

Confusion and Great Leaders



The Tower of Babel by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1563)

by Carl Nelson

I have a sort of whiteboard in my head of problems I putter around with when time permits. One of the conundrums I toy with when an idle moment presents itself is the riddle of confusion. Actually, this idle moment often presents itself right after my having a confusing conversation with a confusing person, and my brain goes on pause. Right off the bat, I have difficulty relating just why the conversation was confusing; that is, I'm rather confused about it. Only that it was. This is the dead give-away.

One way of confusing matters is simply by over-discussing them. The realtor who sold us our current home did this. I was

purchasing it from out of town, without an onsite inspection. There were a number of details I needed covered and instructions I needed heeded. But when I tried to communicate these in a brief conversation, she continued talking, like an unfunny comic now and then returning to the topic for a call back, so that the focus of whatever it was I was trying to communicate was lost in a total fog of clutter. Trying for clarification in any way only made for a further mess of things. For example, I told her I needed more photos of the home. She had sent me only five or so of the outside and the front foyer. Of course, we had to communicate sometime over this simple request. She responded by sending me five more copies of the same photos. (Face palm.)

Perhaps this verbal plethora is a common tactic used by people who endeavor to see that no instruction ever need taken, rather like a squid dispensing ink. "Garbled in transmission" might be what happened to the instruction, or, "it was overcome by verbiage and, we believe, drowned."

Another type of confusing person seems to suffer from Attention Deficit Disorder. They simply cannot stay onboard long enough for the task to be outlined. Or, accomplishing that, their questions regarding the task take off in such a bewildering blither of observations and queries as to make it seem as if you are trying to remake the world. The person who comes to mind can even confuse a short phone text. They might send the reply to the wrong person. Their message might get spellchecked by the algorithm and sent before scanning, so that I receive something like "will check the giraffes" "not to worry". The ball is then in my court as whether to make an educated guess about what was meant – just hope that the "giraffes" are okay – or (shudder) dive back in.

Some participants just come across as a blizzard of observations, but with not a clue offered as to what they're observing. "What the hell are you talking about?" is the obvious retort (wisely unspoken) which would then just provoke

a further blizzard of observations. With patience and many reiterations, or a tough interrogation, it is sometimes possible to condense the thing to what is oftentimes a single sentence. "Carol took my car." – Okay. Well, what of it? (But, don't ask!)

'Onerous' is the next-door neighbor to overall confusion. And it thrives back in these parts when asking directions. They'll start off describing, for example, that the place you're headed is not a hundred yards from a can't miss ad sign for riding mowers, which is just three blocks from where they played linebacker in a championship season ... (but where, you're thinking? Here, nearby – or in Pittsburg? Or Indiana?) If you would ask for a simple address, they will ignore you, as if they haven't heard, and continue in a long, easily forgotten, narrative of twists and turns – much of which involves their life, especially the salad days. So long in fact that you might have gotten their faster if they'd simply driven you... perhaps while still talking (if they insist).

A fraternal twin of "onerous" would be the bait and switch method of confusing a situation, in which you are promised a quick answer – that never appears. It's held aloft, like one of those plastic, spinning lures, which the fish will chase but never get to digest. Meanwhile they've got you on the line, and hooked pretty good. It may be a long conversation.

The real prize of the confused conversation is the unhinged, but friendly and seemingly normal conversant. The structure of the conversation is so hard for me to place a pin in that a description can't be provided except through the employ of some theorizing. Imagine a scenario in which a person's upbringing has been so emotionally chaotic, schizophrenic, illogical, dissembling, traumatic or whatever – that their terms for things has gotten misplaced or wrongly attached. So that the syntax and translation is all cocky wobble. That is, the way they frame the world would seem entirely cocky-wobble. When you talk cars, they are thinking horses, or perhaps even

chocolate cakes.

For example, they might assume that when discussing a kiss we are into S&M or, as if every relationship is strangely incestuous. It's as if in a math equation the exponent were switched for the numerator, or the variable were always zero. To diagnose this easily, just listen to some of their explanations of how things work. You'll be thinking, 'No. That's not how life or reality works at all... or, perhaps, if it made any sense...' These sorts of people actually respond very well to quite short responses and brief, serial conversations – no more than quips, really. In fact, they seem to enjoy the smooth interaction. You just go along realizing optimistically that when it comes time for them to vote, it's a fifty-fifty proposition that they'll pull the correct lever. They may very conceptualize the problem as if they were pouring a soda.

A terminal sort of confusion may come about because the person simply isn't capable of understanding what has been said. In my experience, there have been two reasons for this.

The first is that the person simply hasn't the intellectual horsepower to embrace the understanding. I suffer from this myself in trying to parse technology, or higher level accounting or financial matters. I simply must locate a guide to steward me through the matter, and/or to explain the matters in analogies which I can employ to make a decision.

The second is that person whose outlook has been framed so as to obviate certain conflicting views. It is a prime practice of propagandists to take away the tools a person would need to reach a conclusion not desired. One way this is done on a day-to-day level is with certifications. You might be able to fix your car, but if the manufacturer will not release the schematics, parts manual, or mechanic's manual to the 'uncertified' – then you will be unable to fix the car yourself. Likewise, if the educational establishment does not

educate the populace on the workings of a free market, they will be unable to understand arguments which utilize it. These confused are like the incredulous Soviet economic planners following perestroika, who remarked that they had innumerable numbers of people working within a vast bureaucracy to create more successful pricing, "and now you suggest we accomplish this huge task by doing nothing?"

Finally, there is the confusion which cannot be dispelled, because there is none. It took me many years to understand that the reason many people could not understand what I was saying, no matter how it was pitched to them – was because they didn't want to. The biggest example of this which comes to mind is the Global Warming Hoax. They simply wanted global government and the Global Warming scam seemed a handy way to get there. Nowadays, as the CO2 scam is petering out, they look to be placing more of their chips on the next looming pandemic and WHO.

If you've ever written an article for which you've received a sea of comments, (or suffered a staged play reading) you'll find the confused surface there like floating beds of kelp. The above essay might help some from being pulled under in the surf and drowned by all of these, but it likely won't. The minds of an audience are like a Tower of Babel. To realize this is to realize despair.

There is a reason most news blips discuss the newest, most novel or frightening possibilities which seem to be rearing their heads. This is the crude stuff which finds near every ear and generates click bites. What's actually going on can be a much tougher conversation to have.

To reach an audience and stem the Babel of confusions, a speaker or writer must find the common link or thread upon which to link his commentary and transform the babble into a sea of unanimity waving in tandem to the breath of your comments like a sea of wheat in the wind. If you can do that,

you're golden. And, for good or ill, to accomplish this marks a great leader, a rare individual. It is certainly an art.