

Stupid is as stupid does is our modern MO

by Mark Pavilons

"Lately things seem extraordinarily stupid," says Canada's leading environmentalist David Suzuki.

Lately?

It's kind of funny that we are at our peak of knowledge and technological process, yet we're dumb as posts in some ways.

Given this, it takes a lot of work today to remain ignorant. And yet, it's still difficult to convince the masses.

According to my trusty lexicon, ignorance is a lack of knowledge, where stupidity is just, well, the state of being stupid!

"The highest form of ignorance is when you reject something you don't know anything about," Wayne Dyer said.

Quite right.

Many leaders, entrepreneurs and industry experts aren't blind to the facts and mountains of research. They just don't care. It's not a lack of knowledge, it's downright rejection of the facts. Being in the "facts" business, I just can't fathom that approach.

Neither ignorance nor avarice is much of an excuse. And they're both choices.

I have often thought that instead of testing people for performance-enhancing drugs, we should test them for stupidity, ignorance, greed and love of power.

There's no question that ignorance and stupidity can do more damage to our society and our planet than all the knowledge and good intentions combined. Sad, but true.

According to research, a substantial portion of the population (just under half) engages in "willful ignorance" to act selfishly.

According to authors Linh Vu and Margarita Leib in Scientific American, sometimes people engage in altruistic behaviors because they feel pressure to do what is expected of them. When the consequences of choices are made clear, people may feel obliged to make a small sacrifice and be generous to others. But when given a chance, they may want to ignore the consequences of their actions. Ignorance shields people from knowing how their actions harm others and makes them feel less like a bad person.

The bottom line is if you know what's really going on, you will have to make harder choices to be a good person.

In our world of limitless information, we can feel overwhelmed and bombarded. We start to find it hard to tell the difference between fact and fiction. Social media and well-known websites have veered far from their original purposes, to present a lot of confusing misinformation. Ultimately, this makes it harder for average people to form a valid opinion on something.

Conspiracy theories, misinformation, black-and-white thinking, personal attacks, and confirmation bias are common.

Pop culture and social media tend to over-simplify things and seldom offer up any in-depth, critical discussions, forums or exchanges of information.

It's almost like centuries past, when average people and academia kept to themselves, never sharing new-found discoveries with the masses. Were the common folk purposely kept in the dark? Of course!

The key to rooting out our shortcomings, many experts believe, is to become aware of our own ignorance, embrace it and learn from our mistakes. Our ego should have nothing to do with moving forward.

Sad to think that our insecurity is one of the causes of denial, racism and hatred.

I've always been a proponent of teaching our kids self-esteem and self-respect in school. If they can learn and embrace those at an early age, they will be much further ahead in life, free to explore, debate, learn and discover. Alas, from all the psychological studies on ignorance, it seems our education system churns out mediocre consumers, not thinkers, philosophers or leaders.

Ignorant types, it seems, cling to their opinions, regardless of how irrational they may be. We may have witnessed this in recent months from various politicians.

Mark Twain warned us to never argue with a stupid person because they're much better at it than we are. Arguing with them only reinforces them.

The problem comes down to the fact we're emotional human beings. We're not purely rational and are still somewhat dominated by our primitive self-survival instincts.

We have cognitive biases, in which we rely on our own environment, upbringing and limited knowledge to make our decisions. They may be irrational, but they seem perfectly logical to us. Some also tend to be overconfident, appearing to know everything, but upon examination, only scratch the surface on any subject matter. It's frustrating.

Again, heading back to basics may provide some answers. We all need to be more reflective in our thinking and more self-aware. We should be grounded and more genuine with others.

Exposing our weaknesses may just be the ticket to the brain train.

That's life, but reality is a bit different.

In my line of work, I hear very passionate, credible arguments from all sides in an issue. They all seem intelligent, well informed and well, right. And yet, they all can't be right.

When we listen to politicians or lobby groups, it's important to know intent. Are they intentionally misleading someone, or do they genuinely believe in their cause and their solution? Again, it's a tricky area because both will fight tooth and nail to the end.

And that makes it even harder for the public to decipher between facts and rhetoric, truth versus self-serving interests.

Martin Luther King, Jr. said "nothing in the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity."

Who wants to lead the way in eliminating stupidity, ignorance and bias? Raise your hands!