

Capped

The man shut his television off, but the act wasn't the usually calm pushing of a button on a remote control. No, this time turning off his television was deliberate, and he muttered, *Shut up. I don't want to listen any longer. I've heard all of this repeatedly, and it still makes no sense.*

He tried to go about his day but he was dazed by the news and the seemingly ordinary citizens who spoke passionately and matter-of-factly about matters they were obviously ignorant about, and who spoke authoritatively about matters they were also completely ignorant about. He felt a wry amusement especially from what he had heard not only just now but over the course of the last several years. He found that he was surprised some times, and perplexed at other times. But the one constant in the dissemination of "opinionated news" was the media outlet responsible was not a news channel governed by the Federal Communications Commission, but rather a channel designated as an Entertainment Channel. Again, why would any of the people who didn't seem interested in hearing both sides of a conversation care to check the accuracy of their news, when their news was being broadcast by an entertainment channel?

As he kept thinking, the bewilderment he was experiencing began to be replaced by an understanding that had not yet fully evolved. So, he decided to let his thoughts continue unabated as he went about his day. His mind drifted back in time, and his mind brought up incidents he had experienced over the past several years; incidents of being forced to listen to theories of gross misconduct on the part of high-level public figures by people who were his friends. And the gross misconduct ran the gamut of high-level lying, child sex orgies by high-level government officials, voter fraud, complete incompetence by very experienced politicians,

doctors, law enforcement, and lifelong public servants. The litany of the alleged misconduct by so many people, all of whom were, at first, of one political party, but the net was soon widened to ensnare anyone who had worked for or tried to defend the opposing, political party.

At first, thinking this time was no different than other times when people could simply discuss things, he tried asking them questions and he tried, for instance, asking them why they believed a certain thing was true despite there being no proof about their aspersions of gross misconduct. He was shocked when the person began mocking him and calling him mean, shame-filled names. He was further shocked when the intensity level began reaching a level that, quite obviously, was getting physically dangerous. The person was yelling at him, his fists were clenched, and the question was yelled at him, "Do you want to take this outside?" At other times, to other people and for other questions, a superior, mocking tone of voice would be deployed, and they would shake their head in disappointment at his stupidity and ignorance.

At this point he was beginning to see that there was not going to be any meaningful discussion, nor was there going to be any discussion that would change his mind or the other person's mind. They were each capped within the information they had acquired. The hardest part of all of this, for him, was that everything he was hearing he had already heard from other people. At first, he wondered where they had heard it because nothing on his television was reporting any of the gross misconduct that he was hearing about from the individuals he knew. Yet each of them was reporting the same alleged incidents, verbatim. He tried listening to the news channel of the political party responsible for the distribution of the false allegations, but the name-calling and the near total lack of respect and civility towards people of different political persuasions was too much for him, and he was literally forced to stop watching and listening. He felt like people from both sides of each political party were talking, but the only listening being done were people

listening to the speakers from their own party. No one from the other political party was listening, or if they were listening, they were simply preparing their caustic replies. He still wanted to find out why to his basic, nagging question of why people, who were otherwise very smart, could fall for the lies and conspiracy theories that had become so prevalent.

That was when he stopped watching news programs as the rhetoric had devolved to include those who would physically hurt those of a different political persuasion. Hate became a part of the daily rhetoric, and hate became to be, for him, an epidemic from or which he sought escape. His escape first manifested itself in him limiting what and whom he talked and listened to. He began cutting off contact with people who could not control their hate and their, to him, immature name-calling. He was forced to decide if knowing several people he had known for more than a decade was worth having to listen to what came out of their mouths and into his ears. He decided it was not a relationship, or relationships, he wanted to pursue; he told them he didn't want to hear their political opinions and he asked them to respect him on that one point, but his friends couldn't stop talking politics. It was as if they had a verbal affliction which meant they couldn't stop the talking about politics nor could they stop the name-calling, and so he chose to end the friendship. This was not something he did lightly; nor was him asking them to refrain from talking politics his first, second, or even ninth choice. No, he tried to tell them as kindly as he could that he did not want to talk about politics. Many of his friends listened to him and while some still made the occasional remark about something political, they would then laugh out loud saying, "I just had to say that so I could watch your facial expression."

