

PERSPECTIVES

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

The average guy's guide to limited omniscience and understanding people

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How many times have you interacted with a person and left the situation feeling totally confused and bewildered? For example, any interaction with a girl back in high school, maybe? Or possibly now, it's a professor who has an unnecessary attitude problem when you just ask a simple question. For example, back in high school, I asked my chemistry teacher if putting pure potassium in water would be a cool experiment. The seven-foot-tall ogre hassled me for ten minutes about my level of incompetence and whether or not I had a death wish. I was actually kidding when I asked, but evidently the joke didn't come across. Who knew?

What I'm getting at is that people can be hard to understand, sometimes to the point of irritation. It doesn't matter if they are friends, coworkers, superiors or whatever. They can be aggressive, quiet, off-kilter, flaky, overly nice, or just plain annoying. When this happens it is really easy to get aggravated and act rashly. However, acting out in righteous indignation usually gets you into trouble later on. What all of us need to bear in mind is that everyone is different and there are always multiple sides to each story. So try to think things through before grabbing a torch and pitchfork out of frustration. Though, for certain situations, over-thinking a problem can be just as bad as flying off the handle and tossing a computer monitor across a physics lab.

With as many "buts" and "sort of's" as the periodic table, figuring out the right way to handle a conflict can be a tad confusing. But fear not, because below are some basic rules on how to handle these terrible social traps.

1. Give them a break. Not everyone operates the same way you do. Okay, so they don't return your calls immediately, or they don't reply to a wall post on Facebook. This does not mean that they hate you or never want to see you again. They just may have different priorities and can't get to it immediately. I currently have at least five friends who never return my calls. We have been

friends since elementary school and still hang out all the time; they just don't return my calls. It's nothing personal: it's just how they are. So don't worry about it.

2. Step outside yourself. In a lot of cases, a person with an attitude is dealing with some personal problem and this negative behavior is just their way of dealing with it. Not everyone is a perfect saint 24/7. So it may just be your bad luck that you caught them at one of their bad moments. So, don't take it personally. The person may not even realize that he/she is being a turd. Take it on the chin and move on.

3. Communicate. Say your roommate has an odor problem. This is an example of something that you can't really ignore. So in this case you're going need to grow some stones and confront them with the problem. But, like a good Dane Cook joke, the delivery is crucial. The only way to criticize a person on their lifestyle is to be as polite as humanly possible, and even then, it can easily end explosively. So be prepared for either some awkward silences or a battle of epic proportions. However, if you manage to win that fight, you are golden. Good job there.

4. Let it go. It's really easy to harbor ill will against somebody who has done us wrong. We feel hurt and want some kind of justice for how we are forced to feel. Because we are good people, damn it, and we deserve to be treated better. True, we all deserve better, but this does not necessarily mean that we are going to be treated like kings every second of every day by each person we encounter. So let it go. If someone was snippy with you on Friday, don't spend all weekend stewing over how big a douche they were. Don't get upset over how your friendship is over or whether or not you are going to give them the silent treatment on Monday. Odds are they have forgotten all about it and everything will be back to normal the next time you see them.

5. Be cool. Stay calm and think things through. Don't fly off the handle and say something that you'll regret. Because once you say or do something, you can't take it back. Just a heads up there.

Afghanistan: time for change?

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The Taliban in Afghanistan controls over 70 percent of the Afghan countryside. Opium production is skyrocketing. This week, the main supply route for American forces through the Khyber Pass was cut off by the Taliban, forcing the United States to rely on Russia to allow supplies through.

The Afghan President, Hamid Karzai, has become increasingly powerless and his government corrupt. In a country where illiteracy approaches 70 percent, training a secular, competent, and professional police and military is becoming increasingly difficult. The border between Afghanistan and Pakistan provides a safe haven for terrorists and militants, going where the U.S. military cannot follow.

One of the first problems President Barack Obama must deal with is Afghanistan. Seven years after the initial invasion, the United States and our NATO allies have little to show for all the sacrifices made by our soldiers and Afghans. Traditionally thought of as the "good" war, Afghanistan sat by the wayside as the conflict in Iraq escalated. However, as the United States begins its withdrawal from Iraq, new calls to escalate the war in Afghanistan are occurring. However, before more resources are committed to the effort, an honest assessment of the challenges, goals, and capabilities should be expressed to the

American people.

