Uncommon Sense

Providing Clarity, Promoting Intelligence

Issue: # 196	July 29, 2019

Dear David,

It has been so hot here in SoCal that I am beginning to doubt my doubts on Global Warming!

All kidding aside: take a peek at the **Self-Development** column below for a brief overview of a macro-issue.

Also, the **Elephant in the Room** column takes a different turn this time. We look at a book that I would like to recommend to my readers.

The **From Ara's Journal** column shares a painfully challenging experience and some of the lessons I drew from it.

And build your vocabulary with another gem of a word from the **World of Words** column!

OK, let's get started.

Ara Norwood

Self-Development

The Stream

As a management consultant, I spent a fair amount of time looking at organizations through various lenses, most notably through the lens provided by the McKinsey 7S Model. The 7S Model examines such disparate elements of organizational health from the perspective of Strategy, Structure, and Systems (what they refer to as the "Hard-S" elements) as well as things like Staff, Style, and Skills (the "Soft-S" elements), along with a core cultural element called Shared Values. My mentor **Stephen R. Covey** added two other elements to the McKinsey 7S Model -- Self and Stream. As I dealt with Self in the previous issue (#195) of *Uncommon Sense,* I will now address the macro issue of Stream.

The word "stream" in this context refers to the environment. It takes a look at matters that have their genesis outside of the organization but that could, potentially, have an impact on the organization. What follows are some of the Stream elements I tend to consider when counseling individuals and organizations. I will briefly mention them and where possible, I will provide links for further study.
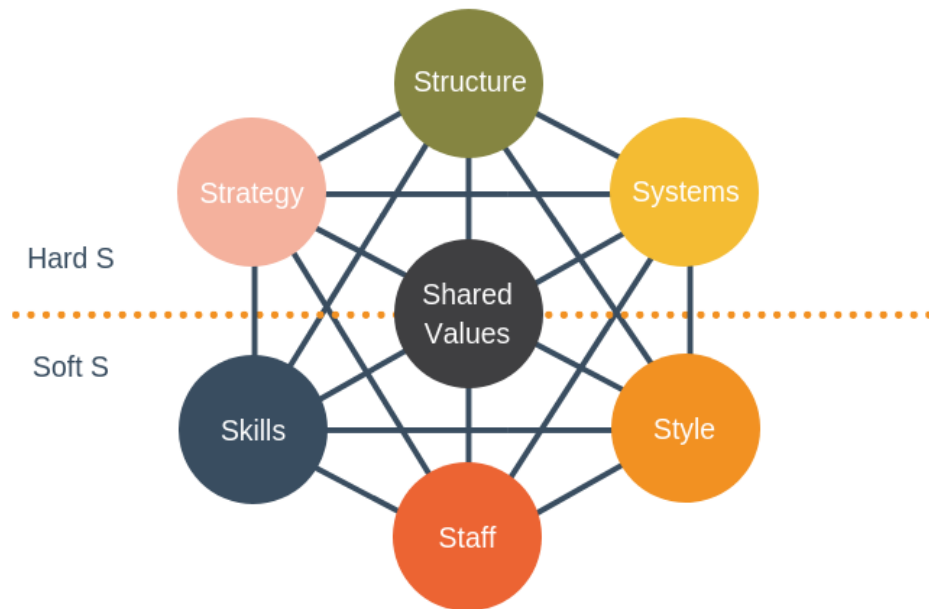
The Competition Stream: Competition is all around us, and this is healthy. Our competitors can be our greatest teachers. We have so much to learn from them, both what to do and what not to do. Of course, we want to know our competitors

McKinsey 7S Framework

intimately, and we want to differentiate ourselves from them. I encourage senior leadership of various organizations to go into the shops, stores, branches, campuses, and facilities of their competitors wherever possible and try to undergo the customer experience with that competitor. It is important to try to learn where a competitor is superior to you. Only when leaders face up to that reality can they implement the necessary changes to boost their strengths and nullify their liabilities.

The Disease Stream: Epidemiology is the study of disease and how to control the spread of epidemics. We live in an age where modern science and modern medicine has made great strides in managing the spread of disease. Our country suffered greatly from yellow fever, small pox, and tuberculosis in the 18th century. We don't hear about those maladies very often these days. But new potential diseases, such as Asian Longhorn Tick Disease, ancient viruses from Arctic permafrost, new vector-borne pathogens due to changes in the habitat where mosquitos live, diseases tied to nanoparticle-induced immune system toxicity, and new, uncontained types of influenza all have the potentiality of wreaking havoc on diverse populations. If any of these new (or existing) diseases were to reach pandemic levels, organizations are would be impacted.

