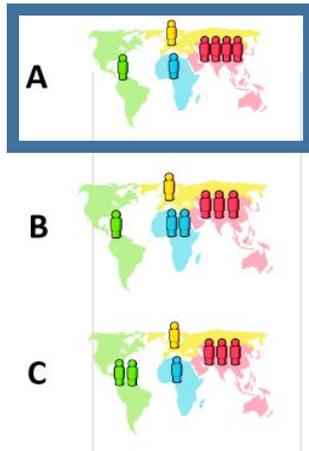


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Understanding the World Rightly
October 16, 2014

We are going to go quite a different route today. In the last several weeks I have said a good bit about leadership behavior, culture, and character. Today, however, I'd like to start out with a little quiz. It's a quiz of eight questions to see how well you know the world in which you live. The quiz is in large part one that has been developed by a think tank of sorts, called Gapminder,¹ although I have added a couple of questions myself. You can keep track on your fingers how many you get right, and we will see how you all fair. So here we go . . .

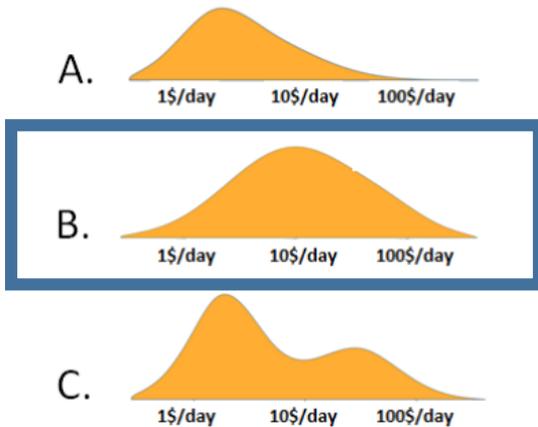
1. Since 1900, deaths caused by natural disasters have . . .
 - A. More than doubled
 - B. Remained about the same
 - C. Declined to less than half²**

2. There are 7 billion people in the world today. Of the maps below, which one do you think shows best where they live?



Source: Gapminder

3. You are more likely to die . . .
- A. As an occupant of a vehicle (1/492)
 - B. From exposure to noxious/poisonous substances (1/136)**
 - C. Due to a bicycle accident (1/4974)
4. What percentage of adults in the world today are literate—can read and write?
- A. 80%**
 - B. 50%
 - C. 20%
5. Which of the curves below shows the present income distribution of all people in the world?



Source: Gapminder

6. Globally, men aged 25-34 have spent 8 years in school. How many years on average have women in the same age group spent in school?
- A. 7 years**
 - B. 5 years
 - C. 3 years

7. In the last 20 years the proportion of the world population living in extreme poverty has . . .
 - A. More than doubled
 - B. Remained about the same
 - C. Been cut about in half**

8. In 1980 about 1 in 10,000 people were murdered in the U.S. Since then the number of murders has...
 - A. More than doubled
 - B. Remained about the same
 - C. Declined to less than half³**

So how did you do? Most people do not do well. They have a hard time doing as well as someone who is guessing randomly.

Now, you might ask why I gave you this test. At least I would ask that. I suppose one reason is for us all to recognize that our view of the world is often not in line with what really exists. We have perceptions of poverty or crime or income distribution and often times they are not quite right. We can think that we are losing the war on poverty for example, when on a global scale we are winning it. We can think that women are way less educated than men when that is on average not the case. Or we can think that there is not a global middle class when there is. And what is most dangerous about these misperceptions is they can send us in the wrong direction. We might, for example, scream at our kids to put on their bike helmet so they don't get hurt, but we do little to insure that our family is not exposed to noxious or poisonous substances that are 40 times more likely to kill us. Or perhaps, we throw up our hands in regards to the poverty in the world, thinking it can't be overcome when the data suggests that substantial strides have been made in eliminating poverty in the last twenty years.

Last month, I had the opportunity to speak to a group of international students at the University of Houston. The group included students from each of the five continents, and I was asked to speak to them about how to flourish in college. I won't tell you all that I shared with them, but I will share with you one point. I told them that if they wanted to flourish in college they needed to be careful not to form life-

shaping conclusions based on minimal information. I said that during the college experience they would hear from this group or that to join one cause or another. And they would probably be given a slogan or a bumper sticker that explained in five words or less why they should be a part of that cause. And my advice to them was that if they choose to take a life-defining stance on some issue, whether it be about a political movement, or an environmental concern, or a social issue to be sure that that stance is resting on a good bed of facts.

Now, I will be honest with you. I had a vested interest in telling them this, and they knew that. My vested interest was this. I am a pastor of a Christian church and I would like people to consider Christianity. It's my mission you might say. But throughout the years I have heard people take stances against religion in general and Christianity in particular. And sometimes the stances that have been taken have been made based on weak information. Let me provide you two examples. First, from time to time I will hear someone say I could never follow Christianity, or any other religion because of all the wars that religion has started through all the centuries. Now, there might be legitimate reasons why someone should not follow a religion or any religion for that matter, but one of those reasons should most definitely not be that religion has caused the preponderance of wars. A review of the facts simply shows that the vast majority of wars (93%) are not religiously motivated.⁴ Just a look at the 20th century will show you that the vast majority of violence was not caused by those who espoused a religion but by those who did not.

The second example, I will give you is in regards to people's view of the relationship between science and Christianity. I have heard many people say that one cannot be a scientific person and identify themselves as Christians. But I think that is a false divide, and the winners of the Nobel Prizes in areas like Physics and Chemistry bear this out. From 1901 (the first year of the Nobel Prizes) to the year 2000, 72% of those who received the Nobel Prize in chemistry identified themselves as Christians, while 65% who won the Nobel Prize in physics and 63% in medicine identified themselves as Christians.⁵ Now those who identified themselves as Christians were not monolithic, some were Protestant, some were Catholic, and they varied in their specific beliefs, but it seems that these statistics alone indicate the best and the

brightest do not see an inseparable divide between Christianity and science and that those who claim such a divide are misguided.

So perhaps today my word to you is the same as it was to the international students: Be careful not to make take a life-defining stance on some issue, whether it be about a political movement, or an environmental concern, or a social issue, or a religious issue based on minimal information. Take the time to think through your positions and the quality of data that informs them. This is important not just at an individual level but at corporate level as well as your companies seek to be socially conscious members of the community.

One of the proverbs in the Bible reads, “It is the glory of a king to search out a matter”(Pr 25:2b), and I would add it is the glory of any individual or company to do just the same.

¹ Gapminder, <http://www.gapminder.org/GapminderMedia/wp-uploads/Results-from-the-Ignorance-Survey-in-the-US..pdf>

² The International Disaster Database, http://emdat.be/advanced_search/index.html

³ FBI, Uniform Crime Reporting Statistics Database <http://www.ucrdatatool.gov/Search/Crime/State/TrendsInOneVar.cfm>

⁴ Schumacher, Robin, “Does Religion Cause War? The Myth that Religion is War’s #1 Cause,” <http://www.blogos.org/compellingtruth/does-religion-cause-war.html>, Charles Phillips and Alan Axelrod, *Encyclopedia of Wars*, (b Facts on File, 2004).

⁵ Baruch Aba Shalev, *100 Years of Nobel Prizes* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2003), 57-61.