

Uncommon Sense

Providing Clarity, Promoting Intelligence

[Quick Links](#)

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

[Join Our Mailing List!](#)

[Click Here to Join!](#)

Issue #219

July 13, 2020

Welcome, once again, to the latest issue of *Uncommon Sense*.

Our **Self-Development** column expounds on ways to utilize a keen memory. Don't forget to read it!

This issue's **Elephant in the Room** column is a little different than what you may have come to expect. I'll leave it at that and let you see what's up.

In the **From Ara's Journal** column I delve into a question I have been wrestling with and *still* wrestle with.

The World of Words column delivers, yet again, a picturesque gem of a word! I hope you use it.



OK, let's get started.

Ara Norwood

Self-Development

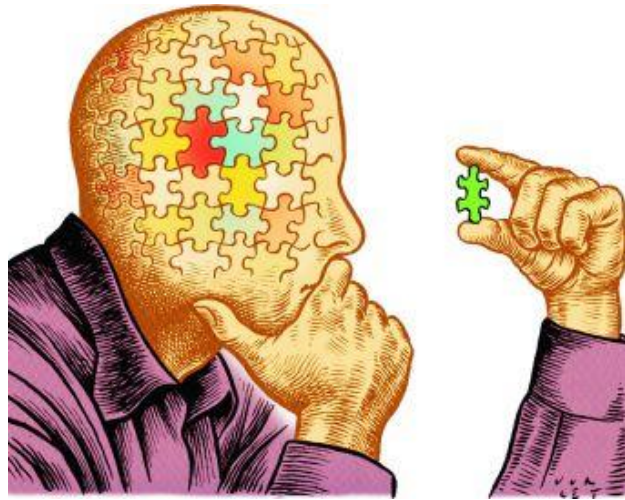
The Power of a Keen Memory

Our memories are one of our innate treasures. We often think about our past with nostalgia, with longing, with fondness. Conversely, when we encounter someone with dementia, or Alzheimer's disease, we pity them, for we know their ability to remember their past – even a past that elapsed mere moments ago – has been taken from them. The inability to remember our past robs us of one of life's deepest pleasures, the ability to review the happy or fulfilling moments of our personal history.

Moving from the philosophic to the pragmatic, having a keen memory can be an impressive attribute to have. And on many occasions it is the appearance of having a good memory that matters. Here are some examples of how having a good memory can be helpful:

Remembering Birthdays: I learned this from Dale Carnegie in his classic book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. Thanks to Carnegie, I keep a Birthday Log. It's a

spreadsheet sorted by date in the first column. To the right of that column are the names of the various people whose birthday I wish to remember. Each Sunday evening, as I plan my week, I make note of which birthdays are taking place that week. Then, on the appointed day, I reach out to whomever is having a birthday that I wish to acknowledge. Whether I place a phone call to that person, or send a letter via email, or, with enough advance planning, send a gift of some kind, the point is that I remembered someone's birthday, brightened up their day, and many of them are floored that I remembered at all. It's hard to go wrong with such a system. And while, admittedly, I may not have actually memorized their birthday, having a mechanism in place such as this leaves the impression that I have a good memory.



Remembering Things I Have Read: I read a lot of books. And within those books are many statements or ideas that are worth remembering. So I highlight them in yellow. It's good to go back over those highlights after I have finished reading the book they are in. Sometimes I will wait a few months, then pick up a book previously read and review all of those highlighted portions. That enables me to lock into my memory the important things I have read. Thus, when the time comes, down the road, that drawing upon such information would come in handy, I can readily seek out the book that information is contained in and utilize it.

Memorization: It takes a lot of discipline to memorize something. Short quotes by Emerson, Thoreau, or Churchill can be quite impressive. Longer passages from Shakespeare, The Book of Mormon, or The Poetry of Robert Frost can be mesmerizing to the audiences we recite such passages to, whether it be as part of a speech, or a private counseling session we are holding with a client or colleague. Either way, it gives one the impression that they have encountered someone who is learned, who is disciplined, who is erudite. It really does make a positive impression in almost all cases. But again, it takes dedication and focus to memorize longer passages, and it gets more difficult with age.

