



How to be stupid

by John Hayward

Scientists spend a lot of time studying intelligence, and arguing over how it can be measured. They should invest more effort in studying stupidity.

Intelligence is largely potential and theoretical, but stupidity is practical. As a great philosopher once explained to her son, "Stupid is as stupid does."

The key ingredient in applied stupidity is lack of effort. Intelligence without effort is a high-performance engine without fuel. Very smart people can do

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incredibly stupid things, usually because they weren't paying attention. I have been in the room when this happened on numerous occasions.

Every teacher in the land has melancholy stories to tell about bright students with mediocre performance due to lack of effort. Teachers often blame poor educational performance on the home lives of their students, insisting that lack of parental involvement deprives the children of motivation, and keeps good study habits from taking root.

Also, the erosion of standards in school means less is asked of students, so they provide less effort in return. When everyone is treated as a special snowflake who gets a trophy just for showing up, and bad behavior is tolerated, kids come to believe that hard work is for chumps. That's a very short-sighted way to look at things, but adults who expect heavy long-term strategic thinking from children are practicing their own form of applied stupidity.

Stupid behavior correlates fairly well with childish behavior, because let's face it, kids do a lot of silly things. This is to be expected—they're children, after all. They have limited experience, they have trouble staying focused, and they can't control their impulses. An adult who displays these traits on a constant basis will reliably behave stupidly. Acting in a mature

manner—seeking information, staying focused, delaying immediate gratification, and remaining patient—is therefore a good strategy for avoiding stupidity. Courteous behavior, the hallmark of adult communication, is a combination of these behaviors. The acolyte of stupidity should therefore be short-tempered, rude, impatient, and hostile at all times.

Anyone can make mistakes, but consistency is the difference between error and folly. Smart people make mistakes and learn from them. Stupid people make the same mistakes over and over again. That's not necessarily because they can't learn from their mistakes. Sometimes they refuse to learn. Arrogance leads people to consciously withhold the effort necessary to learn. People with a great deal of theoretical intelligence can behave foolishly because they have blinded themselves with arrogance. Many intellectual pratfalls have been committed by people who couldn't see past the diplomas plastered over their faces.

Apathy is another sinkhole for energy. Apathetic people don't care, so they don't try. The result is functionally equivalent to stupidity. A mind pumped

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full of despair, and convinced the world is hopelessly stacked against it, loses the enthusiasm necessary to process information and make good decisions.

The inability to express yourself clearly may lead others to conclude you are stupid. This could be viewed as yet another manifestation of apathy and carelessness. The basic rules of grammar and syntax are durable, fairly straightforward, and taught repeatedly to children during every year of their primary education. Someone who doesn't make the effort to express themselves using those basic rules of clear speech, knowing that listeners expect them to be followed, is either being lazy or arrogant, which for the purposes of stupidity engineering have similar practical results.

What good is a head full of wonderful ideas, if you have no way to share them? How can you truly judge the value of your ideas, if you cannot mint them into words and present them to others for inspection?

This is even more important when written communication, since the writer has more time to

prepare an article of communication than an extemporaneous speaker. Sound habits of mind are reflected in good composition. This was well-understood in previous eras, when even people of modest education invested considerable effort in writing letters, knowing that the quality of their writing would convey an impression of their character.

It all boils down to effort and commitment.

It all boils down to effort and commitment. Observation, memory, expression, and control of emotional responses all require an investment of mental energy. Effort can be withheld due to sloth, fatalism, a false sense of superiority, or stubborn, sullen anger.

Most people have the neural capacity to conduct themselves in a reasonably intelligent and expressive manner, so if you want to be stupid, the key technique is to avoid putting any effort into thinking. Tell yourself that you shouldn't have to try hard, or that the rest of the world should accommodate your indolence. Insist that it's unfair to expect patience or diligence from you.

Share your raw emotional reactions with the world around you, in the most crudely impassioned manner possible. When more temperate people accuse you of throwing a childish tantrum, claim you're just being "honest" and "authentic." Accuse more reserved and thoughtful people of repression and hypocrisy. Celebrate the lowest common denominator. Rely on aggression instead of co-operation, demands instead of persuasion, and nihilism over optimism. Focus on what you deserve, not what you have earned. Accept responsibility for nothing, because that's the first step in learning from your mistakes, and you can't afford a single step in that direction, if you wish to remain stupid.

I think you'll find these techniques work equally well for individuals, organizations, ideologies, and cultures. Stupidity is open-source and scales easily to fit any number of people.

Hayward, John. "How to be stupid." [RedState.com](http://www.redstate.com/). 18 July 2013. < <http://www.redstate.com/> >.

Questions

Answer the following questions according to the article above. Please write your answers in complete sentences on a separate sheet of paper.

1. What does the author mean by saying that stupidity is practical?
2. What does he imply by saying that very smart people can do stupid things?
3. Hayward claims that an erosion of academic standards has led kids to believe that hard work is for chumps. You're a kid--do you share that belief? Why or why not?
4. Why do children do a lot of silly things, according to the author? Should they be held responsible for this, in your opinion?
5. Is the author more critical of adults or children who behave stupidly? Why?
6. What should one do to avoid appearing/being stupid, according to Hayward?
7. According to the article, what separates the smart from the stupid?
8. Look up the word "apathy" or what Hayward calls "the functional equivalent to stupidity" and explain what it means. What causes apathy and how can one avoid it?
9. What, according to the author, may lead others to conclude that you are stupid, and how can you avoid it?
10. Explain Hayward's assertion that the quality of one's writing conveys an impression of their character.
11. What are the two great ingredients needed to become an intelligent person? How can you cultivate these, in your opinion?
12. What was the author's apparent reason for writing this article? What is his message to readers, overall?
13. What is your favorite line in the article and why?