

About the Mouse

In previous issues we have discussed some of Mr. Mickey Mouse's contemporaries and how they do not set good examples for us as Barbershoppers. Lack of a thorough knowledge of lyrics results in each of us waiting a fraction of a second for our neighbor to sing the word. Our neighbor, in turn, waits for his neighbor, and on and on ad infinitum. This results in the well-known "Porky Pig Effect". That stammering approach to the lyric that Mr. Pig uses to closeout cartoons, "Th, Th, Th, That's all folks". The equally famous "Donald Duck Effect" is the non-melodious sound that results when we all sing different vowel sounds. The resulting cacophony of overtones sounds more like an ad for Cepacol Gargle than a musical group. These effects are well known in physics, ranking right up there with the Bohr Effect, the Doppler Effect, etc. With this brief summary of these previous articles, let us now proceed to an examination of the "Mickey Mouse Effect".

The "Micky Mouse Effect" is named after the rodent of the same name whose life style along with its ramifications defined the "Effect". Mr. Mouse's career is a story of paradox. Beginning in the movies with "Steamboat Willie" and continuing with "Fantasia", Mr. M. then spread into other entertainment venues, founding theme parks here and abroad. Along the way he had a very successful television series (who among us did not lust after Annette Funicello?). In general, Mr. Mouse was and is a commercial force and has had a lasting impact on our culture.

But now the paradox. "Mickey Mouse" has become a common slang term for something that is insignificant and unimportant. For example, most students of English composition regard the parsing of sentences and correct punctuation as "Mickey Mouse". Arthur Anderson apparently regarded reliable audit procedures of Enron as "Mickey Mouse". With Mr. M's undeniable success, why has his name crept into the vernacular to mean..., to mean Mickey Mouse? Why is this?

I think it is because we here in the front line trenches of every day life are far too clever to be misled by the Mouse. We have lived with him for many years. Does familiarity breed contempt? Perhaps. If not contempt, however, it does facilitate a deeper understanding. What is it that we have found about Mr. M. that has caused us to relegate his name to such lowly esteem?

Grandiose ideation. In Mr. Mouse's case, we have found that he has grandiose ideation in spades. Mr. M., at his request I am sure, is portrayed as being bigger than his dog, Pluto. Now, I submit to you, is that possible? Let us go back a bit in time. Way back in evolution, after the one celled animals found that sex was fun, the dinosaurs took it to the extreme and had fun in a big way. But the party ended after a particularly bad night, and small shrew like- animals took over, beginning with their own amorous adventures. Canines arrived on the scene somewhat later and were definitely bigger than the shrews. Thus Mr. Mouse is not now and never has been bigger than his dog. Neither was his granddaddy a few hundred times removed bigger than Pluto's granddaddy also a few hundred times removed. This is Mr. Mouse's state of mind. He has grandiose ideas that are not founded in fact.

Work. What exactly does Mr. Mouse do? He is apparently able to maintain himself. His wardrobe has improved over the years. He seems to have a good relationship with his nephews. But does he support them? This has never been made clear. He does no work and leaves his fate to chance. Thus far, he has survived but his triumph against adversity in his many adventures seems to have been made possible by dumb luck. In reality, it seems that he is stuck in the status quo. What will the future hold? He is apparently uneducated and untrained. It would seem that he is likely to fall upon hard times.

Commitment. All of you know Minnie Mouse. This poor creature has been waiting in the wings for over half a century but Mr. Mouse has yet to make a commitment to her. I have seen an occasional peck on the cheek but nothing more and certainly no overnights. Yet, as far as I know there has never been another female (or for that matter, another male) in his life. He seems to prefer hanging out with his friends, Donald, Horace, and Clarabelle. But even they have changed over the years. So, with Minnie's biological clock ticking away and friends disappearing (Do you remember Horace?), we seem to have a certain inability to commit from Mr. Mouse.

The "Mickey Mouse Effect" then is the effect on any given project when it is undertaken with the basic concepts not based on facts; when there is hope for a lucky break but no work ethic to guarantee success; when there is a lack of commitment to a sustained effort toward an achievable goal. The project remains mired in time. It may appear successful because it exists but it does not move forward and objective assessment reveals its true status. It has become trivialized and insignificant. It has become "Mickey Mouse".

This is, of course, what we do not want to have in the Arlingtonges. I think we have a realistic idea of our ability. We know that with hard work and a sense of commitment we can do better. Thus we find that

along with Effects of Messrs. Pig and Duck, the “Mickey Mouse Effect” completes an unholy trilogy for which we Arlingtones have no use.

Next time, more serious issues. Just What is a Barbershop 7th ?

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