The Drug Stream: Illegal drug use (actually, abuse) is rampant in America, which is another reason we need to put up a wall along our southern border. With marijuana becoming legalized in several states, more and more people are showing up to work with their mental faculties compromised, producing error-prone work. Fortunately, recreational marijuana use is still a Federal crime, but even that may change some day, opening the door to more and more mediocrity. Organizations will have to implement policies -- and enforce them vigorously -- in order to stem the tide of employees showing up for work with dilapidated brains. Leaving marijuana aside, employees using far more dangerous drugs such as cocaine, heroin, LSD, methamphetamine, and fentanyl will undoubtedly creep into the work environment from the outside. Organizations will

have to remain vigilant to detect such occurrences and move swiftly to remove addicts from their environment while attempting to provide options to such employees to get them the help they need for recovery.

The Economic Stream: The economy is a vast organism with a life all its own. While politicians can and do attempt to influence the economy (and, at present, it appears President Donald Trump as been quite successful with his economic policies, although that could change at any time) the economy can be quite unpredictable and erratic. The state of the economy does influence what organizations are able to do in terms of growth and expenditures. A bad economy often demands belt-tightening and layoffs. A really bad economy (AKA a bear market) often means a drop in revenues, and many companies go bankrupt if this is sustained for too long. A booming economy (a bull market) usually means greater revenues for R&D, product development, hiring of more sales professionals, and customers with extra liquidity available to purchase goods and services. To learn how the economy actually functions, click here and let Ray Dalio, founder of the largest hedge fund in the country, explain it to you.

The Political Stream: Currently, the great battle being waged in American politics concerns those who are Conservative and those who are Leftist. I spend a lot of time writing about Leftism in The Elephant in the Room column of this publication. But for our purposes here, I will simply point out that when Conservatives are in power, free-market Capitalism is honored, taxes are usually lower, and businesses usually thrive. Today, we have a completely new phenomenon taking place with Leftists. Many of them are now self-described Socialists, meaning, they wish to advance a Marxist-Socialist agenda which is antithetical to free-market capitalism. Think of it this way: how many successful entrepreneurial ventures have come out of Cuba since Fidel Castro came to power in 1959? Answer: Zero. Why is that? Because systems such as socialism and communism quash creativity and the entrepreneurial spirit. Keep an eye on whether a Conservative is in power or a non-Conservative, and you will usually see a correlation with the level of organizational productivity.

The Technology Stream: All I will say here is that new inventions become new innovations over time, and that organizations can often benefit from anticipating and capitalizing on such innovations. Organizations must be attuned to the changes in technology, for such technological advances can be tools that are utilized in advantageous ways.

The Terrorism Stream: Most of us are aware that there is an element within Islam of men (and some women) whose reading of the Koran has radicalized them into believing that they have a moral obligation to enforce Sharia Law through brutal, savage means. These means include detonating bombs, using trucks to run over innocent people, using firearms to shoot people, using knives to decapitate people they consider to be infidels, etc. In addition to Islamic terrorists, there are occasionally individuals born and raised in Western society who, unlike Islamic terrorists, get radicalized for completely different reasons, usually having nothing to do with any particular religion. We call these people "home-grown" terrorists. Timothy McVeigh was one of these. While the Trump Administration seems to have done an incredible job dismantling Islamic Terrorist groups such as ISIS and Al Qaeda, it should be remembered that Islamic Terrorists are a patient

group, and will often lay low for many years before they regroup and strike again when they believe the opportunity to do so is favorable. Similarly, home-grown terrorists are unpredictable, and one can never be certain when their sick, demented ideological proclivities propel them into doing something tragic. Organizations must have up-to-date, state-of-the-art security systems in place and avoid being crippled by a PC-mentality which causes people to keep silent for fear of appearing bigoted when they see or hear something that raises alarms. Employees must understand that if they hear things that sound like they are coming from a radicalized terrorist, they must report it immediately.

The Unknown Stream: The world is fraught with the unexpected. There are known-knowns (things we know and we know that we know -- example: we know what 5 x 5 is and we know we know that); there are known-unknowns (things we do not know, but we are aware of our lack of knowledge -- example: we don't know the square root of 13,934, and we are fully cognizant of our ignorance on that matter); then there are unknown-unknowns. These are things that we do not know, but they remain in our blind-spots, outside the boundaries of our awareness. We not only do not know them, but we do not know that we do not know them. Two of the best books on this topic are Donald Rumsfeld's remarkable memoir, *Known and Unknown*, and Nassim Nicholas Taleb's The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable, which is not easy reading. But the value of considering this rather esoteric concept is that awareness of it can at the very least give organizations a quicker response time when the unexpected takes place.

