

Common Sense Gresham

Let's look at a few principles of Common Sense. The one I like to list first and foremost is “The K.I.S.S. Principle”. For those who haven't heard it, it means, “Keep It Simple, Stupid.” No insult intended, and no, I didn't invent that.

Keeping it simple helps us “cut to the chase”, another principle which says to skip all the window-dressing and look at the reason we're concentrating on a subject. The Common Sense Project will ALWAYS “cut to the chase”.

In my introduction, I mentioned that I am a big fan of, “if it ain't broke, don't fix it”. This maxim means that some things just don't need improvement, and work to make improvement on an already-workable process is usually just wasted work. Smart people, and most in government are smart, don't do work without a reason, so if they are “improving” a workable process or law, it's likely to THEIR advantage, not yours.

“Whose turf are you on”, or “whose rice bowl are you breaking” are two other buzz-phrases we'll deal with here, because the answers to those two questions often reveal, right up front, whether common sense is in play in a process, or has already been rejected in favor of deviousness. Most of us realize that “turf protection”, or protection of spheres of influence, is a primary motivation of bureaucrats, but when common sense butts heads with turf protection, a “rice bowl”, or influence, the staff of life for a bureaucrat, is often at risk. This is why common sense is not the go-to solution for all governmental questions, but frequently a last resort, if it's considered at all.

How is Common Sense best expressed? If we're to become advocates for Common Sense, we have to be able to explain ourselves, on any subject at hand, in as few words as possible. This idea is known as the Principle of Parsimony, and was known to ancient philosophers, so it's been around a while. If you're technically inclined, it's also known as Occam's Razor, which states that the simplest explanation which accounts for all the data at hand is always the best explanation. One may say that the application of Common Sense is nothing more than the idea of simplifying any process to the most basic level which will still accomplish all the desired goals of that process. One may also say that a lot of Government processes never attain that level of simplicity, and in fact, attaining simplicity is not on very many published agendas in government service.

That's where WE come in, my friends. We're here to help government discover and comply with the Principle of Parsimony, and we're here to find out why they won't meet that principle when they resist it.