

Opinion

R & D? I can do that

I hear a lot about research and development. If you're hip, call it R & D.

Of course, research and development is usually mentioned in ad campaigns concerning high technology companies in an attempt to impress people with corporate responsibility and stuff like that. The term R & D conjures up laboratories filled with Bunsen burners and tubes that drip, drip, drip, one drop at a time. Where, and for what, is never mentioned.

These places, in our imaginations, are filled with white-coated scientists speaking in a language so filled with newly developed jargon that, roughly once each day, a translator goes critical and explodes. It's terribly messy.

Most research and development used to take place in people's garages and basements. A chemistry set and a death wish, that was all it took to put 'inventor' on your resume. Now companies fund think tanks and research centres and all sorts of other things to stay on top of the corporate heap.

The little guy in his garage can't keep up with all the technological requirements of an R & D department. Labs look busy. The scientist is always writing something in his notebook when the bean counting boss comes in. Fact is, he's trying to balance his cheque book, which for some can be an immensely complex calculation.

Many people believe compact disc technology was born in a lab somewhere. Wrong. Two neurons made contact in some record executive's brain when his boss demanded that, despite an aging population, sales be increased to the same level as the mid-1970s. The compact disc was born in the cranial collision of those two itty-bitsy particles of grey matter.

Most companies don't depend on technological breakthroughs for products. Their R & D departments are bent on discovering new ways of using existing technology to increase conveni-



Reaume With a View

with BRAD REAUME

ence for the purchaser or profit for a company.

This means that five guys sit around a comfortably appointed room and they think, "Hey I got one. Frisbees can be marketed to the military as ultra short range, radar masked message carriers."

Every business has its R & D people. Sometimes, in small companies, they aren't too popular, and rightfully so. An R & D type in a smaller outfit might suggest the following: "Hey, what if we close the service department? Fred might lose his job, but customers would have to buy more product. Call it planned obsolescence. Yeah, we make more money and we don't spend as much either."

Even in the newspaper business we have R & D types. One guy wanted to create a whole second language with English words, thus giving two complete meanings to anything he wrote. They said it wouldn't work. The fools.

I tried to explain the concept. It would have worked. They wouldn't listen to me. Okay, so I'd have to publish a dictionary, tell me something I can't do.

My idea for running sequences of pictures, taken only a split second apart, on consecutive pages in the same lower corner spot was great. Flip the pages and you get motion pictures. I was foiled by the lightweight nature of newsprint.

Ideas? I got a million of 'em. It's reality that keeps getting in the way.

Going out — I know the drill

Going out for the evening. Alone. What do I have to do before I walk out that door at 5:30 p.m.?

First, months in advance, I have to ensure that my husband will be home that night to hold the fort. He adds my booking to his appointments ledger and I mark the date on the kitchen calendar. That accomplished, I forget about it.

A few days before my historic departure (albeit temporary) from hearth and home, I remind my husband of my plans. He looks at me as if he is hearing the news for the first time, but we look in his little book and sure enough, there it is: "E — out for evening".

The big day arrives. Although I'll be dining out, I'm still expected to dream up and prepare the meal for the family. Now, if it was my husband who was going out, he wouldn't give our grumbling tummies a second thought.

In between peeling potatoes, mixing up a meatloaf and worrying about a bedtime snack, I shower, blow dry my hair, put on my makeup and grope in the dark closet for a dress, hoping all the while that my one and only pair of pantyhose — at least four years old — still sports no runs.

I strap on my high heels and toddle around, missing my jogging shoes terribly. My blue jeans look forlorn lying in a clump on the floor. Somewhere over the last 12 years of staying at home, "chic" has disappeared from my vocabulary and from my personal style.

I work up a sweat (so much for the shower) rushing around in the kitchen adding the finishing touches to a meal I'll never experience (lucky me) and waiting nervously for the executive to pull into the driveway.

He makes it just in time and I fly out the door. At my destination, I look around and wonder how many other women went through the same ordeal as I did to get there.

Part two is going out for the evening — with spouse. This momentous occasion occurs



On the Home Front

with ESTHER CALDWELL

about once every three years. Big problem: Who's going to look after the kids? Until recently, we would make complicated arrangements to bus a grandmother from miles away. She doesn't make long-distance house calls anymore.

For the first time, we asked a teenager to stay with the children. My going-out plans with spouse become even more complex than my solo flights.