Most of his long-time friends were smart, well educated, if not highly educated people. And for a couple of years, he was unable to figure out where the disconnect was between them being smart and them following these suspect conspiracy theories, or the allegations of child sex rings,

or that vaccines against viruses were produced so that people could be controlled, and just so much more. Still, he waited and he waited and he waited, trying patiently to figure out how an entire section of society seemed to have had their intellects capped. Intelligent, and in some cases highly intelligent people were, when it came to the simple acceptance of one political side of present-day politics, fools. There was simply no other way to frame it, or to phrase or express how he now felt about this specific behavior. He had been letting those thoughts, and more, rattle around in his head. “Their intelligence seems to have been capped” he would occasionally repeat to himself, as if he was trying to figure out a riddle. What else could account for people not seeing past their leader’s willingness to do and say virtually anything to remain in the spotlight. It was as if a huge majority of people didn’t want to see past the untruths. The situation was perplexing but the hatred, now so prominently on display, was scary to him.

Once the rhetoric had sunk to name-calling, shaming, and placing the types of targets found at rifle and shooting clubs on to pictures of people with opposing political views, he knew the situation was getting out of control. It wasn’t only one side of the political equation of course. Falsehoods were taken up as truths by both sides and used to support their cause, and each side became attached to the falsehoods they chose to believe. Thus an impasse was created except for the escalation of the name-calling, shaming, the hate and the meanness. There was quite literally a standoff for a while, because there were capped people everywhere: in the police, in government, in media, and in the armed forces, which prevented those people from doing their jobs according to the strict limits of the law, and in defiance of Section 1 of the 14th Amendment which reads: “nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws”. All their leader had to do was to say something and it was as if he handed off a baton and they ran with it. “Ballot boxes are not secure and thousands of bogus votes were cast that

way”, was an assertion made but no proof was ever provided to prove the veracity of that claim. Seeing so many people remain, by choice, so ignorant for so long about so many distortions and outright lies, was confusing, to say the least. Even after proof was shown that the lie was indeed a lie, millions refused to believe the proof, and millions called the people who provided the proof liars and cheaters. The final days of the administration which had so exasperated so many was tumultuous to say the least.

And then one day he checked his news feed on his phone. He got his news over the internet because then he didn't have to sit through, and be subjected to, whomever put together the news feed or what order the news feed had been programmed. And then there were the patience-testing television commercials that had finally broken his will to continue, and led him to turn his television off mid-commercial and mid-sentence. By using his phone for his news, he was in control of what he wanted to read and or know about. He particularly didn't care about the opinions of so many uninformed yet highly opinionated people, and, quite honestly, he wondered why anyone cared about their opinion. What he liked the most was unbiased news reporting, preferably stating both sides of the news, and told dispassionately, without personal opinions, because he felt, personal opinions are not news.

But then came the day that he was scrolling through his news feed, and there was an article about one of the most out-spoken purveyors of false allegations at a rally with many of his followers. These were just some of the people who believed quite literally anything he said. If this man said it then his followers heard it and without thought they accepted it as truth, and there was nothing that would change their minds. Their intellects were all, quite literally, capped, and they were capped because their leader said that was how he wanted things to be, and if you weren't with him on everything he said, you were against him.

