

Last week I flew up to Canada and had a very long layover in Cincinnati due to Delta getting us there late (about 31 seconds after the 35 minute planned connection plane to Toronto had departed). This gave me a perfect opportunity to research this column. Here dear readers, are some mind-boggling statistics from my purely unscientific and studiously non-quantitative, improbably-qualitative unrefined research:



□□□ □□□ **91.4% of all people do not cover their mouths when they yawn.**

When you and I were kids our parents taught us to cover our mouths when we yawned or coughed or sneezed. Well, it appears that, maybe, parents have stopped doing that. However, I am happy to report, after looking at thousands of wide-open mouths, that America's dentists are doing a fine job. We may be more impolite than we ever were but those porcelain veneers are the cats pajamas.

□ **61% of all people will pay \$8 for a cellophane wrapped "Wolfgang Puck" three day old designer sandwich and think they are being cool**

The Austrian automaton of a chef somehow gets his sandwiches into open-fronted refrigeration units in our nation's departure lounges. These units, in turn, are manned by disinterested, apron-clad, minimum-waged young women who will take your money but have no interest in your life. However, I am happy to report, you get a free bag of patently non-designer potato (that's potatoe if you remember Dan Quayle) chips with the Puckwich and this, in turn, allows for a much greater facility to really mess up the floor and the chairs of the lounge with spud detritus, Wolfgang crusts and little labels that have cute writing on them that say things like "chicken pesto red onions and pine nuts in a sun dried spinach wrap". We may be leaving more trash behind than ever, but hey, it's upscale trash.

□□ **84% of all people are terribly well-informed about perfectly awful things**

It may even be higher. The numbers of people watching CNN airport screens is enormous. The stuff they are being fed is outrageous. Here's a one hour sampler: 1) Anna Nicole's non-criminal drug overdose (story replete with learned talking heads arguing the pros and cons of the relative strengths and weaknesses of her drug intake; 2) The Senator and the Wife whose breast cancer has returned: Will he gain in the polls from it? Will he not? Should he have remained in the race? Should he not? Was it right to go public? Was it not? 3) A woman bartender in Chicago being severely beaten on camera by a fat and drunk off duty Chicago cop because she refused to serve him any more. While the horrific beating is in progress a colleague of hers watches and does nothing. The reporters wonder aloud if charges will be brought at all. All this ugliness was repeated every thirty minutes and not one of the anchors; not one of the "experts" wondered aloud if, just maybe, our society was unraveling a little bit. All the folks watching all the screens were mesmerized. I was terrified.

These are just three little things and yet they seem to reveal a terrible direction. In a country with such remarkably good founding principles, civility is dying. Please, force yourselves to read the far left blogs about Presidential Press Secretary Tony Snow, now battling cancer again. They are not just uncivil; they are fetid and rank. They are callous and hurtful. They are free speech, some will say. Perhaps, but somehow, I am betting it's not the kind the framers had in mind.

The death of civility is mirrored in scores of simultaneous cell phone conversations in supermarkets, malls or airport lounges producing an unharmonious cacophony of private and personal information gone wildly public. Listen, Fred (or whatever your name is), I couldn't care

less that you and your Uncle Paul are going to be two hours late for Jenny's birthday in Secaucus. It's none of my business so stop forcing me to learn about it. Mind your own business and let me mind mine.

The death of civility is brought nearer by our simple impoliteness with each other: Like jockeying for position on an inadequate local highway and cursing the driver parked, at 55 in the passing lane. Or, becoming so selfish about what each of us wants that we care nothing about what others might need.

No-one has done more in recent days to hurry along the death of civility than House Speaker, Pelosi. This elegant, refined and wealthy woman from San Francisco telling the President of the United States to "calm down", is the new paradigm: If we dislike a president or a presidential policy, why would we debate it like intelligent men and women when we can grandstand for the press and, with an ugly little smirk of nasty inflection, make the "calm down" sound like we're giving little Georgie a smack on the derriere in public. He may not be your or my favorite President, but that's not the issue. If the Speaker of the House can be so disrespectful of the Office of the President, then should it not then be open season on her and her office too? And there's the problem, folks: It all degrades. It conceives more loudness. It buries honest dialogue. It moves the media to even greater frenzy. It polarizes us when we should be seeking the answers somewhere between the extremes.

Think about it. Maybe we each need to recognize that if we lose our civility, we lose the one human quality that, other than speech, distinguishes us from the animals.