

Wisdom

By David Silver

Conventional Wisdom, also known as Received Wisdom, is that body of ideas or explanations generally accepted as true by the public and/or by experts in a field. But Conventional Wisdom is not necessarily true and the rules it promotes are often arbitrary. It is additionally often seen as an obstacle to the acceptance of newly acquired information. Besides, we all know about 'experts' don't we?

This all came to mind at an afternoon tea I recently attended. As we all enjoyed our sandwiches, cakes and pastries one person noticeably stood out because he was eating his 'finger' sandwiches with a knife and fork. (Apparently he eats bananas with cutlery which puts him in good company with The Queen). Well, everyone had a good laugh at my, I mean his, expense but he had the last laugh as everyone else went home with sticky fingers and mucky sleeves. Personally I always thought finger sandwiches were so named because of their shape but apparently it's because Conventional Wisdom says you're supposed to eat them with your ... err ... fingers and anyone who doesn't is viewed as a little odd.

But there's a but. Someone will happily eat a fried egg with cutlery, but clap a piece of bread around it and suddenly he feels obligated to eat it with his fingers. How do people eat their Croque Monsieurs? 'With a knife and fork because they are hot and greasy you silly sausage' they say. Well what about when they have cooled down? 'Well of course then you eat it with our fingers you fool' they say. And at what temperature does it become de rigueur to eat it with your fingers, where is the cut off point between cutlery and fingers? 43 degrees? 37? Presumably you carry a food thermometer with you? 'Durr' they say. Pizza is a sort of open sandwich but we don't eat that with our fingers do we? What? Did that lady in the front row say she does? That's unbelievable! I bet she even eats spaghetti with her fingers because that's also made of wheat. (Please don't answer that dear lady but can I come to watch next time you order spag bol?)

Surely Stone Age Man didn't eat his sandwich, bursting with delicious but messy egg mayonnaise, with his fingers? It just would not have been possible because mayonnaise hadn't been invented back then, so it's simply untrue to say 'that's how it has always been done'. Future generations may well eat their sandwiches completely differently – perhaps everyone will carry their own miniature solar-powered liquidisers and drink their sandwiches with a straw. Imagine the opprobrium heaped on the poor social misfit who eats his sandwich with his fingers then, eh?

The moral of the story is that just because other people do things in a certain way and they do it that way because everyone else does it that way because that's how it's always been done, doesn't mean that's how it should always be done forever and ever until the end of time. We should always stop and think – is there a legal, decent and better way of doing something?

Especially if it will annoy the hell out of other people.

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