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# Uncommon Sense

Providing Clarity, Promoting Intelligence

## In This Issue

[On Getting Fired  
Culture, Law, and  
Religious Liberty](#)  
[The Sin of Ingratitude](#)  
[Add Import to your  
Vocabulary](#)

## Quick Links

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

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Issue: # 107

November 10, 2015

## Greetings!

Thank you for being a subscriber to *Uncommon Sense*.

If you are a new subscriber, I welcome you to this semi-monthly publication that is sure to bring value, challenge your thinking, and expand your mind.

In this issue, I share a story involving the pain of ingratitude, sharing something I witnessed some years ago involving a father and son. I hope it awakens within you a desire to be bent on thankfulness.

Also in this issue, I replace my usual Elephant In The Room column with a guest editorial by an attorney who I am convinced has articulated a very interesting and important take on how those who value traditional marriage should conduct themselves in light of the Supreme Court's recent decision to legalize same-sex marriage. Read it.

But I begin with some counsel for those who may one day find themselves fired from their jobs. I hope you find value in my perspective.

OK, let's get started.

Ara Norwood



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## On Getting Fired

"You're fired!"

If you are like most, you have probably been on the receiving end of words to that effect. Granted, the bad news is not normally delivered with the harshness that we saw on the television show, *The Apprentice*. In fact, all but the cruelest

of bosses consider terminating an employee one of the most distressing aspects of being a manager.

Even if the



boss can't stand you, most of them do have some sense of sympathy or remorse at having to send you packing. But those feelings of guilt are usually trumped by their need to do what's best for the organization. Hence, certain people will get the ax.

If you should be on the receiving end of a separation from your employer, how you handle the affair is of paramount importance. So allow me to give you some sound advice.

First, recognize that there is a very high likelihood that the people terminating you will not be 100% straight with you. I'm not talking about situations involving a layoff. I'm talking about being fired. The people explaining their decision almost never tell you 100% of the truth as to their reasons. They want to get rid of you and do so in a way that doesn't cause you to make a scene or make things difficult for them. So unless you are being fired for embezzling company money, in which case it will likely be law enforcement personnel who are informing you of the separation from the company (with you in hand-cuffs), you probably won't be told all of the actual reasons for your dismissal.

Second, most of the time the person being fired is not caught off-guard. Usually there is the proverbial "writing on the wall" where the indicators have been manifest that you are walking on thin ice. But occasionally, an employee is completely blind-sided. This can be very disconcerting.

Here are some indicators that should raise your antenna every time they occur and cause you to wonder whether you may be in the cross-hairs of HR:

- Your boss expresses dissatisfaction with your work more than once.
- You don't seem to have any close relationships at work.
- People seem dismissive of you or avoid you at work.
- A new boss or new management team comes into the picture.
- The company gets acquired.
- Senior Management from corporate headquarters comes to your office and starts snooping around.
- Someone complains about you to HR.
- You just don't feel like you are contributing in meaningful ways; you feel out of place at work.

Third, when you do get pulled into a small conference room by your boss, and an HR representative is in the room, there is a good chance you are about to be terminated. When that happens, you need to try to stay calm. There may be little point in trying too hard to change the outcome, as the decision has been made and almost nothing you say is going to change that. So stay calm and don't over react. Maintain your professionalism. Try to find out in precise, unambiguous terms why you are being fired. Ask them, perhaps several times, to state the reasons in clear, unmistakable terms. Write them down. Read the reasons back to them. Confirm you got it right. Then ask, "Is that all? Are there any other reasons you are not telling me?" Keep digging for the full story until they say to you that there are no other reasons. (And again, trust me: they may well not be telling you everything, even when they insist there are no other reasons.)

Fourth, since they are canning you, and they may well feel guilty for doing so, this is the time to squeeze out of them any and all concessions you can obtain. For instance, although a long shot, ask them if they can provide any sort of reference letter on company letterhead touting whatever virtues they think you do possess (if not your work abilities, perhaps your character.) Most companies won't or can't accommodate this request, but you should still ask. Ask if, considering the financial predicament they are putting you in, they can provide severance pay, and if so, whatever the amount they say they can provide, ask for

more. Tell them it's just not enough. Perhaps they will up the ante a bit. Also, ask about medical benefits. Find out how long they can continue to provide such benefits to you. Again, whatever duration they commit to, let them know it's not enough. Ask for an extension. They may or may not accommodate you, but it behooves you to ask.

