

# SPOKESMAN Opinion

## GUEST COLUMN

### Chuck Yeager, a real hero, breaks through

BY LLEWELLYN KING

Winston Churchill used to advise young people to read “Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations,” the oft-updated compilation of brief quotes from just about anyone who said something memorable. Of course, Churchill added more than a few of his own. He may have added more to the storehouse of aphorisms than any writer since Shakespeare.

But others have been no slouches. If you want to go back a bit, Napoleon wasn’t unquotable, and such writers as George Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde were prolific with wit and wisdom served up in brevity. Mark Twain was a treasury of quotable sayings all by himself. In our time, Steve Jobs has made some pithy additions, and Taylor Swift, in her lyrics, has some arresting and quotable lines.



King

The quote, to me, is distilled wisdom in a few words, often funny, whether it came from Dorothy Parker, Abraham Lincoln or the Beatles. A picture may be worth a thousand words, a quote believed to have been first formulated by Henrik Ibsen, but a well-chosen aphorism is worth many more than a thousand words.

So, it is thrilling to know that Victoria Yeager, widow of Chuck Yeager, aviation’s greatest hero, has collected his sayings into a book, “101 Chuck Yeager-isms: Wit & Wisdom from America’s hero.”

Yeager came from the small town of Hamlin, W.Va. Even today, it has a population of just over 1,000. Being from one of West Virginia’s famous hollows, Yeager said of it, “I was born so fer up a holler, they had to pipe daylight in.”

When the town erected a statue of Yeager, he said, “There wasn’t a pigeon in Hamlin until they erected a statue of me.”

The journey began modestly with Yeager joining the Army as a private after high school and led to his success as a fighter ace with 11.5 kills — one involved another U.S. aircraft and, hence, the half — but Victoria Yeager told me there were more not officially recognized. She said he may have shot down as many as 15 German aircraft over Europe.

Shot down himself over France in 1944, the Germans watched his parachute float down and went out to find him. Yeager said, “There ain’t a German in the world that can catch a West Virginian in the woods.” And they didn’t.

In an interview for “White House Chronicle” on PBS, Victoria told me that Yeager always insisted that there be fun in everything, whether it was aerial fighting, flying through the sound barrier, or flying aircraft that might kill him. “You gotta have fun in life, whatever I did, I always included fun,” he said.

Yeager, Victoria said, maintained critical aircraft like the X-1, in which he broke the sound barrier himself. That way, he knew and there would be no excuses. He said, “In the end, or at the moment of truth, there are only excuses or results.”

Victoria told me the impression given in the movie “The Right Stuff” of Yeager as a reckless daredevil who rode a horse up to his aircraft, took off, and broke the sound barrier was pure Hollywood. Yeager was a consultant to Tom Wolfe during the writing of the book “The Right Stuff” to ensure accuracy. In fact, Victoria said, it was on the ninth flight that he broke the sound barrier. It is true that the horizontal stabilizer on the plane wasn’t working, but Yeager was able to control the plane with a manual trim tab, she added.

Yeager fought in World War II because it was his duty to fight, as he saw it. After being shot down, he wanted to keep fighting; when the military wanted to send him home, he appealed the decision all the way up to Gen. Dwight Eisenhower and won the right to fly in combat again. He said of duty, “You’ve got a job to do, you do it, especially in the military, when I was picked to fly the X-1, it was my duty to fly it, and I did.”

Yeager’s philosophy may have been summed up in this quote, “You do what you can for as long as you can, and when you finally can’t, you do the next best thing; you back up, but you don’t give up.”

That is the spirit that kept Yeager flying for pleasure until his death at 97.

In our carping, whining, blaming times, it is a tonic to read the thoughts and something of the life of a real hero. Thank you, Victoria Yeager, for assembling this book.

■ Llewellyn King is executive producer and host of “White House Chronicle” on PBS. He wrote this for InsideSources.com.

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## YOUR VIEWS

### Patrick best choice for mayor

Let me share with you why I will be voting for Jay Patrick for mayor.

In my humble opinion, he is the person for the job in our challenging times. He is a native of Redmond, he was born and raised in Redmond, and he is not an outsider. He served on Redmond Council for 23 years, he knows in and out of our town and what makes us tick.

He is a quiet man, not flashy, with no ego. He listens and wants to work harmo-

niously with the citizens and city council of Redmond to keep it livable and safe for our children and grandchildren since he has two grandchildren of his own. He wants to preserve Redmond to be the Redmond that we all love.

Our city is experiencing growing pains and many difficulties that we are facing every day, and no one understands that more than Jay Patrick. He has wisdom and vision on how to preserve our way of life by improving our challenges and moving forward with in-

tegrity and transparency.

He is the only one that has those qualifications to be an outstanding mayor that can lead us into future with fatherly guidance. He knows people in the right places to engage them in solving problems and improve our infrastructure, housing, and homeless challenges and most of all keep our community safe so we can flourish and make our city one that other local governments will be envious of.

Antonina Vass  
Redmond

## GUEST COLUMN

### Pitfalls of mental shortcuts

BY STEVE TROTTER

It has many names. Sometimes we call it “intuition.” Other times it’s a “set of the mind.” Or “cognitive bias.” And, while each of those labels mean something not quite the same as the others, they are each a shortcut we take when we think.