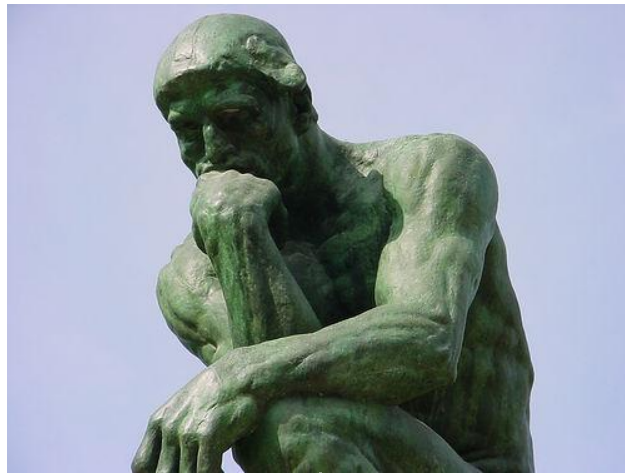
Decisions Made in Meetings: Whether the meeting was in person or held online, I strongly recommend you take careful notes on what was discussed, what was said and by whom, and what decisions and agreements were arrived at. And keep your notes. That way, you can turn to them when questions come up about what was discussed at that previous meeting. If you have your notes accessible, you can speak with confidence as to who said what, etc., and people will start to see you as dependable. This helps strengthen your own reputation.

Follow even one of the above suggestions, and you will start to see how having a keen memory is something that will open doors for you again and again.

The Elephant in the Room When Brilliant People Get It Wrong

As a long-time observer of the human condition, I have been able to draw some conclusions about different types of people. In particular, as I have been fortunate to

mingle with truly brilliant men and women in all walks of life, I have come to realize that being brilliant has its advantages and also its drawbacks. Brilliant people carry with them a burden – the burden of high expectations from others. Brilliant people are expected, by others, to offer brilliant pronouncements 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. We don't expect such things from great baseball players. We know that even if a baseball player is sporting a batting average of .400, that means he is truly among the greatest of the great, but it also means he strikes out more often than he gets a hit. Yet with brilliant, intelligent, intellectually-gifted people, the rest of us seem to expect that they will have a batting average of .999 or better.



Thus, we often look to brilliant people and assume anything that comes out of their mouths must be valid.

That is often true. Brilliant people tend to write brilliant ideas, or speak in brilliant ways.

But sometimes what they say is anything but brilliant. Sometimes true geniuses are abysmally foolish in their pronouncements. Here are some examples:

Thomas Jefferson: Our third president was truly a polymath, a renaissance man, a deep thinker. Indeed, a later president, John F. Kennedy, once greeted a 1962 gathering of Nobel Prize winners with these opening remarks: *"I think this is the most extraordinary collection of talent, of human knowledge, that has ever been gathered together at the White House, with the possible exception of when Thomas Jefferson dined alone. Someone once said that Thomas Jefferson was a gentleman of 32 who could calculate an eclipse, survey an estate, tie an artery, plan an edifice, try a cause, break a horse, and dance the minuet."*

Kennedy is not overstating Jefferson's gifts. Educated at the College of William and Mary where he studied about 15 hours each day, and mentored by men of great learning, including Dr. William Small, George Wythe, Francis Fauquier, Peyton Randolph, and even John Adams, Jefferson was a quietly tenacious man. He was educated in the classics, mathematics, horticulture, architecture, and science. He owned a personal library of 6,707 volumes. He was fluent in 7 languages. In addition to being President of the United States, he was a diplomat, astronomer, naturalist, political philosopher, educator, statesman, farmer, musician, scientist, agriculturalist, horseman, geographer, theologian, and paleontologist.

