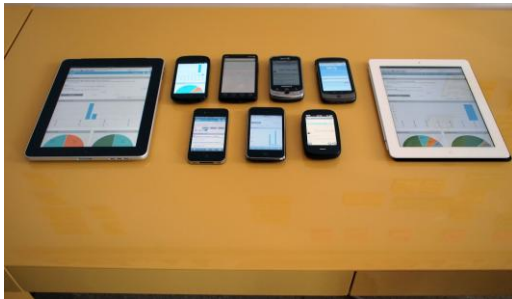


## Wisdom. Why we STILL need Leaders.

### The Age of Information.



With the rise of the internet and the proliferation of mobile devices permitting us to be connected to vast information resources from virtually anywhere, “downloading” of information from person to person may seem to have taken a back seat. It used to be that older persons passed on information about the world, how to live successfully and how to

be happy, to younger persons. It seems now that with almost unrestricted access to information, younger persons no longer “need” older persons to pass information to them. Indeed, younger persons seem to “know more” than many older persons because they tend to be more “plugged-in” to the virtual information sources available on the internet. This has certainly contributed to attitudes of disrespect for older persons being proliferated amongst the younger. It would seem that younger persons have no notion that they will grow old someday as well. That should sound familiar to most of us. We were like that too when we were younger, were we not? “Older” persons should therefore not bemoan this lack of “respect” and instead seek to engage with younger people who would very likely need help in coping with the “information overload” we hear about so often.

I think a greater concern for all of us in this “Age of Information” is the quality, reliability and validity of information. When information was “scarce” and news from afar seemed “refreshing”, people tended to be more careful with how information was transmitted. A man’s word tended to carry far more weight in those days than it does today. People were also more careful to cross-examine the data presented before accepting it as true. Today, people also do the same thing on the internet, but, perhaps ironically, it may have actually become more difficult to verify whether some piece of information is actually true or not. The rise of urban legends is an example of the difficulty of ascertaining the veracity of something going around. For perhaps a far-out example, it has been said that all the world’s population of 6.5 billion could fit into the US State of Rhode Island, assuming that each person were allocated 4 square feet of space. Too crowded for your taste? How about 1.6 acres per person? 1.6 acres is maybe a little smaller than 1.5 soccer fields. That’s what would happen if we fit all of the world’s population into just Asia alone! Asia is about 30% of the world’s total land area? Did someone say the planet’s overcrowded? Ok, maybe you won’t like to live in Antarctica, but you get the point. All kinds of people, including all kinds of leaders, use this imaginary “overcrowded” earth to come up with all manner of money-spinning schemes for themselves and whoever jumps on the bandwagon. Trouble is, people have no qualms about shooting down Lance Armstrong, but put great faith in Al Gore. I mean, I can always select another great role model, bearing in mind that Lance Armstrong’s human as well, but I’m actually



going to have to pay more money unnecessarily where Al Gore is concerned! By the way, that's why it's always better to select human role models that are already dead. The likelihood of some aberration cropping up and spoiling the otherwise rosy picture is much less than otherwise.

So, yes, this IS the Age of Information. So what?

### Where is Understanding?



I have been told that bank tellers are trained to spot counterfeit notes by getting them to be immersed in real money during their training. They are made to see, feel, listen to, and otherwise experience being around real money. I'm not sure if they're made to taste the money or not, but you get the picture. Are they given counterfeit notes in order that they become better equipped to detect them when they do

turn up? No. They are only given real money to handle. That way, they immediately know when something that isn't quite "The Real Thing" finds its way into their hands. They may not know what's wrong with it, but they certainly know that it's not right, and they will sound the alarm. I am not sure if Coca Cola does something similar, but I assume there is some sort of Quality Control there. That is one definition of "understanding", where one is thoroughly acquainted with any particular subject. Of course, the attitudes of the staff and the environmental conditions play a part as well. To illustrate, there was an experiment conducted where contraband was placed in plain sight in the boots of cars being driven into a facility where security was a clear priority. The security personnel were very well trained, but had come to the point of operating on "autopilot". It was actually observed that the security personnel opened the car boots, looked directly at the contraband, and closed the car boots in classic mechanical fashion, allowing the contraband to get through. Personnel on the job need to be present in mind and spirit as well as in body!

Another part of "understanding" is the ability to discern the intentions of the one communicating the information, as well as being able to perceive what is meant by the message, given the context in which it is sent. This is where we not only receive the information, but also process it, making it meaningful to us in our particular contexts. The end result is being able to recognize what the implications are for us and those around us. An everyday example is that of fire alarms in public places. A friend of mine and I were having a discussion at a local food court recently. It happened that the fire alarm went off several times during our meeting. At first, we checked whether the alarm was for real. After a while, we discerned that the alarm was undergoing testing and we continued our meeting without paying undue attention to it. This is one simple example of receiving a message and discerning the intentions thereof. Of course, in this case, the building management, via the personnel in the Fire Command Centre, ought to have announced that testing of the fire alarm was under way and that patrons ought not to be alarmed. I wonder what the level of Understanding is in the "Information Age" today. Do you process what comes in through your eyes and ears, or do you swallow it lock, stock and barrel? Or have you decided that someone is good enough to be your "guru" and follow

whatever he or she says? Keep your level of understanding as high as you possibly can!

### Wisdom.

*Character First!* defines wisdom as “Making practical applications of truth in daily decisions”. We may have access to all the relevant information. We may have understood the information in the sense of having digested and assimilated it. The next step is knowing what options are available and deciding what to do about it. That may include doing absolutely nothing, by the way. Or it may be to file away the information for review at a later date. Knowing and not doing is actually worse than not knowing at all in the first place. Most people have access to loads of information. Some people are able to make sense of all that information. However, few are actually able to make wise decisions based on the knowledge and understanding available to them. I encounter this phenomenon constantly as I talk to various people. The constant question seems to be “I know this, that, and the other. I just don’t know what I should do now”. Are you wise? Do you know how to apply what you know and understand to everyday business operational decisions? Are you able to stick your head up every so often so you know where your business is headed? If you hesitate at all answering that question, then you, like me, probably need to get wisdom with a lot more zeal than how we are getting wisdom now. What are your sources of wisdom? I have mine, and I am constantly seeking new sources of inspiration. I do not, however, accept everything some guru says just because I admire him or her. I am always cognizant of the fact that this guru is just as human as I am and can fail at any time. What I do is measure what they say and what they do by universal, non-negotiable principles and get ideas about how to implement what we already know. Are you in a position to do that as well?



### Wise Leaders.

Now, more than ever, the world needs wise leaders. Leaders who are willing to make decisions and give directions based on the wisdom they are continually upgrading. Alan Weiss’ way of putting it, “I’m constantly surprised at how stupid I was two weeks ago” is a great way of shaping our thinking. We need leaders to make unpopular decisions, but in such a way that people will still follow what they say because they know it’s good for everyone. The Listerine advertisement line “The taste you hate. Twice a day” illustrates this very well. The message, of course, is that you hate it but you’ll still do it because you know you need it.

So, are you a wise leader? If not, are you willing to become one? We certainly need every wise leader we can get!