

Commentary...

Pause before sending

By Mitchell Luftig
Columnist

The false perception — spread through social media — that the local McDonald's franchise in Sisters refused to feed hungry wildland firefighters led some in Sisters Country to respond with anger, moral outrage, and a desire to punish the offenders.

We can understand this response by peering at our behavior through the lens of evolutionary psychology. We learn from Andrew W. Delton and his colleagues:

"From prehistory to the present, human survival has depended on productive labor, much of which was carried out by groups of people coordinating their actions to reach a common goal and then sharing the resulting benefits. This style of cooperation — often called collective action — is seen across human societies.

"The presence of individuals with a disposition to free ride—that is, to take the benefits of group cooperation without contributing to the cooperative project—can jeopardize the evolution of collective action."

According to Delton, communities respond to free riders by excluding them from the benefits of community membership, creating incentives to become contributors, or by reducing their welfare as a disincentive to engage in this kind of behavior.

As communities grew, our ancestors relied more frequently upon gossip to identify the free riders amongst them and to warn others how they could expect to be treated should they free ride.

It was always more important for our ancestors to use gossip to identify the free riders amongst them than to learn about the deeds of Good Samaritans. This may help to explain why more negative than positive information is shared about others.

Spreading negative information matches our inclination to believe the worst about others and their motivation (and the best in ourselves). While we are likely to attribute our mistakes to circumstances, we are likely to attribute the mistakes made by others to their character flaws.

It's also challenging for us to consider two diametrically opposing (dissonant) ideas at once. This is the basis of the theory of cognitive dissonance.

Once we decide which explanation or set of facts

to rely upon, we may be unwilling to admit we made a mistake, despite an unfavorable outcome. Instead we rationalize our decisions, presenting them in the most favorable light ("Although smoking may be harmful to my health, if I stopped smoking and became obese, that would be even worse for me").

If our instinct is to trust online information provided to us by someone we judge to be reliable, we may not take the time to identify the origin of the information or determine its accuracy. When events prove the information false, we don't admit it to those who might learn from our example, or reconsider the wisdom of passing it along, despite the harm to someone's reputation.

Here's how we might respond with greater skill.

- Let's start, as Jim Cornelius suggested in a recent editorial, by offering each other a little grace. Rather than assume the worst possible motivation, we can give strangers the benefit of the doubt. Is there a more benign explanation for their behavior?

We can recall that we have all had days where we failed to live up to the best version of ourselves (and to thank God that friends and strangers alike aren't judging our character based upon those days alone).

- Has this individual or organization made a meaningful contribution to the common good? What are some of their positive qualities?

- We can provide incentives so free riders see the benefit of becoming cooperators.

- We can pause before we hit send and ask ourselves: Is it true? Is it helpful? Will it hurt others?

- We can take a step out of our silos, set aside our assumptions and biases, and try to discover the truth, even if this means sacrificing some of our cherished beliefs. And when we are wrong, we can say so, encouraging others to follow our example and act just as courageously.

