignifying her message with a response,") but rather in the sense of recognizing that any response I offer, regardless of its content, runs the risk of further alienating and antagonizing MJ - a reality that I find both sad and strange, given the depth of our friendship over the years.

But I won't lie: it is a great loss to me, and, I am sure, to her as well.

Friendship is fragile.

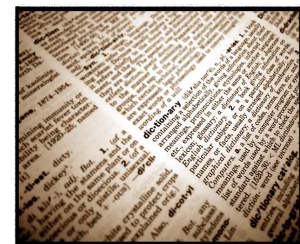
The World of Words

Personify

Building Your Power of Expression

Personify, v.

Pronunciation: pər'sänə,fī



Meaning: This word suggests the embodiment of a concept, usually by taking something and representing it in human form. For instance, when you attribute a personal nature to a concept, that concept can be said to "personify"

that personal nature.

Usage:

- *Reagan came to personify the American values of optimism, free markets, and entrepreneurial spirit, and thus won the election in a landslide.*
- *Far from being the personification of integrity, he came to personify something wholly apart from that attribute.*
- *Her red hair came to personify the fiery spirit that resided deep within her.*

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,

Ara Norwood
Leadership Development Systems