Admittedly, President Karzai has lost a lot of support from regular Afghans and he may be unable to win them back over. Likewise, any good will the United States gained from ousting the Taliban when it invaded, has faded.

According to Robert Haddick at Foreign Policy, "Although lacking a plan, Obama still intends to sharply increase in 2009 the number of U.S. soldiers in the country, from about 32,000 today to more than 50,000 later this year." A large increase, but still well short of anything approaching the accepted 10:1 ratio for troops needed to combat a counter insurgency.

So what could he possibly do with that many soldiers? Afghanistan is not Iraq. Iraq was a functioning secular state with a stable income from oil profits and tourism. Afghanistan has arguably never resembled a stable, functioning society.

Furthermore, there are real challenges to creating a stable economy not grounded in the production of opium. According to the Associated Press, "Afghanistan produces more than 90 percent of the world's opium, the main ingredient in heroin." That's why I couldn't help but laugh when I read that Afghanistan's Foreign Minister Rangin Dadfar Spanta was offended when soon to be Secretary of State Hillary Clinton described Afghanistan as a "narco state." Some real change could occur fast if we get a handle on this problem, though it's not as if we're not succeeding for

want of effort.

U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel Hubert E. Bagley Jr. documented our efforts and failures in a paper for the Army War College in March 2004. Bagley wrote, "Driven by circumstances, opium cultivation has become, for many Afghan farmers, the main source of income. The earned revenue, while not earth shaking by American standards, certainly enhances the livelihood of poppy farmers and traffickers." I find it hard to believe that one of the most technologically advanced farming countries in the world, the United States, can't figure out a way to help Afghan farmers turn a profit, even if it means providing some subsidies. Luckily, Secretary of State Clinton and Special Envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke have already tried to increase interagency coordination to mobilize all portions of the federal government.

It is still not entirely clear what the troops hope to accomplish. The Obama administration has already been reducing expectations about what is possible in Afghanistan. In his Inaugural Address Obama mentioned a "hard earned peace," echoing Nixon's "peace with honor." This is the first step in preparing the American people for realistic expectations for the possible outcomes in the war in Afghanistan, finally returning why the surge in troops?

Beacon Valentine's Day Picks

<p>Rachel: Andy Samberg</p> <p>Connor: the Pink Power Ranger</p> <p>Jennifer: Hugh Jackman</p> <p>Matt: Maggie Gyllenhaal</p> <p>Evan: Kate Beckinsale</p> <p>Nick: Kristen Wigg</p>	<p>Christine: Sidney Crosby</p> <p>Neil: Kristen Bell</p> <p>Keegan: Jenna Fischer</p> <p>Kay: You!</p> <p>Jeremy: *pass*</p> <p>Emily: Joshua Jackson</p>
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Debt, debt, and more debt: when will our politicians wake up?

By Edward Miseta
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In all the debate currently going on over the 900 billion dollar "Let Our Children Pay For It Later" bill, the only word I have not heard mentioned by any politician is China. And yet, this is a word that I believe Americans need to hear and ponder when deciding whether we should support this massive boondoggle. Why China? I'll explain that in a minute. But first, let's look at where we stand and why this expensive package should be a concern to all Americans, and especially all of you.

Let's assume you run out of cash this week. You know that next week you will still need to eat. It would be difficult to go to class and study without proper nourishment. Would you have a problem with going to Mom or Dad for the money? Probably not. I think your parents would understand your situation and happily send you the cash.

Now let's assume that you have money for food, but you run out of cash to pay for your weekly allotment of cigarettes and beer. Would you call Mom or Dad and ask them to send you money for

that? I hope not. There are some things that are worth borrowing for, and some that are not. Hopefully most of you are able to distinguish between the two. For some reason, our politicians seem unable to do the same.

