

# Inquiring Minds: Lessons Learned in November of 2012

"Kindness is the language the blind can see and the deaf can hear." - Mark Twain

Mission Past Issues: #1 #2 #3 #4 #5 #6 #7 #8 #9 #10 #11 #12 #13, #14 #15 #16 #17 #18 #19 Comment

## Some Emails Challenge What's Funny and What's Not

Within two weeks two friends emailed me "humorous" forwards. One was a video of a calloused



black substitute teacher from the inner city mispronouncing all the first names of the suburban students. This was meant to be a takeoff on some of the unusual pronunciations of names by some Afro-americans of the [ebonics](#) ilk. The other "funny" forward was photo of an obese bare-chested woman with purple angel wings and purple hair, not a royal sight.

My first instinct in both of these cases was to laugh at the stupidity of these people. I even sent the gross angel one on to two of my less P.C. friends to see how they would react. One guy surprised me with his response: "How sad!" He nailed it, and without lecturing, made me reconsider. It was indeed sad that this fallen angel sold herself so short and that my forwarding it lowered us both.

When I questioned the sender of the [ranting black substitute video](#), that person was thought it was sad that "everyone has lost their sense of humor." This led to more back and forth emails and more defensiveness. It was getting ugly, but fortunately cooler heads prevailed and clarifications were made to preserve our friendship.

These two experiences reminded me of many lessons I once knew: 1) Humor has a limit: that which degrades or belittles *is* more sad than funny. 2) Humor is a very subjective thing, oftentimes based on one's beliefs or perspective. 3) Personal belief systems, whether they be political, religious, or just engrained attitudes, often make up a person's identity which is often sensitive to change. 4) Oftentimes the less said, the better, but sometimes a *kind* comment may plant a seed. (It could also uproot weak friendship.) 5) Some people are more flexible than others. 6) All of us have our strengths and weaknesses, insights and blind spots. 7) I'm still learning after all these years, and am thankful for the opportunity to do so, though I find I get less patient with age.

## Debunking Clever Stories which Misrepresent or Over Simplify

Some email forwards are like the Trojan Horse of old: they appear as a gift nicely wrapped as an



entertaining story, but in reality contain a message or metaphor which is subtly crafted to present a certain point of view and undermine another. You've all seen them: the story about the professor who tells his students all the grades will be averaged and everyone will get the combined average grade so no one will fail--this supposedly

being analogous to health care or tax reform--socialism, of course.

Debunking such a stacked story is very difficult because it is oftentimes an over simplification (reductionistic) missing important particulars which are difficult to locate. Oftentimes, the sender might not want to debate the issue, like the evangelist who wants to convert you but is not willing or able to acknowledge another point of view. Strongly held beliefs (liberal or conservative) are blind to opposing facts. Conversely, the person who acknowledges my particular point of view makes me more open to his or hers.

I told a sender of the above cleverly crafted story--a teacher friend of mine--that such a metaphor would be a great assignment for a class to analyze for truth and accuracy, noting its strong and weak arguments. I never got a response, but maybe raising the question was good enough for the both of us.

## Pride and Prejudice: A Cure for this Deadly Duo

As stated, the more we are attached to our beliefs and opinions, the less likely that we will be open to those that differ. My brief experience with Buddhism is that one of its chief tenets is that of detachment: to possessions, to ego, to ideas, to dogma. Such a philosophy seems the most scientific of all the spiritual practices in that it is empirical, does not have articles of faith, dogma, and/or obsession with self propagation.



If only we could detach from our own point of view, just for a moment, stand outside of ourselves; then we might be able to understand. And, in that moment of understanding, love that which is lovable in another, apart from some thought or idea. And in doing that, possibly nudge the both of us a fraction toward enlightenment. Such tolerance takes patience, practice, and lack of ego. Nirvana.

### Election Process Weakens the Ability to Elect and to Govern

A campaign analyst, whose name and position I cannot find, made some interesting points on PBS's *Moyers and Company*. He reported that Reagan in 1984 met with 4 large donor fundraising groups, whereas President Obama in this last campaign met with 228. This expert felt this had to compromise the president's ability to deal with national and international affairs. He also said that it made the president beholden to these donors. Those wealthy donors are only 1/3 of one percent of his supporters where the average Obama donor gave \$200.

Congressmen also spend large amounts of their time (on our tax dollar) not legislating but wooing (and owing) donors on a daily basis instead of legislating totally free from favors owed.

**SOLUTION:** serious campaign reform: limiting PACs, reinstating corporate donation transparency laws, and insisting that all public servants put their jobs first--once the support is there to allow them to do so. It should be a no-brainer.

### Dangers of a Supermajority?

Thirty-eight states now have supermajorities in both houses. Will this give one party unbridled freedom to pass whatever laws it wants? Supermajority can be viewed in several ways, as 2/3 of

those present to pass any bill or amend the state's constitution, or 2/3 of the total. The challenge of such supermajorities is to use their power responsibly, listening to the minority party to double check their due diligence in vetting any bill. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supermajority>

### Bloom's Taxonomy Revisited

In discussing with a friend the nature of intelligence, I recalled a psych. ed. class introducing me to a remarkable summary of a hierarchy of learning known as Bloom's Taxonomy. It was presented by a committee in 1956 as a model of learning, and still is.

These are some of the skills needed to make decisions in a democracy, but unfortunately most of that which is taught and tested in school often deals with the lower rung of thinking: memorization and recall. What makes citizens so susceptible to advertising is their lack of the higher skills of analyzing and evaluating. Note the highest skill is being able to create. I find this



description of knowledge as fascinating today as it was 43 years ago when I first came across it.

For a more detailed chart zoom in on the one below, or go to this link for more information. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bloom's\\_Taxonomy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bloom's_Taxonomy)

*I hope you found something of interest in this issue, and enjoyed reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it. It helps me clarify my thoughts. If it works for you, please let me know.*

*Thanks, Joe*

