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It's wonderful to have you back for my latest issue of *Uncommon Sense*. And welcome to all the new subscribers.

Curious about fielding questions effectively? The **Self-Development** column provides some solid content with that objective in mind. Read it, and use it.

I hate to bring you down, but I have to make truth my first love. One thing that fascinates me is how and why civilizations decay and then implode. Whether it's ancient Rome, or the Mayan civilization, or, . . . the United States of America, I am riveted by clues and signs of societal decay. I address indicators that we are in real trouble as a nation in **The Elephant in the Room** column.

The **From Ara's Journal** column reviews why anger is so burdensome and counter-productive.

And a **World of Words** column will not let you down with a dandy of a word that will make you come off as intelligent and smart. Not a bad outcome.

OK, let's get started.

Ara Norwood



**Self-Development**

## Three Kinds of Questions

I do a fair amount of public speaking (not just in the form of speeches, but also in the form of workshops, seminars, classroom teaching, online teaching, webinars, etc.)



Particularly when I am privileged to give a speech, I often structure the speech so there is a Q&A near the end. I don't ever end on a Q&A because I find that anti-climatic; it's far more inspiring to have a strong and profound ending that galvanizes the audience in a memorable way. But I do place the Q&A near the end, shortly before, or even right before, the big ending.

Why do I do a Q&A at all? After all, a Q&A can be risky. I recognize that in doing so, I am relinquishing some control. One never knows if a show-off is in the audience who may try to commandeer the event by hogging the microphone. Or worse, a bully or a troublemaker might try to embarrass or humiliate me in some way for some reason (or for no reason). Likewise, a person in the audience could possibly be unstable or psychotic and could say shocking things.

I do the Q&A because, in spite of the risks, it gives me an opportunity to connect with the audience on a deeper level by having more of a customized, interactive experience with them. Also, it is intellectually stimulating as well as challenging, because it forces me to "think on my feet," which is to say, to think quickly and speak persuasively.

When I am asked a question in such circumstances, that question usually falls into one of three buckets:

1. A question is posed that I am ready for because I have already thought about that question many times in the past, have addressed it, and have a ready answer for it. Thus, if someone should ask: "*What are your core values?*" I am completely ready to respond convincingly and without hesitation. If someone asks, "*What is your proudest accomplishment?*" I'm ready. I already know the answer. If someone asks, "*What is your greatest fear?*" I am prepared to answer without hesitation. I don't have to ruminate on such a question.
2. A question for which I may not have a ready answer, but one with which some quick reflection will enable me to craft an

answer on the fly. My response to such a question requires a clear head, an ability to think rapidly, and penchant for synthesizing various components from things I have read, heard, seen, experienced, or imagined. I am usually pretty comfortable doing this. Many people have commented on my seeming uncanny ability to pull thoughts and facts and stories out of thin air and spin them into a cohesive whole on the spot.

3. A question for which I am ill-prepared to address. Perhaps I don't understand the question. Perhaps the question is over my head or addresses a topic of which I know little about. How I respond to such a question can matter. While not ideal, there are times that I simply admit my ignorance and say, "I have no idea," and if I feel the question lacked relevance, I'll often leave it there and move on. But sometimes I will punt, and throw the question out to the audience to see if valuable discussion can come to the surface. I will virtually always repeat the question first, partly to ensure I heard it correctly, partly to ensure others in the audience can hear what the question consisted of, and partly to buy time, on the off-chance that those few moments may enable me to land on at least a partial answer. In workshop settings, I will turn to a Flip Chart and label a page "Parking Lot" which is where I will write the question I couldn't answer, and then post it on the wall, as a sort of public place to park the question, with the promise that I will be tasked with finding the answer in the near future and report back to the entire audience what I discovered.

Over the years, as I've gained in experience, I find that the third bucket of questions has become less frequent.

But that is because I've done things that any of us can do to bring that about:

- Read widely and voraciously.
- Take regular time to consciously and deliberately think about issues and problems as well as about opportunities.
- Practice how to speak succinctly, cogently, and persuasively.
- Get out and interact with lots of different people, men and women from all walks of life, all age ranges, and all perspectives.

To the degree that we engage in such activities is the degree to which we will be seen as a thought-leader and a person of substance.

