

OPINION

When thinking well means trusting someone else

Many applaud the virtues of thinking for yourself.

I agree it's critical — but it's only part of the battle.

Thinking well is just as important as thinking for yourself.

Entire books have been written on the topic of thinking well, but one aspect that sometimes gets a bad rap these days is relying on the judgment of those who know more about a topic than you do — in other words, trusting experts.

The value we collectively place on expertise seems to have waned in recent years. I'm sure there are many reasons, but I suspect the internet plays a role, perhaps because we

WRITER'S BLOCK



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feel like we can find everything we need to know on our own.

But the knowledge that comes from study and experience remains important.

If I have a concerning medical problem, I'll go to the doctor and have it checked out. I trust that after years of medical school and experience the doctor not only knows more about the possible causes than I do but also

knows better how to diagnose the problem.

Sure, I can go online and look up what my symptoms could mean (and perhaps freak myself out in the process), but the doctor's education and experience put him or her in a better position to understand and judge the situation.

That doesn't mean I have to stop thinking for myself or that I never question experts. I'll ask

questions and try to understand the situation so I can make my own decisions. I may get a second or third opinion to see if there's a consensus among the doctors or if their advice differs. But I'm relying on their expertise to make more informed decisions, because they are more qualified in this area than I am.

And when I get on an airplane, I'm more than happy to trust an army of engineers' expertise over my own knowledge of physics.

Acknowledging when someone else is more qualified to judge a situation than we are takes intellectual humility. This oft-neglected virtue is vital to thinking well, because it allows us to acknowledge

what we don't know.

In Plato's "Apology," Socrates concludes he doesn't really know anything, but he's better off than another man who believes himself wise, "for he knows nothing, and thinks that he knows," Socrates says, but "I neither know nor think that I know."

Don't worry, I'm not going to get philosophical and start debating epistemology here.

But from a practical standpoint, the person who recognizes what they don't know has an edge when it comes to thinking well, because instead of basing decisions on ignorance and bad assumptions they can rely on those who have spent years studying a topic.

In the real world, of course, it's not as simple as merely choosing to rely on experts. Experts don't agree on everything, so sometimes our best bet is to look for a consensus among experts. Even then, experts can be wrong. And in some cases the input of experts in one area must be balanced against expertise from another area.

Reality is seldom simple, so I'm not proposing a quick fix or an easy way to think well and make decisions.

But having the intellectual humility to know when someone else is more qualified to speak to an issue than we are goes a long way toward helping us think better for ourselves.

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LETTER

Vaccine brings hope to 2021

To the editor:

We can see the light at the end of the COVID-19 tunnel. Vaccine distribution got underway in Minnesota on Dec. 8. A broad, diverse, statewide coalition has done extensive planning to be ready for this moment. We are fortunate to have a strong public health system and experts that have specialized in this type of planning for their entire careers.

Our first supply of the vaccine is limited, so will be delivered in phases to priority groups. The first phase — those in Group 1A — includes health care personnel and long-term care residents. Within this phase are sub-prioritization groups. Group 1B covers essential workers, including sectors like education, food and agriculture, utilities, police, firefighters, corrections officers, and transportation. People eligible in this group will be contacted by their employer or facility where they live to let them know when the vaccine is available to them. Group 1C will include those 65 or older and those with underlying health conditions.

In Phase 2, the vaccine will be distributed more broadly to the general public. People do not need to get on a waiting list or make an appointment at this time.

To date, over 132,000 Minnesotans have received their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. We are off to a great start, but we need more support from the federal government. Last week Gov. Walz sent a letter urging the federal administration to expedite distribution of the millions of vaccine doses still in their possession.

Although vaccine administration has begun, it likely won't become widely available for all until spring. In the meantime, it's important that we continue following the public health guidelines that have kept our communities safe — social distancing, hand washing, wearing a mask, and getting tested when we feel sick.

I will continue to provide frequent updates in my weekly Capitol newsletters, which you can sign up for at house.mn/41A.

Contact me anytime with questions.

Connie Bernardy
New Brighton

Democracy thrives with good people

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mediate issue. But the underlying and certainly much larger issue for this country is our combined lack of involvement with the very government that is meant to help all of us.

When we elect representatives to Congress, our state legislatures, or even our city councils and school boards, our responsibility does not end with our vote. We choose candidates and vote for individuals because we believe they will represent our beliefs and make decisions for the good of our communities, states and nation. But once they are elected, they cannot be left to make those decisions on their own. It takes people like you and me to communicate with them,

to ensure they understand what is important to us or our community, what is best for our entire democracy, at every level of this country. If we don't, they will make decisions on their own, they will be influenced by others and the seeds of disconnection will take root.

Good will always overcome evil, but not if good people do not stand up and get involved.

Your voice does matter. You have talent that can and must benefit those around you, but it cannot happen if you choose to stay in the haze. Democracy dies in the shadows but will flourish in the light.

Now is that time for all Americans to step into the light and lead by example. When you see

injustice, work to create peaceful change. When you see violence, do not turn away and hope somebody else will fix it. When you witness or experience abuse of power, make sure those who are responsible for it are held accountable. When lies are told, seek the truth and correct the lie.

Americans are given some of the greatest freedoms this world has to offer. But that gift is not free. It comes with the simple price of our involvement. Without our investment, freedom will not survive.

Good people change lives. Good people change nations. You are the good person who is needed now.

Keith Anderson is director of news for APG of East Central Minnesota.

How to mend a broken heart

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certified. Biden won. Trump lost.

When we suffer a deep personal loss, our friends and family hold us close and bring us comfort. We will need to reach out to our fellow Americans as allies and work to find a way ahead.

And it might just take a little love, too. We need to practice some basic human kindness to those standing

next to us in line, whether they are wearing a MAGA cap or a Black Lives Matter T-shirt.

To borrow and bend words from the Bee Gees's hit song of April 1970: "Please help us mend our country's broken heart and let us live again."

— Peggy Bakken is a former executive editor and a columnist for APG-East Central Minnesota. Reactions welcome: peggy.bakken@apgecm.com.

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