Fifth, see if there are any important projects you are working on that really need your attention and no one else's. If you can make a case that a certain project will suffer without your involvement, perhaps they can be persuaded to allow you to continue to work on it, and thus continue to pay you, if they see that you truly are demonstrating that you have the class and the integrity to put the company's interests over your own.

And finally, understand that when you get fired, it will be only human to find fault with others, to blame the system, or to come up with a litany of excuses as to why it was so unfair. And while there may be some truth to that (and perhaps a great deal of truth to that) even the most unfair of terminations don't happen in random ways. There is a strong likelihood that we contributed, at least in part, to our own demise. Thus, it is very important that when you get fired, you wait a day or two until after the pain and shock has subsided a bit, and then you take a good long look in the mirror and make an honest assessment of how you contributed to your misfortune. The more honest you can be in this process, the more you will learn and the more you will grow. And the greater the likelihood that you will not repeat the same mistake at your next place of employment.

We all make mistakes. What separates those who do well in life from those who do not is that those who do well had the courage to boldly face their own liabilities, and find a way to eradicate them, or at least dilute them.

## **Guest Editorial**

**Culture, Law, and Religious Liberty** by  
Alexander Dushku

If there is one thing that has become abundantly clear from the Supreme Court's same-sex marriage decision, it is that constitutional law is as much about culture as it is about the Constitution.

Although much of the legal and cultural elite concluded over a decade ago that same-sex marriage should be a constitutional right, it was not until this year - when at least half the American people seemed to support gay marriage - that the Supreme Court issued a decision finding a fundamental right to same-sex marriage.



Culture affects law and the law, in turn, affects culture.

I believe there are two very different paths that our culture - and the law - can now follow when it comes to the religious liberty of those who sincerely believe that marriage is, and should remain, between a man and a woman.

The first path is the path we took as a nation regarding racism. After a long struggle that included the Civil War and heroic efforts by thousands of activists, in 1954 the Supreme Court unanimously held in *Brown v. Board of Education* that state-sponsored racial segregation violates the 14th Amendment.

As vital as this case was legally, it had a profound effect culturally. It not only made racist actions by government unlawful, it also helped make racist speech, and even racist ideas, socially and culturally taboo. Yes, the First Amendment still protects the right of racists to spout their hatred from the street corner, but if you do so, you will be a social outcast.

That, of course, is good. Racism was and is a scourge, and we properly attach severe social consequences to it. My point is simply that there is very little real freedom or social space in which to be a racist.

If the Supreme Court's same-sex-marriage decision results in support for traditional marriage being equated culturally and legally with racism, then religious liberty will be severely restricted. The expression of pro-traditional-

marriage viewpoints within the workplace will be seen as harassment, even as pro-gay-marriage viewpoints are openly discussed. And institutions - including religious schools - that have standards rooted in traditional marriage can expect, eventually, to have their accreditation and tax-exempt status challenged.

But there is another path. In 1972, in *Roe v. Wade*, a divided Supreme Court declared that abortion is a fundamental right. What followed could have been something like the aftermath of the *Brown* decision, where anyone who questioned the right to abortion would be marginalized socially and legally. But that didn't happen. Today it is entirely possible for a strong pro-lifer to be open and frank about his or her beliefs.

How did opposition to abortion secure a place of respectability in our culture and law? One part of the answer is that religious and other pro-life voices decided they would not remain silent. They learned to make their case with reason, civility, and even love. To be sure, there were extremists, missteps, and course corrections, but eventually, the pro-life movement found its voice.

The effect of the Supreme Court's same-sex-marriage decision on religious liberty will depend, to a great extent, on people like you and me. If supporters of traditional marriage are intimidated into silence, then the Supreme Court's gay-marriage decision will be a disaster for religious liberty.

But if those who support traditional marriage are examples of what is best about their beliefs, if they find ways to explain with reason as well as meekness and love, then I believe our culture and law will accord them the respect and freedom they deserve.

*Alexander Dushku is a Salt Lake City lawyer who has represented The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in First Amendment cases. This essay is adapted from a speech given July 7, 2015, at Religious Freedom Annual Review, a conference sponsored by BYU Law School.*



## Speaking Up A Storm!

It was my distinct privilege to deliver several speeches recently. On October 28th I was the luncheon speaker for the Wilshire Rotary Club. This was my second engagement with this fine group of professionals, and my speech, titled "Six Great Men, Part 2" was a deeper dive into the lives of Franklin, Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison, and Hamilton. I discussed their relationship with their parents, their intellectual acumen, and their relationship to slavery. It was a good turnout with excellent questions coming from the audience during the Q&A.



