

Uncommon Sense

Providing Clarity, Promoting Intelligence

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Issue #234

February 28, 2021

As the month of February goes into the record books we are down two and have ten to go for the year 2021.

Dive into the **Self-Development** column to learn a simple process for relieving yourself of much unnecessary stress.

We recently celebrated President's Day, a poor substitute for Washington's Birthday which we used to single out for celebration. I discuss a few tidbits of our Founding Father in the **Elephant in the Room** column.

Being a life-long learning is an important undertaking. The **From Ara's Journal** column addresses that ideal.

Finally, **The World of Words** column serves up a controversial word that can be used in a non-traditional context for good effect.

OK, let's get started.

Ara Norwood



Self-Development

The Biggest Drain on your Productivity

I'll give it to you straight: Email is both a blessing and a curse. Email is a wonderful servant but a terrible master. And far too many of us are burdened by the avalanche of email we receive – most of which is of marginal importance at best.

Let me focus on work email (as opposed to personal email).

A portion of the work email we receive typically includes content that is not all that relevant to you. For instance, Greg will send an email to Betsy, but will copy Gladys, Freida, Sharon, and Seth. Betsy will respond to Greg. Then Greg will respond to Betsy and say "Thank You." To which Betsy will reply "You're Welcome." Then Greg may say

something chatty, like, “Oh, and by the way, Betsy, I thought your emoji in your last response was funny.” To which Betsy will reply, “Thanks,” and to which Greg will reply, “You’re welcome.” Each time, the sender clicked on Reply To All and if you are Sharon or Seth, or Gladys, or Freida, you received a number of emails that were useful for only one purpose: clogging your In Box.



This fictitious example above is not fictitious at all. It’s a common reality. And it explains why our In Boxes are boated most of the time.

But such bloating also has an adverse psychological effect on us. We tend to feel overwhelmed when our In Box is loaded with hundreds of emails, whether they are opened or not. In fact, some of you reading this are thinking, “Oh, to only have 600 emails in my In Box! That would be heaven!” Why are they thinking this? Because they have several thousand email messages in their In Box!

And it is easy to allow it to get out of hand. It takes very little time for the bloating to occur. I know from first-hand experience. A few months ago I deviated from my practice of dedicating the 2:00 PM hour to email processing. Normally, I would ignore emails unless I noticed they had something truly urgent on them that simply could not wait. Short of that, I didn’t get into my In Box until 2:00 PM on any given workday. Doing so kept my email load very manageable. There were days that I would close out the workday with less than 10 emails in my In Box – and sometimes zero emails in my In Box. People who knew that simply marveled.

However, being human, at one point a few months ago I deviated from my 2:00 PM ritual, and within a week or so, I had upwards of 600 emails in my In Box. And it stayed in that general range of 400 to 600 emails for months! It was like a bad rash that wouldn’t go away, or the sprouting up of weeds in my garden that, zombie-like, kept coming back. I hated it and I felt out of control and mentally drained.

But I dug in over the course of a weekend and finally got things to an acceptable level – about 13 emails in my In Box. And by re-instituting the 2:00 PM ritual of an hour dedicated to email management, I found that I did not even need to use the entire hour for that.

Here is how I work it: I use Folders and Sub-Folders. It’s no more complicated than that. If I am working on a project, such as designing a new seminar on the subject of Critical Thinking, every time I receive a relevant email on that topic, I just drag and drop that email into the Critical Thinking Folder (which is actually a sub-folder of a folder called Courses). Done! It’s out of my In Box and I know where it is parked. When I am ready to work on the Critical Thinking seminar, I can find it in the appropriate folder.

The folders can be as granular as you want them to be. I have a folder titled Systems. Within that folder, I have a sub-folder titled LMS (which stands for Learning Management System, a tool I use to track the training seminars I hold and the people who attend them). Within the LMS sub-folder, I have another sub-folder titled “Training” which refers to any training I might receive or need relative to the functioning of the LMS system. Thus, if an email comes to me from a vendor who is offering training or instruction on how to best utilize my LMS system, I can drop that email into the Training Sub-Folder, which is housed in the LMS sub-folder, which is housed in the Systems folder.

As long as I do not deviate from my normal practice of dedicating an hour a day (2:00 PM to 3:00 PM in my case) to the processing of emails, I will be the master of the process rather than its victim. Being the master means I am more organized, more on top of things, and I don't carry around a psychological albatross on my neck that my life is mismanaged. I feel in control, I feel confident, and I am much more productive.

There is much more to be said about managing emails, but if you follow the advice in this column you will enjoy similar benefits.