Yet Thomas Jefferson, in calculating how long it would take explorers to reach the Pacific (which, being on the other side of the continent, was wholly outside of the experience of Jefferson), he asserted it would take 100 generations. It actually took 3 generations.

Had Americans who gave matters of this sort much thought presumed that a man of such immense learning as Jefferson was correct, many may have simply thrown in the towel and not even bothered such a trek to find the Pacific coastline. Yet, while Jefferson was truly a tower of intellect and knowledge, he was completely out of his league in making such pronouncements.

Vincent Bugliosi: My initial exposure to Vincent Bugliosi took place around 1977, when I read the massive book *Helter Skelter* which chronicled the story of Charles Manson and his cult of killer-hippies who murdered the pregnant Sharon Tate and others in

1969. Bugliosi was the Deputy District Attorney for Los Angeles County at the time and was appointed lead prosecutor of the trial that took place. It was a complex court case and fraught with strangeness on many levels. I came to see Bugliosi as a hero of sorts: rational, fearless, focused, and duty-bound to seek justice. He won that case and in doing so he became a very prominent legal voice in the United States. I later met Mr. Bugliosi in person while attending Brigham Young University. He had come to the campus to give a speech and after his speech ended, I followed him out into the hallway along with a half-dozen other students, and peppered him with questions. Again, I found him to be approachable, engaging, and brilliant.

After graduating from UCLA Law School in 1964 (where he was President of his graduating class) Bugliosi went on to become a very effective prosecutor during the 8 years he worked in the Los Angeles DA's office. During those 8 years he prosecuted 106 different federal jury trials, winning 105 of them. He went into private practice, this time as a defense attorney, and he also wrote a number of books. His 2007 magnum opus, a book titled *Reclaiming History*, is a dizzying *tour de force* that effectively dismantles all of the many conspiracy theories surrounding the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, and shows unequivocally that Kennedy's death was the result of a lone gunman, Lee Harvey Oswald. This prodigious book was over 1,600 pages and contained a CD-ROM containing an additional 1,128 pages of source notes and endnotes. There is no question that Bugliosi, who died of cancer at the age of 80 in 2015, had a keen, crisp mind.

Yet, writing 4 years before his death in a book he titled *Divinity of Doubt*, which is a book that lays out his case for his agnosticism, Bugliosi makes a rather strange claim. (And I should come clean and confess that I am going from memory here; I retrieved my copy of his book just last night and tried to find the exact story, but failed to locate it, so I may be botching some of the details, but not the gist of his illustration).

He essentially offers the following hypothetical: suppose you are a believing Christian. You are being pursued by villain who's intent is to kill you (call the villain Satan, or some earthy tyrant, it doesn't matter for this illustration). So you are running for your life through the desert. Up ahead, about the same distance in front of you as the villain is behind you, is a Savior (call him God or some other sort of earthly protector). You are running in the direction of that protector. But what should you do? Keep running towards to protector, hoping you reach him before the villain catches up with you? Nope, not according to Bugliosi. Instead you should stop running, turn and face the villain, and fall down at his feet, begging for mercy.

In other words, it makes more sense to Bugliosi for the victim to take his chances with a possible change of heart of the assailant who wants to kill you than it does to try to reach the protector who will, with certainty, provide safety for you.

I'm not at all clear what it is that caused Mr. Bugliosi to reach such a conclusion, but there it is: a foolish idea from an otherwise brilliant mind.

Nassim Nicholas Taleb: Talk about genius! Taleb's book, *The Black Swan*, is a brilliant treatise on issues involving randomness, probability, and uncertainty. I read *The Black Swan*. Once I put it down, had someone asked me what the book was about, I would have said, "I have no idea." Facing up to my own ignorance, and realizing that, intellectually speaking, I am completely out of Taleb's league, I read the book a second time. Even after reading *The Black Swan* a second time, I only had a vague grasp of some of its over-arching principles. I will need to read it a third time, and probably a fourth time before I can claim to "get it." And it's not due to any vapid tendencies in my intellect. It's that Taleb is uber-brilliant, formidably so.