The Perfect Storm

The great United States of America is currently over \$10 trillion in debt. Our country is borrowing money simply to pay interest on its debt, a practice known as debt surfing. Most financial experts will tell you that for over-spending families, debt surfing is the last stop before bankruptcy. There are many experts who believe that is exactly where the U.S. is headed. To make matters worse, we have millions of baby boomers who are about to start drawing billions from Social Security, a Ponzi scheme that is broke because of our politicians' habit of "borrowing" the money to pay bills. Add up the unfunded liabilities from Medicaid, Medicare, and Social Security, and our total debt rises to around \$60 trillion.

In *I.O.U.S.A.* (www.iou.sathemovie.com), a documentary that came out last year, David Walker, former comptroller general of the U.S., argues that our expanding government, massive entitle-

ment programs, and foreign debt have created an economic disaster of epic and unprecedented proportions. Our budget, savings, trade, and leadership deficits have created a financial "Perfect Storm" that is threatening to engulf the entire nation.

As of November 2008, the U.S. owed China a whopping \$681.9 billion, up from \$486.9 billion in February 2008 (a 40% increase over nine months, if you're doing the math at home). That means the average American now owes China \$4,000. Our debt to the oil exporting countries rose from \$146 billion to \$198 billion over that same period (www.treas.gov/tic/mfh.txt). Worse yet, our government is projected to run deficits for the next ten years, which will add an additional \$3 to \$3.5 trillion to our already soaring debt.

Enter The Stimulus Nonsense

Regardless of where our debt stands, no one can deny that the U.S. is currently in recession. The debate now is over how to best heal our ailing economy. Many politicians believe in the Keynesian theory, which states that if the economy does not return to equilibrium on its own, the government may

need to increase spending to get it there. If you listen to the media, you would think that every economist is of this mindset. Unfortunately, nothing could be further from the truth. Most economists today would consider themselves monetarists: believers in using the Fed and the money supply to control our expansions and contractions.

Our current administration is clearly in the Keynesian corner. Unfortunately, what started off as a stimulus package to build roads and bridges to put Americans to work has turned into a massive spending package that seems to have little to do with job creation. I could go through a litany of projects that are included in the package and which seem to have nothing to do with jobs, but will instead mention just a few:

- \$83 billion for the earned income credit
- \$89 billion for Medicaid
- \$20 billion for food stamps
- \$30 billion for COBRA


I do not see a single job being created from the \$222 billion listed above. For our politicians to call this a stimulus rather than outright welfare is a travesty.

If the U.S. were not in debt, if we had the money to pay for the programs, and

if we felt the spending would help enough Americans so as to justify undertaking it, then fewer Americans would object to the spending package. However, when we are \$10 trillion in debt, have no money, and will have to go to China to borrow a trillion dollars to pay for it, can anyone honestly say this is a good use of resources? Do we really need to put our children and grandchildren (and, of course all of you) deeper into debt so that Americans today can continue to buy cell phones, iPods, Netflix, XM satellite radio, Wii game systems, and fast food?

I believe the U.S. should do all it can to get the economy back on track. A tax cut would immediately put money in the hands of consumers. A business tax cut would immediately put money into corporations that desperately need it. Unfortunately, most of the spending in the non-stimulating stimulus package will do nothing to put Americans to work. It will only force us to borrow more money from China to pay for government cigarettes and beer, and create a larger debt that all of you will have to payoff in your lifetime. Let's hope that saner heads will prevail.

Beacon Thumbs Up



- Valentine's day
- Warmer weather
- Sweeps week
- Ripe bananas

Submission Guidelines:


Letters should be limited to 350 words and commentaries 700 words. The more concise the submission, the less we will be forced to edit it for space concerns and the more likely we are to run it.

The Beacon does not publish anonymous letters. Please include your major, faculty or administration position, and semester standing. Deadline for any submission is 8 p.m. Wednesday afternoon for inclusion in the Friday issue.

The Behrend Beacon reserves the right to edit any submissions prior to publication. Please keep complaints as specific as possible.

Email submissions to jdj5061@psu.edu or drop them off at the Beacon office.

Beacon Thumbs Down



- Valentine's day
- Rain
- To be continued...
- Green bananas