

## First, You're Guilty, Now Let's Talk

---

The imagination equips us to perceive reality when it is not fully materialized.

- Mary Caroline Richards

Richards uses charming and gentle words to tell us that we have the ability to detect clues and symptoms, then put flesh to their bones to develop a likely reality that exists or might potentially exist as a result of those conditions.

Whether most of us pay attention to those clues is another matter. How many deserted wives have chastised themselves for not paying attention to the evidence that their husbands were cheating or were about to leave?

Still others have accepted the evidence but denied that the most likely conclusion resulting from it is the reality. For example, many people thought it highly unlikely that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction hidden in Iraq before the invasion because he had used the ones provided to him on others previously and did not have the technology to develop new ones. The "evidence" should have been seen as fraudulent.

Our imagination also allows us to concoct highly unlikely scenarios based on flimsy evidence. For example, the family member who is hours overdue returning home from some event is far more likely to have encountered a time-consuming problem such as a car that won't start or a flat tire than involvement in a fatal accident, yet the one at home worries about receiving that terrible call from the police.

Perhaps most common of all is the misreading of written material or the intent of a person who has done something not understood by others who are not familiar with the circumstances.

As the one-time owner of a small business that operated 24/7 I often needed to pass messages to employees who would not be at work when I was there. As phone calls to working employees were not appreciated because they required an employee to abandon a waiting customer to attend to the phone, I often left notes for them. Sometimes suggestions or references to regulations under which the business legally operated were interpreted as insults, though the notes were not worded that way. A few quit because of them.

The farther we get away from the now-ancient habit of letter writing—letters usually included news and descriptions of interesting events, thus were seldom perceived as threatening—the greater the frequency of misinterpreting the contents of written messages. Rarely do misinterpretations make the messages seem more positive, often they are perceived as insulting or offensive.

The human imagination is a wonderful tool of life. However, as with all tools, we need to learn how to use it with due care and caution. This usually requires a young person to be taught certain rules about using their imagination. For example, a student who is inundated with news about terrorism then writes a story about an imaginary terrorist event for a school assignment may find himself thoroughly investigated by police and under watch by the school administration. Charges may even be laid.

Young people also need to be taught to look for more than one conclusion that could follow from sparse evidence they have. The phrase "jumping to conclusions" usually refers to a situation where someone reached the wrong conclusion from some facts without considering other possibilities. That conclusion usually hurt someone needlessly.

When the worst possible scenario is the only one considered as a possibility based on a limited set of facts, that scenario is often tragic or it could result in tragic consequences following something good, decent or harmless that the other person has done.

This means teaching thinking skills. Teachers call it problem solving. But it's more than that because real life situations require us to consider as many possible results as we can before we reach one that may be harmful to another person. Or another country.

Problem solving in real life situations doesn't just mean reaching the right answer. It means considering all possible answers or solutions based on the evidence, then finding still more facts if necessary before deciding on a course of action or reaching a consensus conclusion.

If this kind of problem solving is not a component of school curriculum many children will miss learning these skills.

It's not real problem solving if the only acceptable solution is the one the teacher wants either. Sometimes there is more than one right answer to a life problem.

Bill Allin

**Turning It Around: Causes and Cures for Today's Epidemic Social Problems**, striving to put life's hardest problems into perspective so that we can be taught how to cope with them without grief.

Learn more at <http://billallin.com>

---

Author: builder

Article downloaded from page [eioba.com](http://eioba.com)