

Inquiring Minds: LEARNING FROM ONE'S "FRENEMIES"

#51 Nov. 6, 2018 "Always forgive your enemies; nothing annoys them so much." —Oscar Wilde ([more quotes](#))

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FRIENDSHIP TESTED BY AN EMAIL EXCHANGE

Last week, an old golfing friend of mine who lives across the country blasted me in an email for what I thought was a "non-political" piece I sent to show how both political parties misuse statistics. He thought it was "a shot across the bow," and he started making all sorts of *ad hominem* attacks on me, telling me to "get a life," "accept the duly-elected president," "quit being a Trump-hater," with the truth that "hate can kill you."

Totally floored I responded to each statement in CAPS not to yell but to differentiate our writing line by line. I labeled his various statements as either gross generalization, hyperbolic, not-factual, etc., (something like DT's *M.O.* itself). Before I sent it I read and re-read our conjoined email just to make sure I wasn't over-reacting myself; and with these new eyes I had an epiphany of sorts: **what if he was correct in his accusations?! Hmm... something to consider.**

So then I re-read and re-assessed his rant in this light, *searching for the truth in what he said*. I told him that I was doing this, and invited him to look for the truth in what I was saying. I also told him he's nicer on phone calls or in person than in writing. Then, feeling better, I sent the email hoping that we both could learn something from the exchange—if nothing else but to be a bit more guarded in future exchanges. I know I learned something, and hope he will too.

REFLECTING MORE ON THE EXPERIENCE

The above email encounter got me thinking about two other things. First, what polarized politics after [the civility of Tip O'Neill and Ronald Reagan?](#) Second, why do some people stir up things and other people just "let sleeping dogs lie." Regarding the first, Terri Gross on NPR radio interviewed the author of an [article in this month's The Atlantic magazine](#) which traced the history of the break. (See box.)

[Newt Gingrich](#) turned partisan battles into bloodsport, wrecked Congress, and paved the way for Trump's rise. Now he's reveling in his achievements." He did this deliberately to try to fire up the Republicans who were a shell-shocked minority licking their wounds after the Watergate fiasco.

Regarding the latter, [The Guardian](#) reported that people often lie or temper the truth "in order to make someone feel better, to avoid trouble, or to make life simpler (and very rarely for false insurance claims)." I would hypothesize that men tend to be more confrontational —though there is plenty of justified outrage among women who will no longer be bullied or intimidated. (*What married man doesn't know this!*) Hopefully the culture will change yet again, valuing civility, tact, and understanding over arguing, fighting, and violence; and become more focused on the issues. There are many examples of "[frenemies in history](#)" starting with the 12-year correspondence between political opposites John Adams and Thomas Jefferson once Benjamin Rush got them talking to each other.

DIFFICULTIES IN COMMUNICATING BY USING THE WRITTEN WORD

The very act of writing or typing takes skill. Someone who hunts and pecks or is "all thumbs" will be limited in what she or he can write or type.

Writing is a difficult medium in which to communicate. Grammar, composition, and spelling not only effect the ability to get a message across with all its nuances but also reveals the skill or its lack in the composition itself. Hence, when a principal of a school or a president writes an informal message to his or her subordinates it loses credibility if it contains grammatical errors, and misspellings, as well as exaggerations, factual misrepresentations, or errors.

Face to face communication by a kind person allows that kindness to emerge. I cannot help thinking of Elizabeth (Téa Leoni) in the TV show [Madam Secretary](#) (of State) in dealing with the harsh men in her life and how she wins them over with kindness, compassion, and creativity in seeking a common ground. I am also inspired by Kipling's poem *If*— which strives for character. **(See below.)**
Wishing you the best as we strive for excellence. - JB



Téa Leoni of *Madam Secretary*

If—

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too.
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream—and not make dreams your
master;
If you can think—and not make thoughts your
aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster,
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:

If you can make a heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on!"

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!

If— is a poem by [English Nobel laureate Rudyard Kipling](#), written circa 1895. It is a literary example of [Victorian-era stoicism](#).^[2] The poem is written in the form of paternal advice to the poet's son, [John](#).