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There is a challenge, reward in being honest

I don't know about you, but sometimes I find shopping challenging.

One day I was shopping in Wal-Mart. The lines at the checkout were long, but I waited patiently. When it was my turn, I hurried so as not to cause any unnecessary delays for the customers waiting behind me.

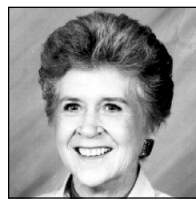
For a change my cart wasn't full. I only had four items, one of which was a popular video for which I had a "\$1.00 off" coupon. I wanted the video for a Christmas gift. I really hadn't planned to buy the video that day, but I saw the store was having an in-store special on that particular video. The sale price was \$9.97, so I grabbed it up thinking how fortunate I was to have stuck the coupon in my purse as I left the house.

Hurriedly left with my purchases, having signed my credit card receipt and feeling very smug about my timely bargain. I had to fight traffic to get out of the parking lot and then rush hour traffic. So I was halfway home, at least 10 miles out of town before my mind settled down. I got to thinking about the total for the items I'd purchased - \$25.08. "That doesn't sound right," I told myself.

Reaching for my purse, then my billfold, then my signed receipt, I managed to get it before my eyes. It wasn't right. The salesclerk had charged me for only three things - a prescription and two toiletry items. The video wasn't listed at all!

However, an even better deal was that I had been given credit for the \$1.00 off coupon! So, in essence, they had paid me \$1.00 to take the video from the store!

"That's a pretty good deal," I thought to myself.



**lorna
gt**

• commentary

"Well, I'm not going back to straighten that out. I'm too far away, and I don't want to fight that whole traffic mess again. I'm too tired."

A little devil on my shoulder whispered, "They'll never miss it anyway!"

When I got home, I checked the bag. Sure enough, the video had been included in the sack; I had four items. But the bag of merchandise didn't match the receipt - just as I had determined. I fought with my conscience over that little bag of stuff. A part of me felt guilty of stealing; a part of me felt extremely lucky and that little devil was urging me to forget it. "What's ten dollars to a big store like that?"

Three days later, when I was once again in the city, I stopped at Wal-Mart. I had removed the other items that I had bought, but never even took the video into the house. It and the receipt were still in the bag. I waited my turn at the customer service counter.

When I explained the situation, that I hadn't been charged for the video, she just stared at me. It was obvious she didn't know what to do. She turned to her supervisor and asked. Then the supervisor stared at me. "Well," she said, "I guess just charge her for the video."

I smiled and the transaction was rung up. "That

will be \$15.86, please."

"No, no. There's something wrong," I countered. My mind immediately clicked. "That video was on a special sale price the day I bought it."

Again, she stared at me. "Well, today it is \$14.97."

"That doesn't seem right to me. I only bought it that day because I noticed it was on sale. Your store made a mistake which I came back to correct, and now you want me to pay the full price?"

I couldn't believe it. Of course the little devil on my shoulder whispered, "I told you not to come back. You should have just kept the video, and no one would ever have known."

I tried to smile at the clerk through my consternation, but I was feeling "incredulous." (Haven't you always wanted to use that word in a sentence?) She checked another computer which told her that the film department hadn't had any sales that week. I insisted that the sign had particularly listed that video, and ONLY that video.

She called back to the video department. The clerk back there said he thought they'd had a one-day sale last week but wasn't sure on what video.

The customer service clerk repeated that news to me. I just kept smiling as I looked directly into her eyes. She still didn't know what to do.

The resolution was that she took my word for it and sold me the video for the \$9.97 sale price. I cheerfully thanked her and started to leave the counter.

She said, "No, thank YOU. Thank you for being so honest."

I brushed the little devil off my shoulder as I walked out of the store humming.

Silence does not signal disinterest

I am a woman of few words, my personal philosophy being if you don't have anything earth-shattering to say, you probably shouldn't say anything at all.

I think I got this trait from my father, who has been a man of few words his whole life. He replies "yep" or "nope" to any question asked of him, and rather than yelling when he gets mad he simply hums. My mom on the other hand is a gabber, I was always amazed that her friends knew every aspect of my life.

When I was in junior high and high school my bus driver thought I was mute. I would normally pick a seat and sit there in silence reading a book, until one day I was so engrossed in my reading that I missed my bus stop.

I tiptoed timidly up the aisle as we got to the last stop on the route and, tapping the bus driver on the shoulder, I said, "Excuse me."

His mouth dropped open as he said, "You speak." I didn't get the joke, it was several years later before he explained to me that he thought I couldn't speak.

I have also been asked if I don't get bored with



**dana
sulsberger**

• chaotic perspective

myself, if I am stuck-up, if I have a speech impediment, and many other questions trying to explain the great phenomena of "why Dana doesn't talk."