The Elephant in the Room

George Washington

George Washington is very likely the most consequential American – ever! Rivalled by very few in terms of significance (Franklin, Lincoln, perhaps Madison) Washington remains a towering figure of Americana. There are no shortages of biographies of the man – I just purchased this week a significant biography that is hot off the press, *George Washington: The Political Rise of America's Founding Father* by David O. Stewart, and I am already well into it.



It is always interesting to try to peak into the formative years of someone so momentous. We don't know as much about the earliest days of George Washington as we would like. It would be fascinating to know more about his relationship with his father, Augustine Washington, who died when George was 11. Unfortunately, we know very little about that dynamic. But we do get some glimpses of his relationship with his mother, Mary Johnson Ball. It was a strained relationship. Mary was a rather crusty woman with a stubborn streak. Possessed of a rather anxious personality, she made few concessions to social convention, and was rather illiterate and unlettered. One historian has said that the first formidable general George Washington ever encountered was his own mother.

After Mary became a widow at age 35, she never remarried and she was left to manage the family farm, tend to five children ranging in age from 6 to 11, as well as oversee dozens of slaves. There seemed to always be a rather cool, quiet antagonism between mother and son, and her common complaint was that she felt that George neglected her.

While they had a number of things in common, he was also her opposite in many respects. For instance,

- She was crude and illiterate; he was well-mannered and well-read.
- She was self-centered; he sacrificed his all for his country.
- She was slovenly; he was meticulous in his appearance.
- She disdained high society; he craved its acceptance.

A few more indicators of their strained relationship: unless historians have overlooked something, it appears that George Washington did not write her a single letter during the entire 8 years of the Revolutionary War. Further, she did not attend his wedding. Still further, there seems to be no evidence she ever once visited her son at Mount Vernon. When she died, George never took the time to have a tombstone erected on her grave.

Washington was a man of extreme discipline. The dignity he projected tended to subdue his rather strong emotions. We get a glimpse into this battle of internal self-control in a letter he wrote during the Revolutionary War. The letter was a reply to a letter he had received from one Lewis Nicola, a Colonel in the Continental Army, who had suggested to

General Washington that he reign as America's first monarch. What makes Washington's response sent the same day so noteworthy was its finality (i.e., this serpent must be killed in the egg.) Here is an excerpt from Washington's letter:

Be assured, sir, no occurrence in the course of the war has given me more painful sensations than your information of there being such ideas existing in the army as you have expressed and [that] I must view with abhorrence and reprehend with severity. . . I am much at a loss to conceive what part of my conduct could have given encouragement to an address which to me seems big with the greatest mischiefs that can befall my country. If I am not deceived in the knowledge of myself, you could not have found a person to whom your schemes are more disagreeable. . . Let me conjure you then, if you have any regard for your country, concern for yourself or posterity, or respect for me, to banish these thoughts from your mind.

That was quite a rebuke.

People are often surprised to discover I do not belong to a political party. My decision to be non-partisan comes from George Washington, who was strongly independent (although I personally sense that he may have been at least somewhat Federalist in his leanings, just as I am somewhat Republican in my leanings even though I am not a member of that party). But Washington hoped America would be spared the bane of political parties, a hope that was dashed during his second term as President. Washington believed wholeheartedly in an energetic federal government. While in office, he never openly identified with the Federalist Party and steadfastly maintained a non-partisan self-image (although my read is that he more often sided with Hamilton, a Federalist, than he did with Jefferson, a Democratic-Republican.) To demonstrate his independent leanings, I quote from a letter he wrote to Thomas Jefferson in July 1796:

"I was no party man, and the first wish of my heart was, if parties did exist, to reconcile them."

Further, in his great Farewell Address, he stated:

"[Parties are] likely, in the course of time and things, to become potent engines, by which cunning, ambitious, and unprincipled men will be enabled to subvert the power of the people and to usurp for themselves the reigns of government."

Today's hyper-partisans would do well to consider such wise counsel.

God blessed us with George Washington to lead the nation in war, and to help get the nation on the right footing in its formative years with his wise governance. Perhaps the Almighty will send another man of his stature some day. Should that day come, it will not come too soon.

