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# Uncommon Sense

Providing Clarity, Promoting Intelligence

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Issue: # 115

March 14, 2016

## Greetings!

Time marches on.

Time. . . It's the one constant.

And it's time again for me to attempt to bring some clarity to various issues taking place all around us.

You'll read some general observations I have to share with you on the Presidential election in the **Ara's Journal** column.

And in the **Elephant in the Room** column, I continue a series of reviews of our Founding Fathers, this time honing in on the illustrious George Washington. I hope you gain a deeper appreciation for this towering figure.

With my **Self-Development** column I offer Part 2 of this 7-part series on leadership that are must-reads. I hope you really give some serious thought to what I have to say about leadership in this piece. I believe it will do you a world of good if you absorb that one.

Please continue to keep the mail coming. I always enjoy hearing from my readers, whether they agree with my thinking, or most especially, when they do not. Always instructive either way.

OK, let's get started.



## Self-Development

### Leadership's Deadly Sins, Part 2 of 7

The deadly sin of leadership I wish to focus on in this column is closely related to the first deadly sin I mentioned in the previous issue of *Uncommon Sense* (A Failure to Think).

#### **The Second Deadly Sin of Leadership: *A failure to question.***

Perhaps Tony Robbins said it best when he claimed that the quality of one's life is the quality of the questions one will dare ask. And it is a necessary component of effective leadership for persons in power to allow their thinking processes to segue into questioning processes.



Questions, we are reminded by the erudite Neal Postman, are our most potent intellectual tool. And all of the great inventions of the past are the result of someone pondering -- and acting on -- a profound

question. Think of that: the stethoscope, the telescope, the stirrup, the printing press with moveable type, the mechanical clock, the compass, the microprocessor, the telephone, the radio, radar, lasers, satellites, contact lenses, microwave ovens, airplanes, and even conceptual things like management, liberal democracy, and intellectual property are all the result of someone wrestling with a question.

Not all questions are created equally. Some questions are flawed. Some questions are murky. Some questions are just plain dumb, in that with a tad bit more thought, they need not be asked in the first place, as the answers were already staring the questioner in the face. Some questions are rhetorical. Some questions are profound. And some questions are unanswerable -- futile and vexing simply because we don't have access to the necessary pool of information needed to answer such questions.

Still, other questions are not even questions, but statements masquerading as questions. (John, you don't expect me to believe you can dead lift 400 pounds do you? Translation: John, I do not believe you can dead lift 400 pounds.)

One question great leaders often ask themselves is a meta-question: *Are we asking the right question in this situation?*

Leaders understand instinctively that if they fail to ask the right question, they risk climbing the ladder of success, only to discover upon reaching the top rung, that the ladder was leaning against the wrong wall all along. Hence, leaders are far more preoccupied with whether the right questions are before them than they are with ascertaining the answers to the questions they grapple with.



If you ever feel stuck with the formulation of questions, simply review the common openers of *who*, *what*, *how*, *when*, *why*, and *where*. Simply by contemplating those words, you will give your brain a jump start in possible questions to consider. Also, as two (or more) heads are better than one, never shy away from the perspectives and minds of other people who hold different outlooks than your own. Gathering small groups of thoughtful people, especially non-conventional people, can work wonders in churning out provocative questions that are loaded with promise and possibility. In fact, some of the questions lurking around in your own subconscious may never be drawn upon without the catalyst-like contributions you can only get from other minds at work.

These first two of the deadly sins of leadership -- *thinking deeply* and *formulating the right questions* -- go hand in hand. Good thinking results in intelligent questions. And intelligent questions fuel better and deeper thinking.

## The Elephant in the Room

### Summarizing Washington

Trying to summarize a man of the caliber of George Washington is a futile undertaking. His greatness is too vast, his contributions too far-reaching, so that to make any "summary" in a column this size will inevitably leave out swaths of information that render any picture grossly incomplete. Still, I will make the attempt no matter how futile.

Born in 1732 and dying near the close of 1799 at age 67 from a bronchial infection, Washington's larger-than-life career was epic and renders him either the greatest president our nation has ever produced, or our second-greatest (Lincoln being the only serious contender for that distinction.) Having lost his father when young George was but a youth of 11, and having endured a difficult and thorny relationship with his mother, George Washington had no real father-figures to turn to for guidance. He was truly a self-made man. And what a man he was!

