

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

We are living in an increasingly complex and dangerous world with so many problems. We are on the precipice of critical decisions that affect every aspect of our lives. The war(s) in the Middle East, terrorism, global warming, the quality of public education, the crisis in health care, social liberties, and constitutional rights are only a short list of the national and global issues that we, as citizens, should be concerned about. At a local level, everything from affordable housing to day care to resources for the elderly to optimal levels of development must be addressed. Admittedly, it's hard to keep up with what is real and true given the spin doctors and their fictions in a sea of overwhelming information. And in the middle of the maelstrom, we are the cusp of the midterm elections, perhaps the most critical ones in recent history.

On November 7, Americans (or at least some of us) will line up at the polls to cast their votes for all 435 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives, thirty-three seats in the U.S. Senate, thirty-six governors, and countless other state and local offices. The outcome of these elections will have a profound effect on our safety, rights, and the quality of our lives for years to come. In spite of the importance of our contributions as citizens, many Americans are not in the mood to vote if history offers any insight. In the hotly contested and vitriolic 2004 national elections, only about 64% of eligible voters hoofed it to the polls. You would think that this is a disappointing percentage and that we should all do everything that we can to encourage our friends and neighbors to get out there and vote. Maybe not.

Recently, Zogby International – an international public opinion polling organization -- was commissioned by the producers of a new game show (Gold Rush) to investigate how much Americans know about popular culture. The results were, for lack of a better word, scary.

In this critically important election year, three out of four respondents were better able to name the Three Stooges (Larry, Curly, and Moe) while only forty-two percent could identify the three branches of the U.S. government (Judicial, Executive, and Legislative). About three-quarters of those surveyed could correctly identify two of Snow White's Seven Dwarfs while less than a quarter could name two Supreme Court Judges. (Note: Dopey and Grumpy are dwarfs not Supreme Court Justices).

As evidence that more people can talk about what was on TV last night than what was in the headlines, twice as many people knew who won the most recent American Idol talent show (Taylor Hicks), as were able to name the Supreme Court Justice most recently confirmed (Samuel Alito). More Americans know who Harry Potter is than Tony Blair. And our ignorance doesn't begin and end with politics; it bleeds over to literature and science.

Sixty percent of respondents correctly named Bart as Homer's son on The Simpsons while only twenty percent were able to name either the Iliad or The Odyssey as one of the ancient Greek Homer's epic poems. Sixty percent also knew that Superman's home planet is the fictional Krypton, but only thirty-seven percent were aware that Mercury is the planet closest to the sun.

Professor Robert Thompson, of the Bleier Centre for Television and Popular Culture, said the findings were not about Americans being stupid, however. "These results are not

about how 'dumb' Americans are, but about how much more effectively popular culture information is communicated and retained by citizens than many of the messages that come from government, educational institutions and the media,” he said. Uh, Okay.

Still, the results of this survey cause me to wonder who will be casting votes in November and what the results will mean for our future. I'd hate to see a movement to blame Kryptonite for global warming or Marge Simpson as a write-in candidate for a senate post.

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2006 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at www.fullpotentialliving.com.