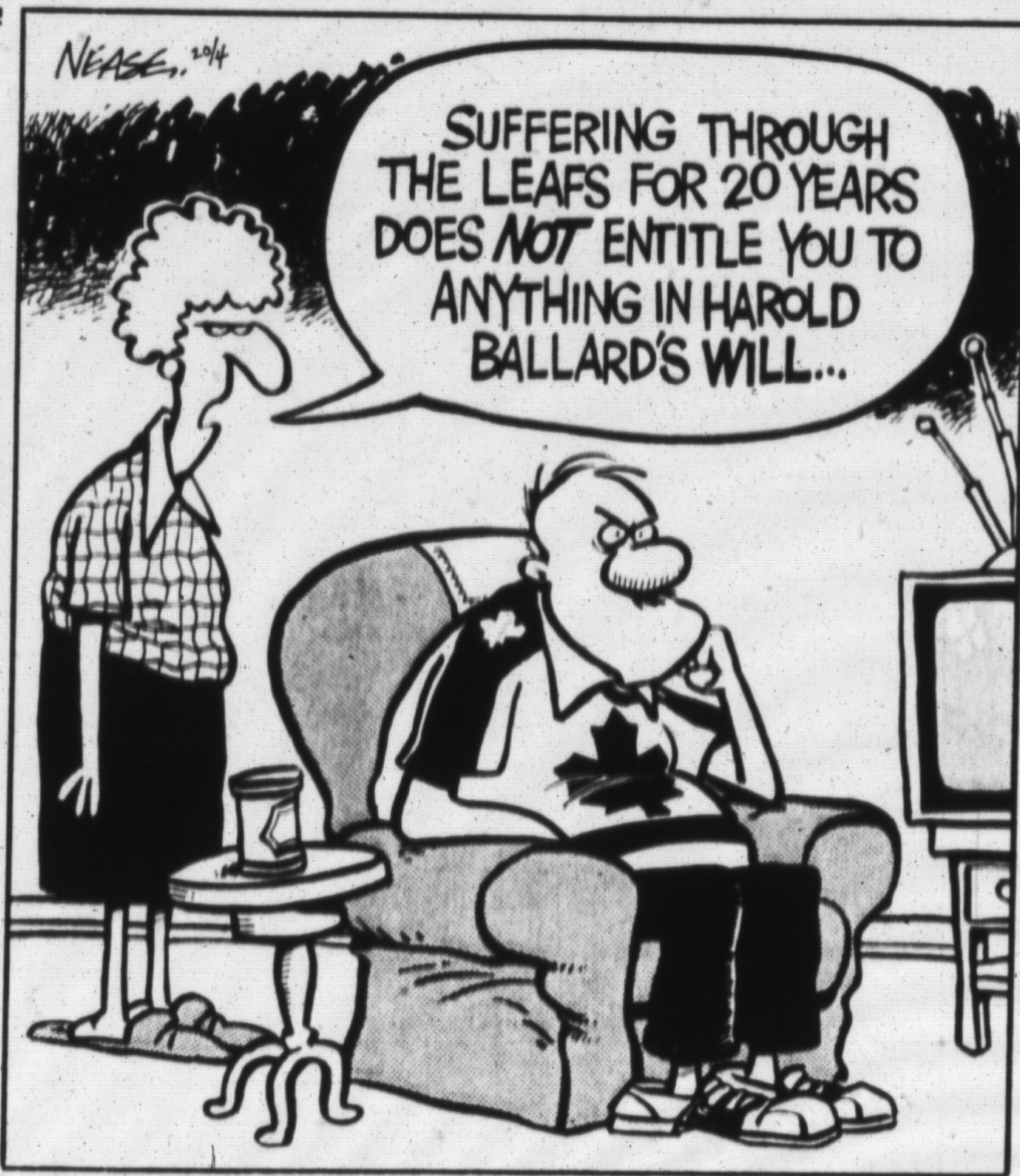
What are the kids going to eat for dinner? I take the easy way out and order a pizza. I figure that will keep the babysitter happy too.

What will they do for the next four hours? Years ago, I was more idealistic and I actually expected babysitters to entertain the children with games, stories and crafts. I have lowered such expectations and now my major concern is; which video will be suitable for viewing by children yet not too boring for a teenager?

What will they have for a snack? Once upon a time, my children could count on three snacks a day, but nowadays, they demand only a bedtime goodie. As the family ogre, I rarely produce yummy, sugary snacks. Fortunately, they'll still willingly gobble up a dish of plain yogurt and unsweetened pineapple, but will our house specialty pass muster with the babysitter?

Finally, I have to run through the bedtime routine with said sitter; brushing teeth, pyjamas, when and where, favourite stuffed toys, shut-eye time.

Is it possible that the evening has just begun?



Divide tasks to conquer conscience

Last week we described the classic "obedience" studies at Yale University, in which people were convinced to apply what they thought were dangerous electrical shocks to others (actually actors), simply because people in authority commanded them to do so.

The message is a scary one: Ordinary people, just doing their jobs, without any hostility whatsoever, can easily become part of a terribly destructive process. Few have the skills or resources needed to resist authority, even when they are totally convinced their actions are wrong.

Why did people obey? Were they just sadistic, or letting out pent-up aggression? No. A follow-up study allowed the subjects applying the shock (again for errors in learning a task) to set the voltage wherever they wished after each error.

On average they used only the mildest levels of shock (instead of the supposed 450 volts most agreed to use in the original study), with many in fact never straying from the lowest possible level of 15 volts. Clearly they did not enjoy shocking others. Most hated every minute of it.