Standing at six feet, with red hair which he powdered white, Washington was an extraordinarily strong human specimen and an excellent horseman. His biggest physical liability involved his teeth, for which he suffered significantly for much of his life. One characteristic about Washington that eludes the general public (but is well known to historians) is that he was a very punctual individual. Somewhat

obsessed with time, he remained mindful of the clock, and when supper was to be served at, say, 2:00 PM, it was served precisely at 2:00 PM regardless of whether the guests had arrived. Abigail Adams, the wife of John Adams, was quite taken by this dignified man from Virginia. A keen judge of people, she claimed that "He is polite with dignity, affable without formality, distant without haughtiness, grave without austerity, modest, wise, and good." Yet he did have a temper which, when ignited, could be quite fierce. An occasion involving a cabinet meeting during his first



term as president bears this out. Present were Henry Knox (Secretary of War), Thomas Jefferson (Secretary of State), and Alexander Hamilton (Secretary of the Treasury). Knox's report that certain Democratic-Republican societies (not to be confused with any of today's political parties) were slandering Washington's name and claiming he wanted to become a monarch, a flagrant lie, caused the President to blow a gasket. Jefferson recorded the episode this way: "The President was much inflamed, got into one of those passions when he cannot command himself, . . . Defied any man on earth to produce one single act of his since he has been in the government which was not done on the purist of motives. . . ." and essentially declared that he'd rather be in his grave than continue to have his sacrifices rewarded with such abuse. That outburst effectively ended that cabinet meeting.

Lacking any formal education, Washington was not a philosophically deep man, but he was quite bright in a native way. He read people very well and possessed impeccable judgment. Politically independent, but Federalist in leanings, he hoped America would be spared the bane of political parties, yet such hopes were dashed, particularly in his second term.

Although Washington was a slave-holder, he was in no way a proponent of slavery as an institution. On July 17, 1774, he drafted 24 resolutions adopted by the Fairfax County Committee. Known as the Fairfax Resolves (which he chaired), one of those 24 resolutions contained a "plea to suspend the importation of slaves into Virginia and wish to see an entire stop forever put to such a wicked, cruel, and unnatural trade." This aversion to an inhumane practice which he had been born into did not wane; in 1786, Washington wrote to Robert Morris saying, "There is not a man living who wishes more sincerely than I do, to see a plan adopted for the abolition of slavery." And he practiced what he preached, making the bold

decision to free his slaves upon his death.

A member of the Episcopal sect, Washington was a man of deep faith who prayed fervently. A telling indicator of his religiosity is this line from his Farewell Address: "Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle." So much for today's lovers

of secularism, with their faithless and flawed grasp of the notion of separation of Church and State who seek to banish (and punish) "church" while propping up a godless state.

Washington would have had such persons horse-whipped. Yet Washington's faith continued to deepen, as we learn from remarks he made to six Delaware Indian chieftains on May 12, 1779, when he stated: "You do well to wish to learn our arts and ways of life, and above all, the religion of Jesus Christ. These

will make you a greater and happier people than you are." Can anyone imagine today's President saying something similar?



One more note on the religious paradigm of George Washington bears repeating: In his inaugural address as President, we read this telling line: "The sacred fire of liberty and the destiny of the Republican model of government are justly considered as deeply, perhaps as finally staked, on the experiment entrusted to the hands of the American people." Thus, liberty itself was seen by this Founding Father as having the spark of divinity in it.

Although not what one would call a statesman, Washington did offer some poignant and prescient comments that arrest our attention. Here are some of my favorites:

"Human affairs are always checkered and vicissitudes in this life are rather to be expected than wondered at." (Letter to Robert Stewart

April 27, 1863)

"It was not my intention to depart from that plain and simple manner of living which accords with the real interest and policy of men struggling under every difficulty for the attainment of the most inestimable blessing of life - Liberty!" (Letter to Lafayette, Sept 30, 1779)