**The Elephant in the Room**

## Western Civilization is Unraveling, Part 1 of 2

On the evening of April 15th, 2023, hundreds upon hundreds (possibly more than a thousand) teenagers rampaged recklessly through downtown Chicago, causing mayhem and destruction. Due to previous Defund the Police campaigns, Chicago citizens were left vulnerable to the mob, and the police (or what was left of them) were completely outmanned.



What I found even more disturbing than the mob shenanigans was how Chicago leaders responded to the chaos. Let's start with Mayor-Elect **Brandon Johnson**. Speaking out of both sides of this mouth, here is what he had to say:

*"In no way do I condone the destructive activity we saw in the Loop and lakefront this weekend. It is unacceptable and has no place in our city. However, it is not constructive to demonize youth who have otherwise been starved of opportunities in their own communities."*

Everything he said after the word "however" represents his true outlook. Everything he said before the word "however" represents his politically correct but phony jargon.

We shouldn't demonize youth who blocked traffic, smashed windows of stores, beat up people to within an inch of their life, vandalized cars, stole cars, and even shot people? They should not be demonized? Because why? Because they are starved of opportunities?

I'd like to ask the Mayor-Elect what percentage of those youth lacked a cell phone? What? Zero percent? Starved of opportunities? Come again?

How about outgoing mayor **Lori Lightfoot**? What did she think of the mayhem? She denied it was mayhem at all. She insisted the term "mayhem" does not apply. Responding to a reporter, she said, with a



straight face: "The vast majority of the people who came downtown came because there was great weather and it was an opportunity to enjoy the city. That's absolutely, entirely appropriate. There are a few that came with different intentions. They have and they will be dealt with. But I'm not going to use your language, which I think is wrong, to say there's 'mayhem'."

Really? Jumping up and down on cars was enjoying the city? Stealing cars was enjoying the city? Beating a young couple named **Devante Garrison-Johnson** and **Ashley Knutson** was enjoying the city? That mob stole the young couples shoes, cell phones, and Apple Watch. Is that how they were enjoying the city? Those thugs told the couple they were going to kill them. Is that how they were enjoying the city? That wasn't mayhem? And only a few had bad intentions? And what, specifically, was done with those few? And what number constitutes "few"? 3? 43? 143? 997? 3 might be the number of people there who weren't causing trouble. The mayor is simply delusional.

Likewise, an Illinois state senator named **Robert Peters** claimed that the "teen takeover" was nothing more than a mass protest against poverty and segregation." This, in spite of the fact that the rowdy revelers were shooting guns into the air. This, in spite of the fact that a 6-year-old boy was shot, along with two other teenagers. This, despite the fact that the mob jumped on a man's car and smashed his windshield while he and his wife sat inside the car. They then dragged that man out of his car and beat him so badly that he ended up in the hospital. But to Senator Peters, these crazed teens were paragons of society that were merely protesting poverty and segregation. Again, all of these poverty-stricken youth own cell phones. Most wear expensive Nike shoes.

Are Senator Peters, Mayor Lightfoot, and Mayor-Elect Johnson aware that this mob attempted to breach the **Art Institute of Chicago**? They were thwarted, but imagine what they would have done had they barged inside? Imagine how many invaluable art pieces would have been smashed? This amazing museum has over 300,000 works of art. It is one of the oldest and largest art museums in the world. This mob of unruly teenagers would not have hesitated to smash such priceless works as Pablo Picasso's *The Old Guitarist*, or Edward Hopper's *Nighthawks*. And yet, had they done so, Chicago's leaders would have merely shrugged their shoulders, and then blamed Donald Trump.

When thugs swarm our streets unabated, it is an indicator that civilization is in the beginning stages of coming apart at the seams. But when leaders condone the mayhem, deny it is happening, and

pretend these are good kids just out enjoying the city, then it is no longer an indicator.

It is a certainty.

\* \* \* \* \*

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

## Shameless Plug Norwood Delivers Leadership Programs

I was recently honored to deliver a series of lectures on the topic of leadership. My client, Intel Corporation, is a Fortune 100 multinational tech firm



that remains one of the world's largest semiconductor chip manufacturers. They brought me on board with a 3-year contract to develop and rollout a leadership development initiative. It is a supreme honor to be entrusted with the task of developing first-rate leaders at Intel.