I can't explain it any more than anyone else could, except that I have always been a "thinker," as my mom puts it. I prefer to think about things long and hard before I say them and, usually by the time I get my wording perfect, the other person has lost interest and walked away.

I also enjoy just observing life. There are a million and one little dramas going on all around, if people just pay attention. Since I have a difficult time walking and chewing gum at the same time, I learned at an early age I had to shut-up in order to see what was going on around me.

I think the biggest challenge of not talking is

people tend to think I am a snob, that I am too good to talk to them. This is not the case at all. I have never met a person I didn't like, or couldn't see something good about in my lifetime, so why would I not want to hear about everyone and everything?

I can hear a lot more about other people if I don't waste time talking about myself, though. I think those that know me well might be surprised to learn that I am quiet with strangers. Get me going on a topic with someone I know, and you are lucky if I ever shut-up or give the person a chance to get a word in edge wise.

My college boyfriend was Mr. Social Butterfly. People would always ask how we met, because while he was flitting from person to person in a crowd, I would most likely be sitting in the corner wondering when we could leave.

But I have always had talkers as my friends, maybe because they fill in the silence left by me.

I don't think there is anything wrong with silence. I don't like having to fill empty space with mindless chitchat. Which brings me back to my original point: If what you have to say isn't important, is there any point in saying it?

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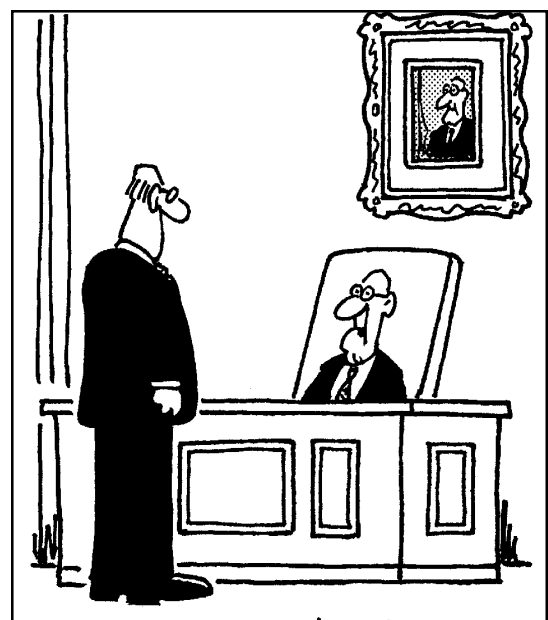
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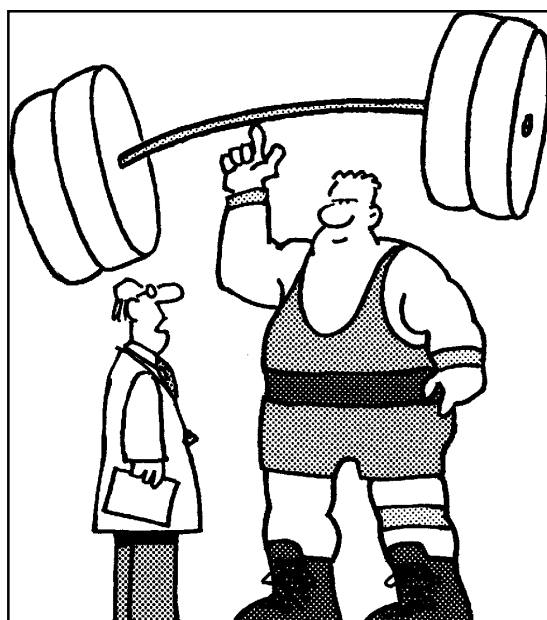
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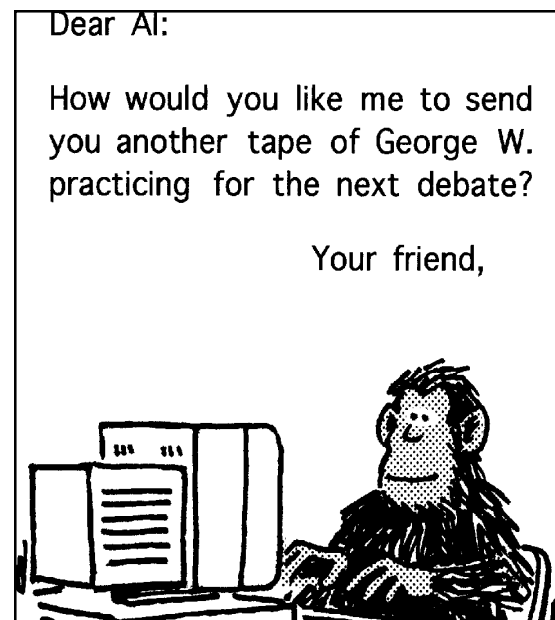
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