

Comment



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For a number of reasons I have been able to read a lot more than usual of late. Perhaps I should re-phrase that – able to read stuff that has some curiosity value, rather than read stuff I have to. You get the picture?

For instance a colleague passed on a fascinating little book that suggests that we live in a world that is pretty much run by idiots. Of course the author doesn't quite phrase it like that at all. They suggest a leadership of jargon-filled air-heads who seem to have missed that point that life is, after all, quite a serious matter.

They also place quite a bit of emphasis on how this world just loves statistics and pretty graphs and smooth talkers above real substance; and how it seems that international stardom is but a mere step away from being invited to become a brain surgeon – or something to that effect. Please appreciate that I have not finished the book yet, so watch this space.

The disturbing part of all of this, of course, is that a lot of it rings true. I suspect that most of us can think of some absolutely astonishing statements that have been made by leaders (any kind) who, really, should have known better – one would imagine.

Before anybody imagines that I have any particular leadership figure in mind, let me assure you that I do not. I have about a hundred in mind. This is a global phenomenon that seems to be permeating all levels of society everywhere. Somewhere, deep down, does one not find oneself wondering whether there has been some very fundamental change in how society views learning (in general), competence, responsibility and so on?

Let's not knock an already strained schooling system (again, pretty much anywhere in the world, I suspect), but I find myself wondering sometimes

whether we haven't completely missed the point in a number of areas. It seems (and I hope I am wrong) that fundamentals (content) is giving way to the achievement of pretty complex and no doubt worthwhile competencies - whereas these should be achieved together.

There is no better example than engineering education, where students are expected to develop and demonstrate competencies - but in the context of their own discipline. For instance, it is no damn good at all if a person is good at speaking and presenting confidently (etc) unless this is in the context of their chosen technical field. The long and short of it is that while we do expect all engineers to have the same fundamental competencies, I rather suspect that you would be dismayed if a bloke claiming to be an electrical engineer and could analyse, synthesise and design – but had no clue about circuit theory, electronics, signal analysis, control theory, energy and power – and so on. The context defines the value of those capabilities.

I suspect that demonstrating those very high level competencies become much easier when the context is watered down or even removed. And I also rather suspect that the fundamentals are (dare we say it) hard (and actually require effort of both the learner and the educator – and the system).

Which leaves that ghastly thought – are we bringing people up to become these vacuous individuals that we see all over the show? A horrible thought indeed...

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