This is a man of wide and varied experience: options trader, mathematical statistician, lecturer, college professor, author. Taleb has earned Bachelor of Science and Master of

Science degrees from the University of Paris, an MBA from the Wharton School, and a PhD in Management Science, also from the University of Paris.

Yet, when it comes to climate science, a field he has no direct expertise in, he made the absurd statement that we should, in effect, follow the advice of the climate alarmists ***even if their models are flawed!*** In other words, it does not matter if the models followed by climate activists are false. Even if false, we should *still* follow their implications. Truth and facts are not relevant. Hysteria is.

Not one of Taleb's brighter moments.

Ray Kurzweil: With Ray Kurzweil, who is employed by Google as a Director of Engineering, we have a man who is both an inventor and a futurist. While he doesn't have a lengthy pedigree of college degrees, earning no more than a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science and Literature from MIT, (although he does have more than 20 honorary doctorates) where he is different is that he wields a very high batting average when it comes to his many predictions. As for the aforementioned predictions, he correctly predicted the dissolution of the Soviet Union, that computers would beat the best human chess players by the year 2000, the explosive growth of the internet long before the internet was widely known about, and a long train of additional predictions. Indeed, of the 147 predictions he made between 1990 and 2005, 115 were entirely correct, 12 were essentially correct, 17 were partially correct, and only 3 were wrong. Adding together the "entirely" and the "essentially" correct has him correct 86% of the time. If this were baseball, Kurzweil would boast a batting average of .860 – simply unheard of! The man is a certifiable genius.

And yet, when asked if he believed that God exists, he replied, "I would say, not yet."

This answer is quite revealing. It suggests two things:

- 1) Mr. Kurzweil imagines that *God* is a human construct, a highly technological Golden Calf that men will one day perfect, but that invention lays in the future.
- 2) Mr. Kurzweil has virtually no understanding of the meaning of *God*, not even conceptually. The notion of deity lies far outside Kurzweil's intellectual comprehensions. The very notion of a Supreme Being that resides outside of time and space as we understand such concepts is not a part of Kurzweil's world-view.

Thus, while I am certain that many of his followers gasped with admiration when they heard his statement about God's existence, this brilliant man's pronouncements on the existence of God are entirely worthless.

I have just shared four examples involving four very different yet brilliant men -- a political philosopher, a legal genius, an expert on randomness, an innovator. Most of what they have to say is worthy of consideration. But as we have seen, all of them are just as susceptible of saying something abysmally ludicrous as are the rest of us.

The Lesson? Never assume an expert is correct. We should never fall into the trap of appealing to authority, of trying to validate a position we hold by turning to someone brilliant. Most of the time, there is enormous value in what they bring to the table. But not 100% of the time. Remember that and you probably won't go wrong.

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

Shameless Plug Want to Succeed at your Next Job Interview?

With the COVID-19 pandemic going into its 5th month, many people have become displaced in their jobs. You may have lost your job, or perhaps you may be vulnerable to losing your job in the near future.

While you will be scrambling to start interviewing with prospective employers, it may have been some time since your last interview, and you may be rusty.

You may well benefit from my Special Report, [**Your Interview Roadmap**](#).



Let's face it: if you hired me to coach you through the process of an effective interview, the fee would run into the hundreds of dollars. And spending hundreds of dollars when you are unemployed (or about to become unemployed) is a difficult thing to do. I wrote this Special Report so that for less than \$100, **in fact, less than \$50**, you would have access to the golden nuggets that, if followed, would greatly put the odds in your favor that you'll perform brilliantly at your next interview. And every interview after that.

