

Common Sense

Having Lost All Sense

Common sense is a common phrase that is in reality far from common. It seems that it should be common or we would want it to be common; after all when we apply common sense things usually come out pretty good. Common sense implies a wisdom and a discernment that's clean and uncluttered. The absence of common sense seems in large part to be related to the fact that we tack so much stuff on to it, or cut so much stuff out of it, or bend it to the point of some sort of painful contortion that we're not certain what we're left with other than it's probably nothing even remotely close to common sense. Common sense then gets unrecognizably blurred or worse yet it gets entirely lost in our tinkering.

What's problematic is that once we've done all of that stuff to common sense, we think that what's left over is still common sense. Common sense is lost to the point that we don't even recognize that whatever we've got left over after messing with common sense it's probably anything but common sense. But we treat it like common sense anyway. The natural progression is that we act on it thinking all the while that it's common sense that we're acting on. The repercussions are that we end up acting on something that's likely distorted by our agendas or shaped by whatever the cultural bias is. The result is that we do incredibly stupid things while applauding ourselves for how smart we think we are.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said it well when he wrote, "Common sense is genius dressed in its working clothes." George Bernard Shaw put it another way when he said, "Common sense is instinct. Enough of it is genius." Common sense is the stuff of uncluttered instinct simply applied to whatever we're facing. Instinct is all of our life experiences pooled together that gives us a sense that something's right or wrong, good or bad, constructive or destructive, wise or not. Common sense then is simply using that instinct; doing nothing more than directly applying it to our situation as our instinct tells us to apply it.

If that's the case, then why is common sense so incredibly uncommon? Common sense would suggest that common sense itself is contaminated and distorted by things that dramatically diminish or altogether destroy common sense. We bias it through a number of means that undercut it and render it largely anemic. In doing that we rob it of its simplicity and then we strip it of its effectiveness. We make decisions based on whatever we're left with and the end product is typically something reeking with the stench of stupidity.

Authentic Common Sense is Free of Prejudice and Bias

Common sense is a frankness that's not convoluted by prejudice, bias, special interests, personal demands, self-centered motivations, self-seeking agendas or any of a thousand things that twist it to something rank and spoiled, or cloud it to the point that it's so mucked up that you can't see in it or through it or even around it. It's a blend of truth and fact untainted by anything that would dilute or skew it. It's clean and transparent, entirely uncluttered to all of the muck and mire that we pump into it.

What makes common sense so uncommon is that we contaminate it with all that stuff. We have a difficult time setting our agendas apart and maintaining some degree of objectivity. We don't get that common sense has a voice of its own and it's not our voice. What we adamantly listen for is our voice, our opinions, our sense of what should be. What we do think about this, that or the next thing? We tend to like to hear ourselves talk anyway, so

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when we hear our own voices we typically like what we hear. Because we like what we hear, we assume it to be common sense and we act on it as such.

Common sense is not our voice. It's the voice of life experience. It's the voice of truth and fact. It's the voice of conscience that whispers or sometimes screams in the back of all of our heads. It's the voice of something that's far greater than who and what we are. Whatever it is, it's not our voice. So, if we're listening to hear what we're saying, we're not listening for common sense. .

Authentic Common Sense Uses Knowledge as Wisdom

Despite the fact that it's pretty clean and simple, we somehow have the need to analyze, decipher, scrutinize, probe, inspect, dissect and then review it all in retrospect. If we don't go through this gargantuan process, we feel that we're not being entirely responsible and thorough. In this cumbersome process the intellectual acumen takes it all in a thousand different directions which are then further skewed by our own biases. In the end common sense is altogether killed and replaced with something that's certainly intellectually shiny and pretty impressive, but probably entirely irrelevant and likely entirely off-base. Once we get to this place it's all so messed up that we typically can't even backtrack sufficiently well enough to find the place where we left common sense buried and dead

Robert Green Ingersoll said that "it is a thousand times better to have common sense without education than to have education without common sense." Common sense is not something that's learned in academia. Rather, it's something gained by and through raw, hands-on, day-in and day-out experience. Common sense is gained in the rough and tumble of life, where we get beat, bruised, belittled, betrayed and battered. It's standing up after we've been pummeled, shaking ourselves back to some level of consciousness and asking "what did I learn from whatever it was that just happened?" Whatever we learned, we add it to our base of preexisting knowledge. It's the pooling of all those experiences and bringing them to bear on our situation that's the stuff of common sense.

The Value of Common Sense

Common sense is a whole lot more valuable than we might think. There is something inherently grounded in common sense, something that resonates with the facts and the realities of whatever we're facing. It keeps things on track, focused and balanced. It directs correctly and in a manner that brings relevant solutions that are effective. Common sense takes the confusion that we tend to create and develops a clarity that sometimes seems too simplistic to be worth anything of real value. Yet, common sense can have tremendous value. Re-evaluate your thought processes and the impact of both your own mind and those impressed upon you by the culture. Get back to the basics and you'll find that life often has a stunning clarity that was stunningly missed.