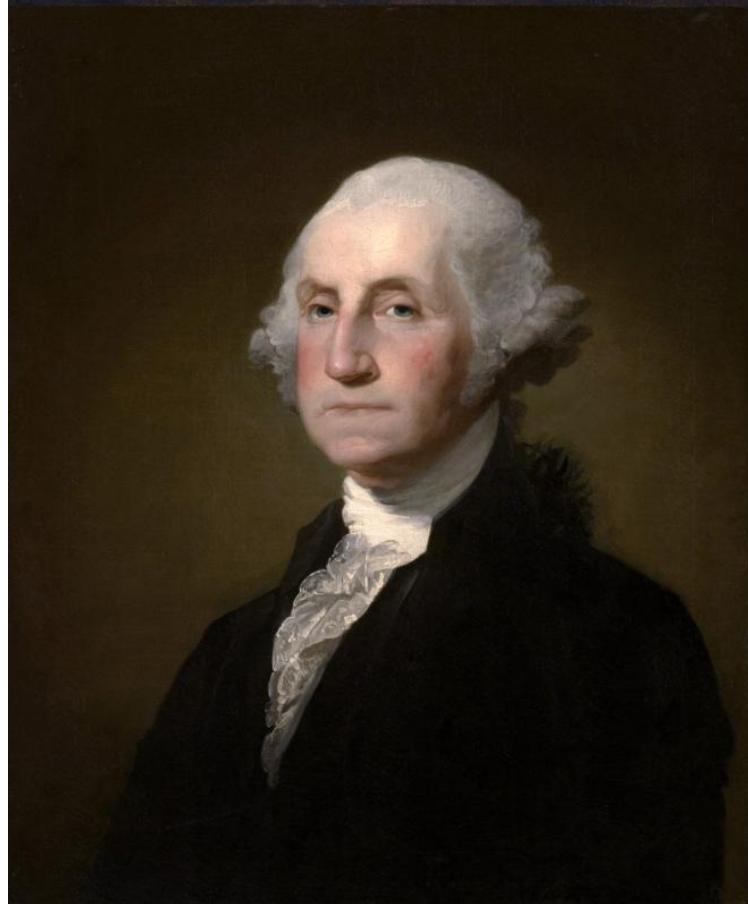
"If we desire to secure peace, it must be known, that we are at all times ready for war." (A 1793 statement found in George Washington Writings, 33:166.)

"You will permit me to say that a greater drama is now acting on this theater than has heretofore been brought on the American stage, or any other in the world. We exhibit at present the novel and astonishing spectacle of a whole people deliberating calmly on what form of government will be most conducive to their happiness." (Letter to Sir Edward Newenham during the Constitutional Convention.)

"Few who are not philosophical spectators can realize the difficult and delicate part which a man in my situation has to act. . . I walk on untrodden ground. There is scarcely any part of my conduct which may not hereafter be drawn into precedent." (A statement made in the early days of his first term as President.)

It's difficult to summarize a man of this magnitude. He was leader of the Continental Army (a ragtag band of untrained men who somehow pulled off the greatest upset in military history, defeating the most well-trained, well-armed, and most disciplined fighters on the planet, after 8 years of relentless war). He was the first President of the United States, serving two terms, and earning the reputation "Father of our Country." The capital city is named after him. As President, he forged the executive branch, appointed outstanding department heads, set a benchmark for efficiency, fairness, and integrity that future administrations would aspire to match. He restored American credit and assumed state debt; created a bank, a mint, a coast guard, a customs service, and a diplomatic corps; introduced the first accounting tax and budgetary procedures; maintained peace at home and abroad; inaugurated a navy, bolstered the army, and shored up coastal defenses and infrastructure; proved that the country could regulate commerce and negotiate binding treaties;

protected frontier settlers, subdued Indian uprisings, and established law and order amid rebellion, scrupulously adhering all the while to the letter of the Constitution. During his presidency, exports had soared, shipping had boomed and state taxes had declined dramatically. He opened the Mississippi to commerce, negotiated treaties with the Barbary states, and forced the British to evacuate their northwestern forts. Most of all he had shown a disbelieving world that republican government could prosper without being spineless or disorderly or reverting to authoritarian rule.



As the Revolutionary War ended, his nemesis, King George III, asked Benjamin West (the great expatriate painter in London, who had risen to become court history painter to the king) whether Washington would be head of the army or head of state when the war ended. West replied that Washington's sole ambition was to return to his estate. The thunderstruck king replied, "If he does that, he will be the greatest man in the world."

When Washington formally resigned his office as Commander in Chief, he closed his speech with these words, "Having now finished the work assigned me, I retire from the great theater of action; and bidding an affectionate farewell to this august body under whose orders I have so long acted, I here offer my commission and take my leave of all the employments of public life." Then, drawing the original parchment commission from his coat, he handed it over to Thomas Mifflin (who was then President of Congress) along with a folded copy of his speech. It was a moment of high drama and high emotion. But King George was right -- Washington, in surrendering power willingly, showed a level of greatness and integrity that is not commonly found in man.

Perhaps Washington's true greatness was best expressed by historian James Thomas Flexner whose assessments of Washington's military prowess also extends to his life in general. Flexner asserted that Washington entered the Revolutionary War "almost as entirely untrained in sophisticated warfare as were his troops. . . Being practically without schooling, George Washington had always taught himself from experience. He learned the lessons of the American war all the more readily because he had no conventional lessons to unlearn. . ." Flexner goes

on to observe that Washington "survived 4 British commanders in chief. Long before the end of the war, he had become much more effective than any of his military opponents. But this did not mean that what he had taught himself would have made him a great general on the battlefields of Europe. Evolved not from theory but from dealing with specific problems, his preeminence was achieved through a Darwinian adaptation to environment. It was the triumph of a man who knows how to learn, not in the narrow sense of studying other people's conceptions, but in the transcendent sense of making a synthesis from the totality of experience."