Just ask D. Smith of Santa Clarita who bought my Interview Guide and successfully landed a job soon thereafter:

"I purchased Norwood's interview guide last month and it's amazing! He goes through the processes step-by-step and you end up with not only the skills that will get you that interview, but the strategies necessary to be confident so you succeed in your interviews resulting in you receiving job offers (yes, offers)."

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've done poorly in job interviews in the past, you can turn it around. The answers are there. Take action! [Click here to get started](#). You won't regret it!

From Ara's Journal Movie Critics vs. Box Office Receipts

I saw a movie in 1971 called *Billy Jack*. Starring Tom Laughlin (who wrote the screenplay and was also the Director), the movie was a western-style action drama about a mixed-race (Navajo-Caucasian) former Green Beret who is caught in the middle of a conflict between bigoted townspeople and counter-culture students who attend an alternative

school. The character Billy Jack is known for having a violent temper when provoked and is an expert in the martial arts. A lot of young, impressionable youth (such as myself) were captivated by the movie.



The movie reviews, written by professional film critics, were not so kind. They thought the movie was pretty lame. Leonard Maltin of *Movie and Video Guide* called it "ridiculous." Roger Ebert found it disturbing and self-contradictory. Howard Thompson of the *New York Times* called it "misguided." Gene Siskel claimed it "tried to say too many things in too many ways". Kevin Thomas of the *Los Angeles Times* claimed it suffered from a "careening unevenness," and was "crude," and "awkward." Gary Arnold of *The Washington Post* called the film "horrendously self-righteous and devious." David Wilson of *The Monthly Film Bulletin* wrote, ". . . Tom Laughlin at least has the courage of his convictions, even if those convictions are scarcely thought out."

Yet, as an independent film, when adjusted for inflation, it was, at least as of 2007, the highest-grossing independent film of all time. The film grossed about \$10,000,000 on its initial run, then brought in close to \$50,000,000 on its re-release, plus another \$32,000,000 from rentals. \$92,000,000 against a budget of less than a million dollars is not too bad.

What is one to make of this dichotomy? On the one hand, we have the professionals, the experts, the movie reviewers telling us the movie is sub-standard. On the other hand, we have the movie-going public telling us the movie is, largely, worth seeing. Who should we believe – the trained experts or the untrained masses?

It would be easy to presume that the trained experts are smarter and more informed than the untrained masses. However, one need only look back at the 2016 Presidential election between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump to realize that the experts in that case assured us that Mrs. Clinton had about a 95% chance of winning that election – an election she lost. The experts, the pundits, the pollsters were completely wrong.

On the other hand, one only need pay attention to the oft-repeated (and utterly false) claims of "systemic racism" in America to realize that the public can be easily manipulated and hoodwinked.

If one can't trust the experts and if one cannot count on the wisdom of the common people, what then? To whom can one turn for reliable truth?

I don't pretend to have an easy answer.

But I suspect the answer is found in God in some way.

The World of Words

Bloviate

Building Your Power of Expression

Bloviate v.

Pronunciation: 'blōvē, āt

Meaning: To bloviate is to speak at length, especially in an inflated or empty way. To bloviate is to be a "wind bag."



Usage:

- *I don't want to put him on the program because he has a tendency to bloviate without saying anything substantial.*
- *I heard you, and there is no need for you to bloviate further.*
- *You can bloviate all you want, but it's not going to get me to change my mind.*

New subscribers, the Special Report "11 Ways to Beat the Odds" should be in your In-Box within 24 hours from the time you subscribed. 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 Facebook (keyword "Leadership Development Systems") or via my website: www.aranorwood.com

Sincerely,

Ara Norwood
Leadership Development Systems

Visit our website



Leadership Development Systems | P. O. Box 801681, Santa Clarita, CA 91380-1681

[Unsubscribe {recipient's email}](#).

[Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)

Sent by ara@aranorwood.com powered by



Try email marketing for free today!