

Capped.

The man shut his television off, but the act wasn't the usually calm button pushing on a remote control. No, turning off his television was done angrily this time, and he half-shouted, *Shut up. I don't want to listen any longer. I've heard all 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 issues they were also utterly ignorant about. He felt a wry amusement, especially from what he had heard just now and over the last several years. He found that he was surprised sometimes and perplexed at other times. But the one constant in disseminating "opinionated news" was that 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 people who didn't seem interested in hearing both sides of a conversation care to check the accuracy of their news when an entertainment channel was broadcasting it?

As he kept thinking, the bewilderment he was experiencing began to be replaced by an understanding that had not yet fully evolved. So, he 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, and 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 from other times when people could discuss things, he tried asking them questions, and he tried, for instance, asking them why they believed a particular story was true despite there being no proof about the reporting 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 was getting physically dangerous. The person was yelling at him, his fists clenched, and the question was asked, "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 heads 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 almost verbatim. He tried listening to the news channel of the political party responsible for distributing the false allegations. Still, 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 could no longer watch and listen. He felt like people from both political parties were talking, but the only listening being done were people listening to the speakers from

their party. It did not seem like anyone from the other political party was listening, or if they were listening, they were preparing their caustic replies. He still wanted to find out the answer to his fundamental question of why people, who were otherwise very smart, could fall for the lies and conspiracy theories that had become so prevalent.

He stopped watching news programs when the rhetoric devolved to include those who voiced the threat of physically hurting those who belonged to the opposing political party. Hate became a considerable part of the daily rhetoric, and hatred became, for him, a growing epidemic from which he sought to escape. His escape manifested when he limited what and whom he talked to and listened to. He began cutting off contact with people who could not control their hate and immature name-calling when speaking to him. 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 asked them to respect him on that one point, but they couldn't stop talking about politics. It was as if they had a mental affliction, which meant they couldn't stop talking derogatorily about politics, so he chose to end the friendship. This was not something he did lightly, nor was asking them to refrain from talking politics his first, second, or even ninth choice. No, he tried to tell them as kindly as possible that he did not want to hear or talk about politics. Many of his friends listened to him, and while some still occasionally remark about something political, they laughed out loud, saying, "I just had to say that so I could watch your facial expression."

Most of his long-time friends were intelligent, well-educated, if not highly educated. For a couple of years, he was unable to figure out where the disconnect was between them being intelligent 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, patiently trying to figure out how an entire section of society seemed to have had their intellects capped. Intelligent and, in some cases, brilliant people seemed fooled into accepting one political side of present-day politics. There was no way to frame, 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 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 millions of people didn’t even want to fact-check what was being reported. 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 ranges onto 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, a wedge of misinformation and hate was used to create a larger opening for the escalation of name-calling, shaming, hate-rhetoric, and uncivil 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 guidelines 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 the leader had to do was to say something, anything, and it was as if he handed off a baton and his followers ran with it.

“Ballot boxes are not secure, and thousands of bogus votes were cast that way” was an assertion put forth, but no facts were ever provided to prove the claim's veracity. 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 assertion was false, millions refused to believe the facts, and millions called the people who provided the proof liars and cheaters. The administration's final days, which had so exasperated so many, were tumultuous for the entire country.

And then, one day, the man checked the news feed on his phone. He preferred getting his news over the internet because then he didn't have to sit through and be subjected to whoever 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 and led him to turn his television off mid-commercial and mid-sentence. He controlled what he wanted to read and learn about by using his phone for his news. He honestly didn't care about the opinions of so many uninformed yet highly opinionated people, and he wondered why anyone else cared about their opinions. What he liked the most was unbiased news reporting, preferably stating both sides of the news, voiced dispassionately, without personal opinions, because he firmly believed personal opinions are not news.

But then came the day that he was scrolling through his news feed, and there was an article about the most outspoken purveyor of false allegations at a rally with thousands of his followers. These were just some of the millions of people who believed, quite literally, anything their leader said. When this man said something, his followers heard it and, without thought, accepted it as truth, and nothing would change their minds. Their intellects were all capped, and they were

being led without objecting because their leader said that was how he wanted things to be, and if you weren't with him on everything, you were deemed to be 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. They would all unite and share interests, objectives, and standards by wearing that red hat. 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, so clearly he couldn't help seeing it: the leader with his cap on and thousands of his followers with their caps on. There, they all were, in plain sight, with their knowledge and ability to think for themselves capped. They were followers without thought because their leader wanted it that way. Their leader was also limited 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, you were against him. His followers were now the subjects of anticipatory obedience, and their leader knew he had complete control over them.

The definition of anticipatory obedience is 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." That made sense to the man and finally answered why some intelligent people follow opinions and assertions with no factual basis and for which no opposing information can change their minds. The answer appears to be that their behavior is instinctive for them.

Two other traits in the equation 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 Westerns on TV as a kid and watching the posses being formed to catch the bank robber or the cattle rustler, and after they caught him, they would hang him.

Sometimes, someone 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 had lived meaningful lives- police officers, bankers, blacksmiths, and shopkeepers- but when they got together, they acted instinctively using hate and meanness. As their emotions rose, their intellects declined. Soon, the heinous act was carried out in a rage fueled by some shared primal instinct. 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 he could say that would reach the intellectual parts of others and cause them to reflect on 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 that they all wore the same, quickly identifying, brightly colored caps. He laughed out loud! For there it was for all who wanted to see. The many followers whose intellects were capped by their instincts proudly wore their bright red dunce caps, which one could see from afar, thus alerting all onlookers. Those with their intellects capped echoed verbatim, or nearly so, everything they heard from their leader and his news sources, websites, or social media platforms, that he publicly promoted. Everything together acted as one echo chamber, which his followers picked up and followed without further thought.

Just because someone is intelligent and successful in one area doesn't necessarily equate to them being successful in another area or areas. Whether those areas are simply having opinions or

trying to run a country is irrelevant because giving credence to wrong or ignorant ideas amplifies them and spreads ignorance, thus providing both of their 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 thing. Experience seems to have been cast aside as irrelevant by a substantial portion of our society. People are now in positions of power and importance, yet those persons have no experience to be in those positions.

The man never wanted to be a part of a group or community. He preferred not belonging to anything. His occasional interaction with others was only 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 outgoing, gregarious nature. He now merely talked to new people he met to learn if they were harmful or harmless. Then, he would retreat to his neutral, solitary lifestyle, keeping that knowledge to himself.

The End.

Written by Peter Skeels © July 22nd, 2022