Several years earlier their leader had shown up to give a speech wearing a bright red cap, and he urged his followers to buy them and wear them. By wearing that red hat, they would all stand in unity as of a group and they could share interests, objectives, and standards together. But as he looked closer at the news feed, there was their leader standing on a raised platform saying something, and the man couldn't hear what was being said since he had this news feed session muted. But there it was as clear as could be; the leader with his cap on, and hundreds of his followers with their caps on. There they all were in plain sight with their knowledge and their ability to think for themselves capped. They were capped because their leader wanted it that way. Their leader was also capped because he had taken on a job for which he had no experience. He had shown through his bitterly harsh, caustic language, and his undisguised and unapologetic mean criticism of his foes, that if you weren't with him on everything then you were against him. His followers, probably without them even knowing, were now the subjects of anticipatory obedience, and their leader knew he had complete control over them. And then he remembered an attribute that he had read about a long time, and that attribute was named Anticipatory Obedience.

The definition of that phrase is that anticipatory obedience means adapting instinctively, without reflecting, to a new situation. The definition said "adapting instinctively, without reflecting" and without reflecting means "without thinking deeply or carefully" or, to put it simply, "without thought". Which made sense to him, and finally answered the question of why do otherwise intelligent people follow theories which have no basis in fact or reality, and for which there is no information that can change their mind? The answer appears to be that their behavior is instinctive for them.

There are also two other traits in the equation which stop any civil discourse and those two traits are the ability to hate and the ability to be mean. Name-calling contains both of those traits.

The next thing the man did was to examine himself to see if he had this same characteristic, and he found that he did have areas where he too acted instinctively rather than thoughtfully. He remembered watching Western's on TV as a kid, and he remembered watching the posse's being formed to go catch the bank robber or the cattle rustler, and after they caught him, they would hang him. Sometimes there was one person who tried to speak thoughtfully but he was usually bullied out of the way and the lynching went ahead. He had always been struck by the fact that these men lived meaningful lives- they were policemen, bankers, blacksmiths, and shopkeepers- but when they got together, they acted instinctively using hate and meanness, and as their emotions rose their intellects declined. Soon the heinous act was carried out in a rage, fueled by some shared instinct between them all. It wasn't until the law intervened and consequences began to be meted out that the lawless situation began to change for the better.

The man wondered again if there were any words that he could say that would reach to the instinctive parts of others, and cause them to reflect and give thought to their life's choices, instead of acting instinctively. He doubted there were words, but being an optimist, he decided to try.

The odd part to the man was they were all wearing the same, easily identifying, brightly, colored caps. He literally laughed out loud! For there it was for all who wanted to see, the crowd of followers whose intellects were capped by their instincts, all proudly wearing their bright red dunce caps, which one could see from afar, thus alerting the rest of the people. Those with their intellects capped echoed verbatim, or nearly so, all they heard from their leader, or from news sources, web sites, or social media platforms, what their leader wanted to have promoted.

Everything else acted as echo chambers, and then those echo chambers were picked up by other echo chambers.

Just because someone is intelligent and successful in one area doesn't necessarily equate to them knowing what they're doing, or being successful, in another area or areas. Whether those areas are simply having opinions or trying to run a country is irrelevant- giving credence to wrong or ignorant ideas amplifies the wrong ideas and spreads the ignorance thus giving both of them oxygen. But how do you talk to instinctive behavior? How do you get through to that?

There used to be an attribute in people that was deemed a highly sought-after attribute, and that attribute was experience in a given trade or position. The more experience a person had seemed to be a good trait. Experience seems to have been cast aside as irrelevant by a very large portion of our society, so that people are now in positions of power and importance yet those persons have no experience in the position they are occupying.

The man, this man, was never, and never wanted to be, a part of a group or community. He preferred not belonging to anything. The fact that he still occasionally interacted with others was merely a sign of his gregarious nature. A nature so embedded in his DNA that there had never been anything he could do to stop it. The present-day tumultuousness had finally changed that in him. The unmasked hate and the threat of physical violence finally slowed his gregarious nature. He now merely talked to the people he talked to initially to find out if they were potentially harmful or harmless. Then he would retreat to his neutral, solitary, lifestyle, keeping his opinions to himself.

The End.

Written by Peter Skeels © July 22nd, 2022