Will we ever be blessed with a leader of this capacity in our lifetimes? God knows we could benefit from such a leader.

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

## Shameless Plug

### Need Help Preparing for that Next Big Job Interview?

No, I'm not being lazy. The response from the previous issue of *Uncommon Sense* for the Interview Guide was so promising that I decided to run it again. So here's the pitch.

So you have trouble with job interviews? You get nervous? You feel unprepared? You get psyched out? I understand. And that is why I am pleased to alert you to my new eBook: *Your Interview Roadmap*. At over 12,000 words and with six appendices, this guide book will open your eyes to what really goes on in the world of interviewing from both sides of the desk, and will prepare job seekers to hit it out of the park 80% of the time. (OK, more like 90%, but I prefer to be understated.)



If you are interested in purchasing the product, you can [click here](#) to make your purchase.

The advice you will glean from this eBook is golden! I would charge you six times the price of the eBook to give you the same advice in person.

If you've done poorly in job interviews in the past, you can turn it around. The answers are there. Take action!



## The Great Unknown: The Presidential Election

We are in a political season. Many pundits are opining that this coming presidential election may well be the most consequential in our lifetime. Are they right? Who knows? Even if they are right, we may find ourselves justifiably saying the same thing in 8 or 12 or 16 years from now.



As for myself, I have to confess the bleak reality that there is no one on the political stage today that excites me. While I'm an independent who favors no party, it's difficult to see how I could vote for any of the Democratic candidates vying for their party's nomination. Hillary Clinton strikes me as too calculating, not authentic, not honest, and of questionable judgment given the email server issue. Bernie Sanders is a Socialist and, thus, does not believe in core American values in the first place. It's remarkable he's even on the ticket.

On the Republican side, there are things I see in Donald Trump, Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio and John Kasich that impress me (different things pertaining to each of them), yet there are also things I see in each of them that give me a feeling of consternation. (I just learned that Mr. Rubio's campaign may be out of money and he may not last for his home state primary in Florida.)

While I will exercise my right to vote, and while I have no idea as of this writing who I will vote for, it is safe to say that I will carefully weigh and consider all the candidates -- their presumed strengths and weaknesses -- and then go with my gut. It would be folly to expect what I imagine is the "perfect" candidate. The only person who shares 100% of my beliefs and values is . . . me. And I'm not running.

Two nights ago I found myself in the Microsoft Theater (formerly the Nokia Theater) in downtown Los Angeles. Located right by the LA Convention Center, Ritz Carlton, and Staples Center, the plaza just outside this high-brow 7100 seat venue reminds me of a miniature Times Square in New York City. It's a happening locale. Inside the theater was a sold out event: Bill O'Reilly from Fox News, host of The O'Reilly Factor, and SNL Alum Dennis Miller, a funny albeit cynical sage whose wry opinions and observations about everything under the sun are as witty as they are thought-provoking. O'Reilly pontificated on why some people are so drawn to Trump: anger at the Republican establishment. O'Reilly also pointed out the not-so-elusive fact that if Trump manages to win both Ohio and Florida (both primaries are tomorrow), it's over for the Republican competition and Trump will be the nominee. But if Trump wins only Ohio, or only Florida, then it may be a very tricky and highly uncertain path to the nomination.

In the end, whoever is president come January 2017, there will be existential angst on the part of much of the population. Yet we will press on as Americans, knowing that we've probably had worse men in office and have survived it (ever heard of Millard Fillmore?). Our next president will probably do some great things

and also do some disappointing (perhaps even abysmal) things.

The key is: What will I do to thrive? What will I do to make this country a better place?

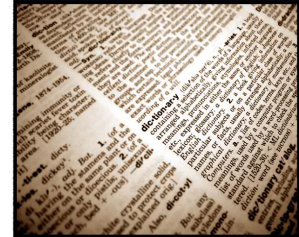
## The World of Words

### Propensity

#### Building Your Power of Expression

**Propensity, n.**

**Pronunciation:** prə'pensədē



**Meaning:** A propensity is a tendency to act in a particular way. Think of it as an inclination for something or someone to behave in a certain way.

#### Usage:

- *His mild-mannered ways are a facade in that he often surrenders to a propensity for violent outbursts when he doesn't get his way.*
- *This particular treatment is one I recommend with utmost caution, as it has a propensity to weaken the patients who undergo it to an extreme degree.*
- *Given my propensity for slapstick, I recommend you do the talking, as I won't be taken seriously.*

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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)

**Sincerely,**

Ara Norwood  
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