

Humor Me

By Ronald P. Culberson

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“Of Course, That’s Just *Your* Opinion”

I’m obsessed with my opinion. I love to focus on it, share it with anyone who’ll listen (and many who won’t), and know in my heart that it’s right. In fact, my opinion has been right for as long as I can remember.

Inevitably, however, I run into someone with another opinion who tries to convince me that he’s right using a variety of scientific facts and complex mathematics. To that, I say, “Blah, blah, blah.”

We need to put away the mechanical pencils because our opinions are not that advanced.

Merriam Webster defines an opinion as a “belief stronger than an impression and less strong than positive knowledge.” So, just to get a second opinion, I also looked up the word “impression.” Webster defines an impression as “an often indistinct or imprecise notion.” In other words, your opinion is only a step beyond an impression which is barely more than a fleeting thought. A simple test of this can be found in any Paris Hilton interview.

What’s interesting is that we believe that our opinions are supported by evidence found in some sort of calculitic formula. But they’re not and I can prove it.

A few years ago, I took the Myers Briggs Type Indicator®. This is a test that categorizes your personality into four areas. You can be extroverted or introverted, thinking or feeling, judging or perceiving, and paper or plastic. Then you’re assigned an acronym with your particular personality configuration. The acronyms are ESTJ, INFP and so on. I think mine was E-I-E-I-O probably because I grew up near a dairy farm.

By taking the Myers Briggs, I discovered that my decision making process was not what I thought it was. For years, I *thought* I had made decisions based on an analysis of all the available data.

As a side note, it’s ironical that some people think that data is pronounced “day-tah” while others believe it’s pronounced “da-tah.” Clearly these folks have a difference of opin-yahn. But enough about them and back to me.

In making decisions, so I *thought*, I analyzed the data, considered my options and made a list of pro's and con's. Then I carefully formulated a solid opinion according to the factual information in front of me. Not true.

Turns out, according to either Myers or Briggs as I'm not sure who to blame, I made decisions based on nothing more than an intuitive opinion that I tried to fit into the data I had gathered. What a shock. I had, in fact, used my gut and not my spreadsheet.

If you're reading this and saying, "Well, *my* views are based on data and I can prove it." Good for you. But that's just *your* opinion and it's not based in reality.

As an example, consider politics where there is no shortage of opinions.

When you vote, you probably think your decision is based on some sort of data, right? Nope. You tend to vote on either your opinion of the candidate's political party or how you *feel* about the candidate. In fact, Richard R. Lau, a politics professor at Rutgers, said that voters often do better with less information than more.

So, put that in your Gallop poll and giddy up.

These days, I'm much more comfortable admitting that I voted for someone for no good reason, instead of trying to come up with data to support my view. I know that my vote is a result of very sound indistinct and imprecise notions and based on that opinion, I can rest assured that it's the right one.

I suggest that if you're spending all your time watching the news, reading commentaries in magazines, and creating detailed reports on the comparative platforms of each candidate, you should put down your slide rule and walk away. Use that time to pursue hobbies you never seem to have time for such as painting watercolors on tree bark or building ergonomic bird houses from empty soda bottles.

We spend way too much time referring to data when it's really our personal opinion that matters most. Imagine how much kinder and gentler this country would be if we just accepted our ideas as simply that – ideas. Then we could have a civil discussion and realize that different opinions are nothing more than opposite notions passing in the night.

I think I've made my point quite clearly. The facts don't matter. It's only your opinion that counts. At least that's my impression.

Until next time, just humor me.

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