

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



137 Why Facts Alone Don't Tell the Story

You've heard it, I've heard it. Two people get into a disagreement and one of them says, "Look here, facts are facts and they're indisputable." I'm Jerry Roberts and today let's discuss why even after getting down to facts, we can still be in trouble. That's the focus, up next on The Extra Point.

How is it that two people of reasonable intelligence can consider a series of facts — even what most people might feel are indisputable facts — and they end up with conclusions that are totally different?

What, have we all morphed into politicians? Well, in a sense, yes. Let me explain.

Do people really argue facts? Not so much as they argue all the stuff that surrounds those facts. They call that context, the circumstances that add understanding to something that happened, or perhaps an idea. It's those circumstances that allow us to see things with greater clarity.

Yeah, just like politicians do.

It works like this. Fact: dogs bite.

Context 1: trying to pet a strange dog increases the chance of getting bit. Context 2: packs of wild dogs endanger Guam's kids.

So the conclusion would be that to avoid being bitten, stay away from animals you're not familiar with, and we need to reduce the number of strays on the island.

When people argue about issues and the facts are pretty clear, you can first do a fact check to see if indeed both sides understand clearly. If so, you can assume there are contextual issues swirling around, plus the other factor — bias.

Our prejudices, as in pre-judgments. We all have them. This includes how we were raised, how our parents taught us to solve problems. It's how we feel about things, how we see the world.

Living in the Bay Area in the late 1980s I was working out at a gym, occasionally mixing in with some beefy airline cargo guys. I learned some good tips from them and all was going well until they asked where I grew up. When I told them L.A. one of them sarcastically asked if I was "one of those idiot Dodgers fans." My response was, "Well, everybody is from somewhere and you grow up cheering for the local team, you know?"

Makes sense, right? Well, not with them. From the moment they found out I had roots with the Dodgers, they weren't interested in me working out with them any more. If I had discovered a cure for cancer, they'd probably have said, "Yeah, the Dodgers fan over there got lucky."

When you hire people you might do well to ask about how they approach problem solving. You can even gamify the experience and offer a few exercises that expose their thought processes.

Facts are facts, yes. but it's all this other stuff we add into the mix that can really muddy the waters and lead to conflict. If you see that at your place among people who have good intentions, peeling back a couple layers of the onion might explain why.

That's The Extra Point. Get out there and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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