The Elephant in the Room
### Book Notes: *The Case for Trump* by Victor Davis Hanson

Victor Davis Hanson is one of the most erudite polymaths alive today. Every time I read an essay he has published, I find myself picking my jaw up from off the floor! The man is so brilliant in his expressions and in his insights that I am rendered speechless. . . A Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University with expertise in the ancient world, Western Civilization, politics, history, ancient Greece, and the concept of war, Hanson is a careful, prescient thinker and an articulate commentator on world trends and their broader, more subtle implications. He has written over 20 books, all of them showing a depth of scholarship that is both deft and formidable.

So imagine my surprise at the subject of his latest book, T*he Case For Trump*. This book is not one that places Hanson in the role of an apologist or cheerleader for Donald Trump. In fact, I found myself annoyed at an endorsement on the front cover from the equally erudite Newt Gingrich: "A must-read for everyone who supports the President." I would not have characterized it as such. The book will do nothing to influence or inform either die-hard Trump fans or dyed-in-the-wool Trump haters. Instead the book is a must-read for those non-partisans who want to understand the macro-conditions that made it possible for Donald Trump, a man with no political or military experience, to win the Presidency from an opposing candidate who had served as Secretary of State, a state senator, a former First Lady, and a governor's wife. In other words, the book answers the question, **How did the pundits and pollsters get it wrong, and wrong on such a colossal scale?** The book answers that question with a depth of

understanding that is breathtaking. Thus, the book is not an attempt to get Trump-haters to stop hating Trump. The book does not attempt to say, "Trump is really not as bad as you folks on the Left think." The book is not prescriptive. It is descriptive.

At 372 pages, there is so much to choose from to share, but I will limit my selection to just a few excerpts.

- Obama's presidency was the first two-term tenure in modern history not to achieve 3 percent growth in annualized GDP. (P. 140)

- "When I became the NASA administrator," NASA director Charles Bolden told *Al Jazeera* in 2010, President Obama "charged me with three things." Bolden added, "Perhaps foremost, he wanted me to find a way to reach out to the Muslim world and engage much more with dominantly Muslim nations to help them feel good about their historic contribution to science, math, and engineering." Nowhere in any founding NASA charter had there been an agenda item to promote Islamic psychological well-being. (P. 177)

- Army chief of staff General George Casey, in the aftermath of the Fort Hood shootings, sought to embrace the correct deep-state orthodoxy: "Our diversity, not only in our Army, but in our country, is a strength. And as horrific as this tragedy was, if our diversity becomes a casualty, I think that's worse." The real horror was that Major Nidal Hasan's radical Islamic demons had been known and ignored by many in the US Army. (P. 178)

- Was the United States so short of legal talent that special counsel Mueller could not find lawyers from a law firm other than his own, or who had not contributed to the Clinton campaign, or who had not represented clients in ongoing Clinton-related scandals, or who did not live in Washington or New York? (P. 205)

- Silicon Valley cynically manipulated both parties: Democrats would drop their muckraking tendencies given Big Tech lucre and progressive cool; blinkered Republicans were so ideologically straitjacketed that they were simply incapable of biting the hand that starved them. (P. 209)
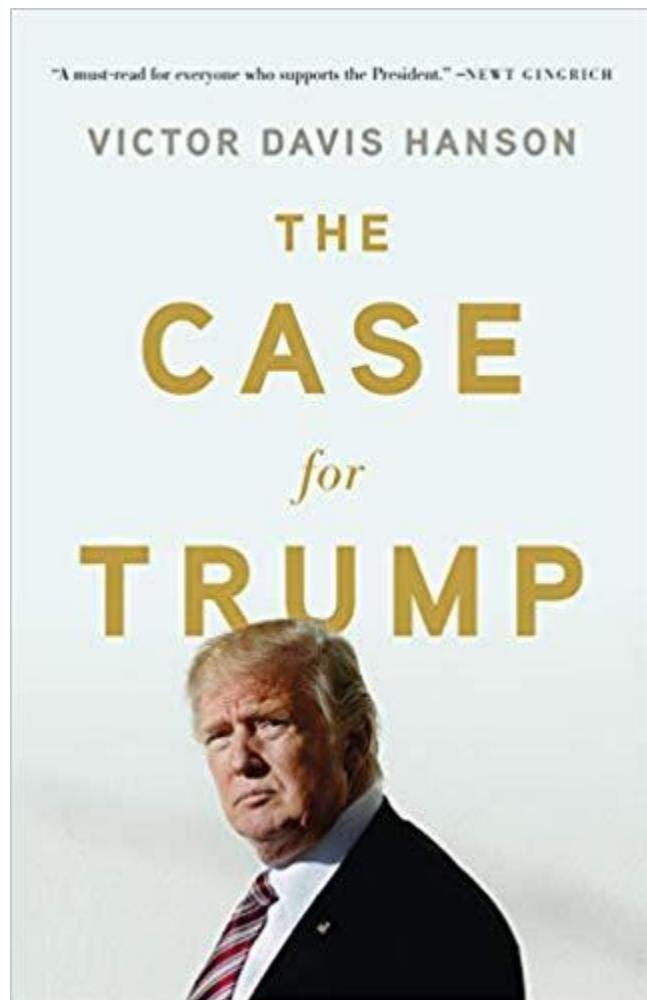
- By autumn 2018, the repetitive nightly predictions of cable news pundits that the latest presidential controversy was a "bombshell," or marked a "turning-point," or offered proof that "the walls were closing in," or ensured that "impeachment was looming on the horizon" had amounted to little more than monotonous and scripted groupthink. (P. 211)