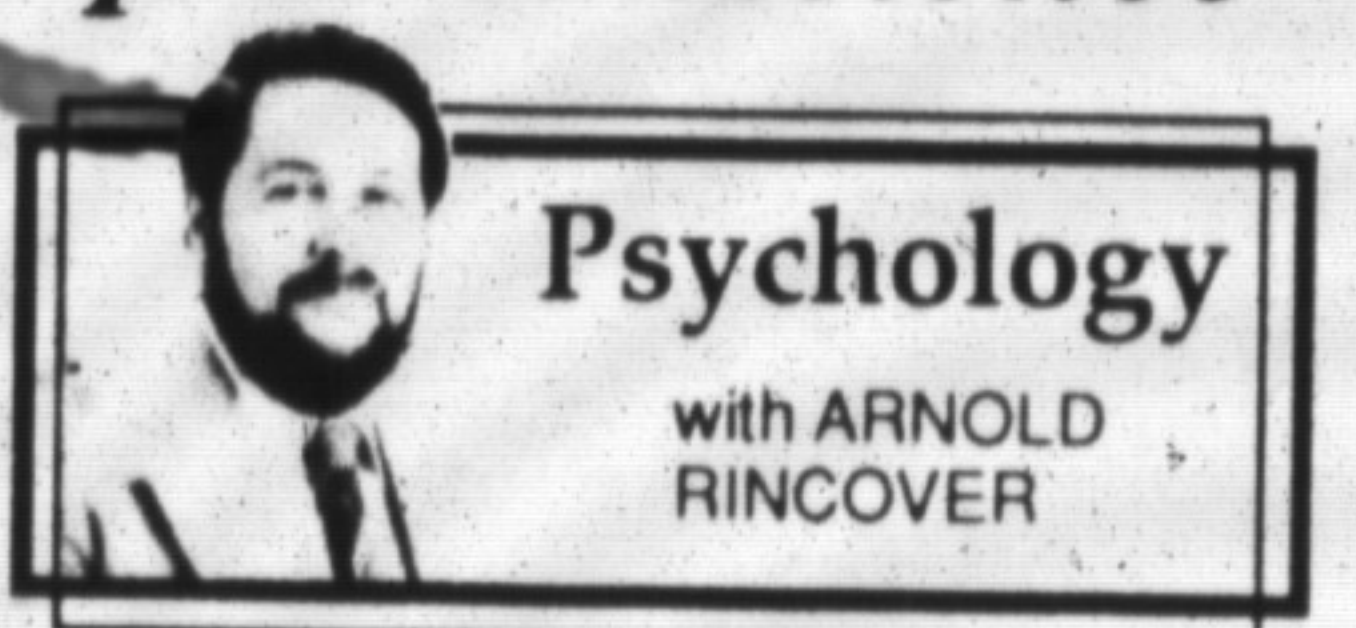
Authors on the subject say people obey when they come to view themselves as only the instrument of another person's wishes; they therefore are not responsible for the acts.

Once that shift in viewpoint occurs, when someone else is the general, you are a private and he gives the orders while your job is to follow them — all the features of obedience will follow.

The subordinate feels responsible to the authority, but not for the actions that authority prescribes. Morality does not disappear, it changes shape... the subordinate's pride or shame now depends upon how well he has performed duties for the authority figure.

Our language has many terms to describe this kind of morality — loyalty, duty, discipline. All of these refer to a degree of obedience to authority, not to the 'goodness' of the person. In fact, the most common defence for a person who has committed a heinous act under the direction of some authority is that he was simply doing his duty or following orders. The trials for Nazi war criminals were a classic case in point.

It appears that in order to feel responsible for an act, most people must feel it came from within. In this experiment, people felt the act



Psychology

with ARNOLD RINCOVER

came from someone else, and they therefore were not responsible.

It may be important to note that the startling degree of obedience found in this study was thought, by its creator, to underestimate the amount of obedience that is found in the natural world (in private industry or the military, for example).

In this study, the experimenter did not threaten the subjects with any kind of punishment, such as loss of job and income, shame, or jail for failure to obey. Moreover, he could not offer incentives. We might expect, then, that the experimenter's authority was much less than that of an employer or general, who does have the power to reward and punish.

One more important variation of this experiment was done. In this study, the "teacher" had only to conduct the learning task; someone else administered the shock. In this situation, obedience was even higher — about 92 per cent of the subjects continued the exercise while the shock was increased to the "danger" level and beyond.

This study most closely approximates the real world, as the evil act was fragmented into several "jobs". The division of the labor changes things, it means that each person does not see the whole situation, only a small part of it, and therefore yields even more to authority (feels no responsibility for the final product).

Second World War reports say that Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann was sickened when he toured the death camps, so he rarely did — he sat at a desk and shuffled paper.

The subordinate who actually put gas into the gas chambers was just 'doing his job', he got his orders from Eichmann. The human, vile act became so fragmented that most were never confronted with the consequences of their parts in it. In this arrangement, the person who assumes responsibility has vanished. Perhaps this — the division of labour — is the most common characteristic of evil events in modern society.



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