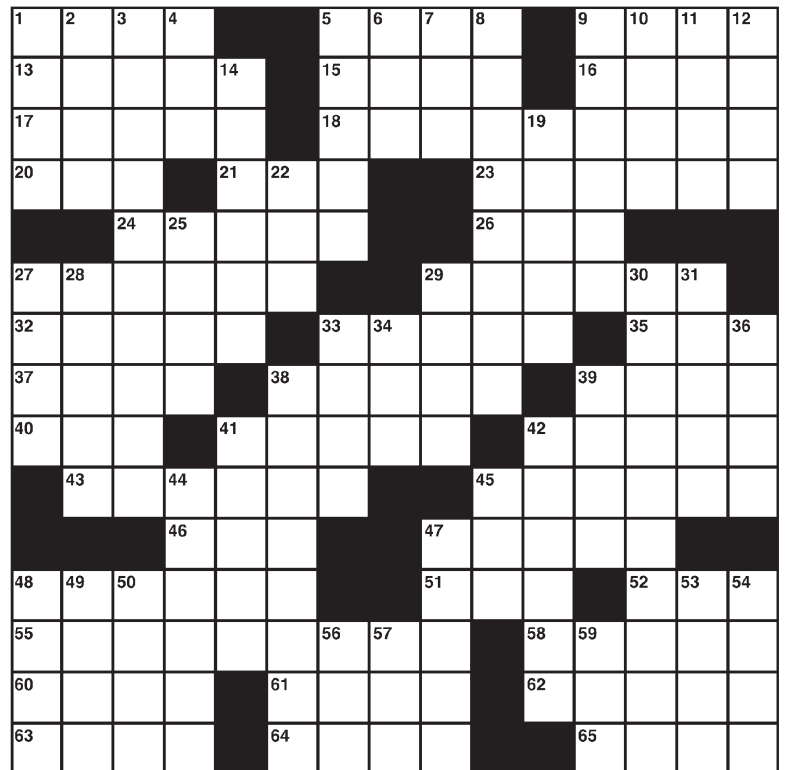
Sources: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3365621/>; <https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2020/1201/1181664-why-do-we-assume-the-worst-about-other-peoples-motives/>; <https://www.vice.com/en/article/ne9ae8/gossip-may-have-played-a-role-in-human-survival>; <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/07/role-cognitive-dissonance-pandemic/614074/>

The Nugget Newspaper Crossword

By Jacqueline E. Mathews, Tribune News Service

- ACROSS**
- 1 Break under pressure
 - 5 Complete failure
 - 9 Dull-colored
 - 13 ___ yokel; small-town resident
 - 15 Long ___; shopper's headache
 - 16 Hindu prince
 - 17 Mom's brother
 - 18 Alike
 - 20 "___ whiz!"
 - 21 Mr. Potato Head part
 - 23 Harsh
 - 24 Nearer to the ground
 - 26 Intense anger
 - 27 Fight sites
 - 29 Atrocious
 - 32 Gruff; crabby
 - 33 Health spa feature
 - 35 Do a yard chore
 - 37 "An apple ___ keeps the..."
 - 38 Many Montenegro residents
 - 39 Cowboy boot spike
 - 40 Fish trap
 - 41 Wanders
 - 42 ___ change; pocket coins
 - 43 Compensates
 - 45 Become sicker
 - 46 "To each ___ own"
 - 47 Civil disturbances
 - 48 Chevy passenger car
 - 51 Tattooist's fluid
 - 52 Altar vow
 - 55 Comforts
 - 58 Receded
 - 60 In days gone by
 - 61 Give in; submit
 - 62 Reigned
 - 63 Bonkers
 - 64 Lamb bearers
 - 65 Cruz & Knight

- DOWN**
- 1 Hit with the fist
 - 2 Nary a one
 - 3 Speed up
 - 4 Homeboy
 - 5 Aviator
 - 6 Can top
 - 7 Half and half
 - 8 Payments for retirees
 - 9 Actress Minnie
 - 10 Rat ___; daily grind
 - 11 Slightly open
 - 12 Bundle of hay
 - 14 Wiggle room
 - 19 ___ firma; dry land
 - 22 "Okeydokey!"
 - 25 No more than
 - 27 As sturdy ___ oak
 - 28 More ill-mannered
 - 29 Wheel centers
 - 30 Out of the question
 - 31 Throw water on a fire
 - 33 North & Baltic
 - 34 Shot spot, often
 - 36 Small songbird
 - 38 Teriyaki marinade



Created by Jacqueline E. Mathews

— Last Week's Puzzle Solved —



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- 39 Separate, as laundry
- 41 Train tracks
- 42 Attractive woman
- 44 ___ out; eliminates gradually
- 45 Finish first
- 47 Heeds the alarm clock
- 48 Golfer's choice
- 49 Waiter's handout
- 50 Covenant
- 53 Notable feat
- 54 Chances
- 56 Uncooked
- 57 First lady
- 59 However

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