Should your organization need assistance with developing leaders, reach out to me. Perhaps I can help.

## From Ara's Journal The Problem With Anger

All of us, myself included, need to control our anger. Here's one reason why.

Let's say I approach someone who did something I am very unhappy about. In fact, I'm angry, and the anger is justified. It could be directed toward a family member. It could involve something done by a co-worker. It could be anyone.



The problem that person caused usually should be addressed and dealt with.

If I approach that person and I am expressing anger, rage, fury, or vindictiveness, I am creating an unnecessary impediment to having the problem solved.

Why?

Because not only am I trying to get the person to face up to the mess they made (as well as remedy that mess), now that person has the added burden of facing my wrath. And in facing that wrath, their rational mind often shuts down (which eliminates their ability to deal effectively with the original problem) as they are in a defensive mode while trying to protect themselves from my anger.

I vividly recall flying into Salt Lake City about a year ago. I was there for several reasons, one of them involving the impending death of my dear friend and attorney, RC. RC had liver cancer and would be dead at any moment, and so I knew I didn't have much time.

I took an Uber from the airport to a Hertz rental dealer located downtown. I had done business with them before. So I walked into the office where the cars are being rented and found a man in there, a customer, who said he had been waiting for over 40 minutes but no one was in the office to help him.

Puzzled, I actually crossed the barrier behind the counter where the agents normally would be standing, and I entered the back office. Not a soul in the room.

I waited about 20 minutes myself, and then got impatient. I walked next door to another building owned by Hertz that leased cars. I explained my frustration in a fairly loud voice to all of the workers in

that building, one of them even emerging from a back office to see what the ruckus was all about. A worker in that building told me that a guy named Troy should be over in the rental office. And then another worker, looking out the window, said, "There's Troy! He's on the side of the building washing a car!"

I marched over to where Troy was and really laid into him, as if I was his boss: *"Troy! What the hell are you doing over here washing cars when you're supposed to be inside helping customers? There's a man in there who had been waiting 40 minutes -- and that was 20 minutes ago when I arrived! Is this how you normally treat your customers?! Now get it together and get in there and serve us!"*

Troy was rattled and dumbfounded. He knew he screwed up. But so did I, and I eventually apologized to him. He asked me what brought me to Salt Lake City. I told him I was here to say goodbye to a dear friend and colleague who was dying of cancer, and that that had contributed to my bitterness. I made it clear that I should have been more circumspect and less mean to him, and he accepted my apology. But I have to admit, I was ashamed I had treated him that way. My treatment did not help the situation.

I should have simply expressed my frustration to him with a calm demeanor. That would have gotten the message across and done so in a way that did not bring the added baggage of Troy trying to navigate my hostility. I would have been a better man had I done so, and Troy would not have had to experience the emotions he was feeling as I castigated him.

Since that time I have encountered similar situations that provoked me. But I have remembered my encounter with Troy, and have not gone ballistic. I have stayed focused on the issue at hand, taking on a problem-solving persona, and the results have been rewarding.

Anger wastes a lot of time and energy. We could all do with less of it.

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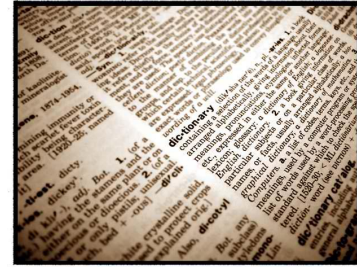
Epilogue: I did have a meaningful and memorable visit with my dying friend, RC. That visit strengthened his resolve and his courage, and brought a positive change in his demeanor.

He died 8 days later in his sleep.



# Impudence

## Building Your Power of Expression



**Impudence**, n.

**Pronunciation:** ˈɪmpyədəns

**Meaning:** When you show scorn or disregard for another person, you are being impudent. Failing to show the proper respect or courtesy to another. If the President of the United States were to walk into the room, I would expect my children to stand as a sign of respect; if they did not do so, there would be consequences for their impudence.

### Usage:

- *His arrogance and impudence offended many.*
- *You will be punished for your impudence!*
- *Lose the impudence; it's unbecoming and beneath you.*

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For more information on my work, follow me on Facebook (keyword "Leadership Development Systems") or via my website: [www.aranorwood.com](http://www.aranorwood.com)

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