- In the pre-Trump era, Democrats defined decline through traditional progressive and redistributionist lenses. Of course, they focused on inequality and the current *relative* plight of the poor compared to the rich, rather than the *absolute* condition of the impoverished compared to the indigent of the past. (P. 220)

I strongly recommend this book to those who would like to understand the political landscape of the recent past and the current day.

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

Check out my website for tools to help you with your career, your presentations, and other matters.

Shameless Plug

Need Help Preparing For That Next Big Interview?

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 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 table, 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!

Being Mindful of Others

I was sitting across from an important colleague, one of the most important associations I have. We were sitting across from each other at a Starbucks going over important business. I'm not a coffee drinker, but I was drinking a very refreshing Strawberry Acai Lemonade blend. She had a hot tea beverage. At one point she abruptly and swiftly reached across the table to point to a certain graphic on the document in front of me. In doing so, she inadvertently knocked her cup of tea over, thrusting it in my direction. The lid came off and a wave of boiling hot tea gushed past my laptop computer on my left and a stack of documents on my right, racing towards me. Before I could react, the boiling hot liquid cascaded over the edge of the table and onto my lap. I instinctively stood up in an instant, my pants soaked in the scalding tea, and knowing I was about to experience unpleasant sensations. Sure enough, in about a tenth of a second, I felt the severe pain of the scorching fluid, and could hear the sound of my colleague's voice expressing shock and horror at the mishap.

It was painful. Very painful. However, there was something also going on in my brain at that moment. It's hard to describe, but I can only think of it as a sense that if I cried out in pain, I would only add to the emotional pain and embarrassment of my colleague, who clearly felt mortified at what she had done. Knowing it was completely accidental, I did not want her to feel greater guilt than she already felt. And in my desires to not add to the burden of self-reproach I knew she was experiencing at that moment, I somehow was able to draw upon the necessary self-control to speak in a way that masked the very real physical pain I was feeling, in order to lessen the burden of the very real emotional pain she was feeling.

I did not let out a groan or a whimper. I was able to manufacture a smile and make a wisecrack about how the air conditioning in the room had me feeling a bit chilly anyhow, so the warm beverage all over my pants was actually a welcome respite from the cold.

There was no way to alleviate her remorse and embarrassment entirely. But I believe her pain would have been far worse had I carried on and made my discomfort very visible and public. Stifling my own searing pain lessened the drama of the moment and, after some cleaning up, we were able to move on. And my own physical pain, though real, had largely subsided within a day.

What I learned from all of this is we all make mistakes; innocent accidents happen due to our missteps that represent errors of the head (or motor coordination) and not errors of the heart. In these instances, I believe we are not culpable. I also learned that people's emotional feelings matter, perhaps as much (or even more so) than our physical feelings. I was in physical pain, but she was in emotional pain, and that emotional pain might have been exacerbated had I not kept my reactions in check. It took enormous self-control to do so, but it was absolutely worth it. That relationship was in no way damaged. And that is a great outcome.
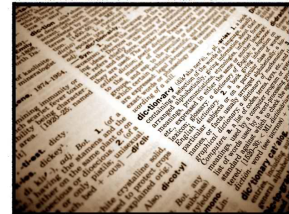
The World of Words

Rife

Building Your Power of Expression

Rife, adj.

Pronunciation: rīf

Meaning: When something is widespread, prevalent, or abundant, or abounding in some way, this term comes in handy.

Usage:

- *The streets were rife with rumors and fear.*

- *Male chauvinism was rife in medicine in those early days.*

- *You received a failing grade because your paper was rife with errors.*

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