I also had the opportunity to be the after dinner speaker at a packed house for Soroptimist International of Santa Clarita. My topic was Time Management ("16 Ideas in 16 Minutes") and the feedback from this all-female audience was uniformly positive. This was a very impressive group of women who do much good in the community to impact for good the lives of women and girls everywhere.



If your organization is in need of a speaker that is a sure bet to inspire your audience, give me a shout ([ara@aranorwood.com](mailto:ara@aranorwood.com)).

## The Sin of Ingratitude

I remember some years ago I was present at the annual convention for the National Speakers Association, a professional trade association for those who make a living as speakers. Each year the NSA includes an awards banquet as part of the convention. It's a very formal affair and somewhat reminiscent of the Academy Awards in terms of all of the pomp and show that goes into the event. One of their highest awards is a designation they call the CPAE Award, and only five people receive this award at each convention - and you only awarded it once. Speakers who receive it often put the letters "CPAE" on their business cards next to their name, even though hardly anyone outside of the speaking profession knows what it means.



When someone's name is announced as the recipient of this prestigious designation, the person goes up to the podium and receives the award, then takes the microphone and gives a speech, sometimes brief, often times not so brief, to reflect on the meaning of being one of that year's winners. Of course, it goes without saying that the recipient of such a prestigious award often takes the time to thank various people who helped the recipient in their journey towards oratory greatness.

One particular year I attended, a young man named David won the award. David certainly was an excellent speaker. His father, who was in attendance, was one of the most gifted orators in the profession. To put it in perspective, it would be analogous to being at the Academy Awards and having Marlon Brando's son win an academy award. Obviously, if such a thing were ever to happen, one would presume that the father had an enormous impact on the shaping of the son's career in the acting field. That was the case with David. His father, who was a super star in that field, had obviously shaped and molded his son's career and, without taking anything away from David, was a huge influence in his son's success.

So David went up there and accepted his award and then gave his speech. And his speech was well-delivered, passionate and earnest, compelling and uplifting, even inspiring. David articulated the various milestones in his



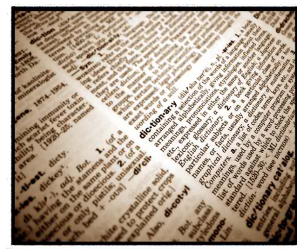
life, he described with picturesque language the various setbacks he had to overcome to get to where he is today, and he thanked many key people in his life who stood as examples. But conspicuously absent from the people he thanked was, . . . his father.

This was not deliberate. It was a tragic oversight. I was standing near the podium where David made his exit, and as he walked off the podium, and took about 20 steps into a crowd of adoring fans and colleagues, I saw the look on his face - a realization descended upon him that he had failed to thank the most influential figure in his professional life, his father. I was standing not two feet away from David when this realization hit. David's face betrayed a profound anguish, a torturous despair, the deepest agony at the realization that he did not even mention his closest mentor, his father. I could tell that he wanted to rush back on to the podium and pay the proper tributes, but alas, the opportunity had passed. I also saw his father who was right nearby in the crowd making his way towards his son, and I could see his father's face very clearly. On the surface, the father masked his hurt, forcing a jubilant and celebratory countenance that beamed pride for his son's accomplishment. I considered that a mark of greatness - after all, this was about David, not the father. But the father had a role, a key role, and to have other lesser influences acknowledged from the podium, but not the major figure receiving even passing mention, must have stung.

\* \* \* \* \*

I wonder whom I have forgotten to thank. I wish to forget no one. I wish to remain filled with thankfulness for the graciousness of all those who have impacted and blessed my life. I hope I will never experience the deep sadness of realizing I forgot others who had been my benefactor. In fact, whether I realize it or not, I hope I am never guilty of the searing sin of ingratitude.

And, on occasions when I am forgotten by others whom I may have blessed, I hope I have the dignity, the maturity, and the class to, as did David's father, celebrate their success with everything I've got!



**Import, n**

**Pronunciation:** 'im,pôrt

**Meaning:** The word *import* has a number of definitions and is used as both a verb and a noun. Here I am using the noun version of the word in the sense of significance, consequence, or importance.

**Usage:**

- *Where we land on the question of the existence of God is of deep import.*
- *The full import of his actions hit her like a ton of bricks.*
- *The import of his statement is ambiguous.*

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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](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)

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