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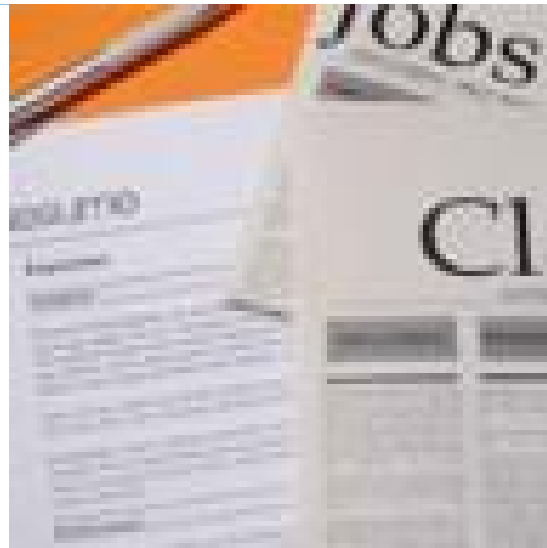
And that, my friends, is the latest elephant in the room.

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* * * * *

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

"I could not have gotten my first job without your expertise. Thank you so much! I learned that I had to reword and improve my résumé in order to be taken seriously in the workforce. I had been given tips from my professors in Health Science and other professionals but your advice was just what I needed. It took weeks of frustration waiting for interview calls when I happened to stumble across your website and discovered that I needed help. Your publication enlightened me with your knowledge on the wording and format needed to attract an employer. Furthermore, your booklet helped me recognize certain skills and work experience that I would have never considered important until you got me thinking about it. Thanks for a great product!" -- R. Espana, Valencia, California

From Ara's Journal

Life-Long Learning

"In times of massive change, it is the learners who inherit the earth, while the learned stay elegantly tied to a world that no longer exists."
Eric Hoffer



Is perfection possible?

That's a loaded question, the kind of question that has lots of plausible answers depending on how one understands or approaches the topic.

For example, I am a student of the martial arts. I am also a musician, specifically a guitarist. Both disciplines are vast in scope. Both require a mastery of the fundamentals.

For Kempo (my martial art of choice), one is required to understand a wide array of stances (body posture combined with footwork). There are many types of blocks. There are a wide variety of kicks. There are many types of strikes with the hands (some are "open hand" as one would often see in styles like Chinese Kung Fu, and others are closed fist as one might see in Japanese Shotokan). And there are all sorts of combinations of all of the above as a defense against a myriad of attacks.

For the guitar, there is so much to try to master. Scales and modes. Arpeggios. Strumming. Chords and the countless voicings of chords. Improvisation. The use of harmonics. Hammering. Glissandos. Bending. Playing on a nylon-stringed versus a steel-stringed guitar. Electric guitars with sound effects boxes. Midi-Guitar and Guitar Synthesizers. 12-String Guitars.

For either discipline, the martial arts or the guitar, or most any other discipline or skill, I would imagine it would take several life-times to truly master all there is to master of the craft in question. Given that my life consists of far more than the martial arts or the guitar, one can readily see it would be very difficult to live a full life, with all of the various responsibilities one has, and manage to perfect one's knowledge and abilities in any one field of study.

Having said that, I suspect it is possible to attain perfection in small, isolated areas of life. I may one day perfect a spinning roundhouse kick. I may one day perfect sweep picking (a difficult guitar technique). But full perfection will always remain out of reach.

All of the above is a preamble to a very important point: the notion of embracing Life-long learning, to be a perpetual student, learning new things, is a noble path to trod. As emerging technologies become established which are sure to transform our world, our ability to understand them and work with them in productive ways will open doors to great achievement. Technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, Robotics, Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality, Sensors, Blockchain, Quantum Computers, Avatars, 3D Printing, and similar breakthroughs will revolutionize our reality. And the convergence – the fusing of these disparate technologies – will further bring unimagined results and possibilities.

To the degree that we bravely and wisely understand such breakthroughs is the degree to which we will inherit the earth.

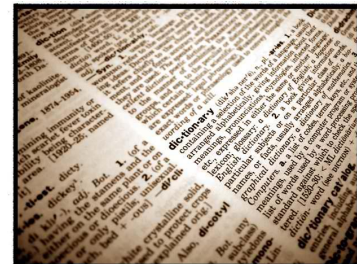
The World of Words

Prostitute

Building Your Power of Expression

Prostitute, v.

Pronunciation: prəstəʊ(y)ʊt



Meaning: Usually with this word we think of a person (typically a woman) who is in the business of offering sex for money. In that sense the word is a noun. But the word can also be used as a verb, in the sense of applying oneself or one's talents to an unworthy or corrupt purpose for the sake of personal gain (or sometimes for financial gain.)

Usage:

- *I was amazed at his willingness to prostitute himself to the worst instincts of the electorate.*
- *By changing her position at the 11th hour, she essentially prostituted herself to curry favor with the very people who wished to destroy her.*
- *I am going to stick with my original mandate, and I will never prostitute my integrity just to score a few points with the rabble.*

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