We see something, a crowd of people with each head tipped back, all eyes focused upwards. Our shortcut immediately says “there’s something up in the sky! Maybe it’s a bird or a plane — or might it be Superman?”



Trotter

We might not notice that the crowd is standing outside a chiropractic clinic. Perhaps the answer our shortcut didn’t consider is that all those people had a stiff neck, that looking upward was the least painful stance and each had an appointment at the clinic they stood near. No bird. No plane. No Superman.

Our shortcut delivered us to the wrong place, the wrong conclusion.

A mental shortcut jumps from A to G without considering B, C, D, E or F. We see people with their head tipped back and make assumptions. “B” might ask: Are they staring upward because they want to or because they have to? “C” might ask: Where are they standing? Outside a chiropractor’s office? What might that mean? “D” would reflect on possibilities: Bird? Perhaps, but it would need to be something special, like an eagle or red tailed hawk or a flock of geese. Plane? Perhaps, but not just any old plane. Superman? Nope: that’s an old TV program starring George Reeves. “E” would wonder if that group of up-gazers might be part of an elaborate hoax, seeing if they could trick others — me or you — into gazing upward too. “F” would say: You’ve got important things to take care of, errands to run. Get a move on and let those folks stare into the sky. It’s not your lookout; ignore them all. “G” misses all that analysis and questioning and considering and provides the shortcut: People are looking into the sky. I don’t know why, but I’ll look too so I can know what’s happening.

Oops. That shortcut took us in the wrong direction. We ended in a wrong place. Shortcuts, mental or otherwise, often do that. Ever trust your GPS only to discover that the road it selected, a shorter route by far, didn’t quite

work? It directed you to a closed road that forced you to turn around with no alternate route. No shortcut; that’s a dead end.

Mental shortcuts can sometimes work, providing a good answer to a question, situation or problem. Sometimes. Not always.

In “The Gift of Fear,” Gavin de Becker argues that we should most always trust our intuition to protect us from harm. With multiple examples he demonstrates that our minds pick up a lot unconsciously and those unconscious observations tell us important things that could keep us from harm. “Trust your intuition,” de Becker repeatedly says.

I grew up with a father who was a racist. Oddly, he would never buy a Japanese car but did buy Volkswagens. He navigated B-17 bombers over Italy and North Africa in World War II. He fought the Italians and Germans, not the Japanese. Go figure.

He hated people of color and referred to anyone who wasn’t white using ugly, destructive, cruel terms always in a disdainful, scornful, judgmental tone.

He spoke disparagingly of folks from Europe who migrated to the U.S. and had ugly terms for them, as well. Jews were in for his insults and hatred too.

There were few people who weren’t white in my part of Seattle as I was getting older. It wasn’t until I started university that I started meeting Blacks and Asians and Hispanic folks. My shortcuts about people was formed in my home. My shortcut told me that Blacks were inferior and Hispanics were lazy and Asians were borderline.

Within a few weeks of my freshman year I realized that dear old dad, a Boeing engineer back when Boeing built good airplanes, was both bigoted and wrong.

I met people whose skin was a different shade from my own and soon learned that our differences ended there. Our differences were skin deep. Our fears and dreams, our plans and struggles and backgrounds and ideas had no color at all and we shared far more than we didn’t. My shortcut was stupid. Wrong. Almost something evil, certainly something ugly.

Fortunately I discovered it soon enough and allowed my thinking to change to match the evidence in front of me. Ram, from India, graduated from Cal Tech and went on to work for Bell Labs as a computer guru. If all I saw was his darker shade of skin I’d never know that. I would miss discovering his delightful

sense of humor. I would miss out on his loyalty and care. All because of a shortcut my father taught me, a shortcut that was a dead end.

So with Ben, a Black student I met at the church I attended near campus. He was, in the words of a family expression, “As funny as a rubber crutch.” No, he was hilarious. He was bright, too, scary smart. Warm and generous to a fault. If I had leaned into my father’s bigotry I wouldn’t have given Ben the time of day.

Here’s another shortcut, this one firmly in the category of a cognitive bias. It’s called the “confirmation bias.” It means We tend to believe things that confirm what we already believe; we tend to not consider information that doesn’t confirm what we already believe.

Confirmation bias is dangerous. It means anything new that doesn’t fit our preconceptions, our existing ideas, anything appearing to be contrary, is discarded without consideration.

I hope you’re saying to yourself “But that’s rampant in our culture right now! It’s everywhere!”

Indeed it is. On all parts of the political spectrum, confirmation bias is working away, keeping us from hearing others, or having to deal with factual evidence, or having to think much at all. Many Americans have formed conclusions without considering whether that conclusion has any basis in reality, in anything that can be measured or tested or verified.

Many Americans hold those conclusions without examining them and, when information comes along that questions a conclusion, confirmation bias tells us to ignore it or toss it and double down on our already-formed belief.

That’s a short cut that keeps us from thinking, from asking questions, from considering anything outside our own circle, our own ideas, our own theories. Not to put too fine a point on it: Confirmation bias spells disaster.

Whew! Who knew that those odd shortcuts in our thinking could be so powerful, could sway so many, could result in actual harm? Who knew? Well, at least to some small degree, WE now know.

Taken any shortcuts lately? How’d that work out?

■ Steve Trotter, with his wife Bonnie, has lived in many places before settling in Redmond for retirement. His last for-pay job was teaching at a small university in Central Washington.

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