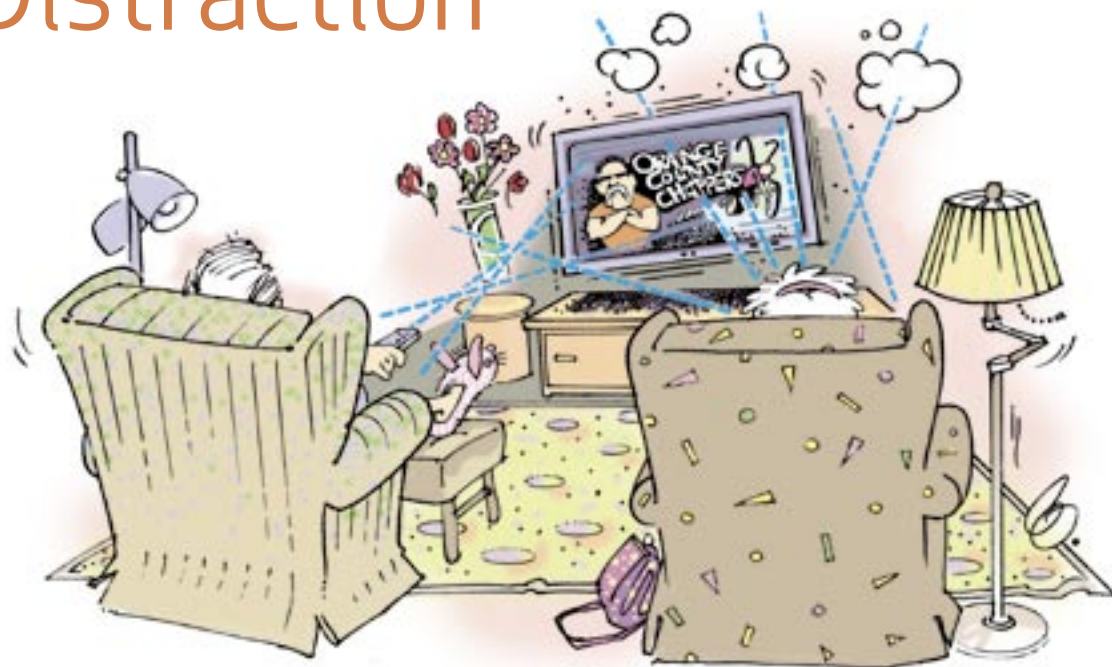


The Laws of Distraction



She has figured out, however, that in speaking softly, she carries a big stick.

→ Robert D. Horseman, DDS

ILLUSTRATION
BY CHARLIE O.
HAYWARD.

A body at rest tends to remain at rest.

— SIR ISAAC NEWTON

As a long-time admirer of Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727), particularly his Laws of Motion, I have always tended to allow my resting body to remain at rest as long as possible. My wife is also a strong advocate of this same law and it is this mutual conformity that has generated a minor hitch in our conjugal bliss.

“Bob,” I detected a faint voice emanating from another part of the house. My bride never raises her voice, not even in anger. A summons from six rooms away is delivered at the same volume as a face-to-face encounter. The message could be referring to a mouse seen in the wainscoting or the realization that World War III had just started. No difference.

Without waiting to determine if contact has been established, she then voiced several sentences, the essence of which escaped me entirely. I interrupted with “What?” vigorous enough to be heard next door at the neigh-

bors, trusting this will have encouraged her to speak up. She repeated at the same decibel rating as her previous statements, and with the same predictable results.

I wished desperately to remain comfortably ensconced where I was, obeying Newton’s law to the best of my ability. Sometimes I feel obliged to make up some sort of reply. Keeping my voice low, knowing she can no more understand me than I can her, I mouthed a couple of ambiguous remarks, thinking maybe she will materialize at my side to clarify things. This did not happen.

“Bob,” she said again, repeating all or portions of what I assumed was the previous message. If I were to announce in no uncertain terms that I can’t hear her, the battle is lost, Newton and I are defeated, and I must struggle up to go see what she wants.

This has been going on with minor variations for more than 50 years. You’d think that over that period another law would kick

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This duel of the remotes provides us with many hours of evening merriment without actually coming to blows.

DR. BOB, CONTINUED FROM 80

in — the Law of Averages — and she would get up and come to me. Not once. My wife is not a yeller, and for that I should count my blessings. But it is an attribute that might improve her communication skills. She has figured out, however, that in speaking softly, she carries a big stick, namely to be the winner in the body at rest category.

In another area of marital discord we have reached a compromise. This happened because of a fundamental male/female difference in channel-surfing. When I occasionally have had command of the remote, I move very deliberately from channel to channel. I pause at each one long enough to determine if it contains something I wish to watch, like NASCAR or “National Geographic” specials. This takes me upward of three seconds per channel. My wife, however, has the ability to analyze, in depth, program content, audience appeal, and whether it’s a repeat or not in the tiniest fraction of a second. She can go through a 75-channel search in less than a minute. As further proof of her ability to instantly divine the content of a program, she can arrive at a movie a half-hour after it has started and be able to understand everything that comes after.

So we got two remotes. As she races through the whole program spectrum, I wield my own remote to back up or go ahead. This duel of the remotes provides us with many hours of evening merriment without actually coming to blows. The television components that have to do with channel changing are given more work to do in a single hour at our house than would be encountered in a single-remote family in six months. The only time there is a clear-cut victor in these shenanigans happens when battery failure fells one of the contestants. Unless the winner can be conned into forfeiting his or her instrument, the moment is like an

unconditional surrender. The loser slinks off to read a book or raid the fridge.

The ultimate answer is, of course, another TV set. It would have to be identical to the first set. If its screen is even an inch bigger, trouble is inevitable. It should not be sited in the bedroom because the two-hour movie would always be playing there when the non-watcher wants to go to sleep. The bed-watcher can seldom be persuaded to get out of the comfortable bed and retire to the cold living room or den to catch the end of the film that usu-

ally finishes at midnight.

A serious student of social mores might conclude that each spouse’s willingness to go it alone at the TV controls bodes no good for the future of the marriage. I disagree. With each spouse the master of his or her domain, the likelihood of physical abuse is greatly diminished — unless one of the mates insists on calling the other in a tiny little voice to get up and come look at what is obviously a superior program. Then a body in motion tends to remain in motion, and you know whose body it will be. I’d like to hear how Sir Isaac and Mrs. Newton worked this out. ■■■■