What is an Ã¢â‚¬Å“opinion?Ã¢â‚¬Â•

Description

Just blowing off some steam here. If youâ€™re not in the mood for a rant, move along. If you are, scroll downâ€¦

A few weeks ago, I found a new blog and I linked into the comments on one of the posts. There were some statements there, presented as the opinions of the commenters, yet and I had personal experience with the issues being discussed. While the comments were not totally off the edge, they were leaning far over the side, ready to fall off the cliff. I entered my own comments. As a basis for my comments, I used my own personal experience, not that of others, as they had discussed. In my remarks, I even admitted that a part of what they stated was true, but there was a far bigger picture to understand. They had formed their opinions based on a small sample size, you might say. I thought it would be useful to provide some more input. I did end on a note indicating I thought that with the ability to research vast amounts of information in the net these days, it would be useful to do some homework, before making those comments. IÃ¢â‚¬â„¢ll admit, I could have left that part out.

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I went back the next day. The response was interesting, yet I think it encapsulates so much of what happens on the net. The main commenter on that blog launched into me, telling me I had no right to tell them to do their homework, and further more, he didnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t care what I had been doing in 1972 (that was an integral part of the first person report, relating to the issue of Vietnam), since he wasnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t alive at that time anyhow. Besides, he had formed his opinion based on the comment made by one of his friends. Wow. I think his Ã¢â‚¬Å“I donÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t careÃ¢â‚¬Â• remark actually summed up his basic demeanor.

The owner of the blogÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s response was to tell that guy he was off base, but then she made an interesting point: She was just stating her opinions, and, after all, isnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t that what blogs are all about? Yes, I agree, but the thing that sticks in my throat is what is an opinion.

Too many things these days ask our Ã¢â‚¬Å“opinion.Ã¢â‚¬Â• The many polls and surveys we are bombarded with try to get us to believe that those 1000 people surveyed essentially represent the over all feelings on an issue. That certainly could be the truth, as it used to be, but now that we have Ã¢â‚¬Å“dumbed downÃ¢â‚¬Â• our youth, many times I think the Ã¢â‚¬Å“adviceÃ¢â‚¬Â• of those who donÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t even know where most other countries in the world are, let alone what the Constitution says may not be the best ones to ask. Opinions, like feelings it seems these days, are our own personal domain, and inviolate.

I have a different view, which may help to bring the understanding of opinions back to reality. HereÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s a dictionary definition of Ã¢â‚¬Å“opinionÃ¢â‚¬Â• with the help of Merriam-Webster:

1) Judgment;
2) a belief stronger than impression and less strong than personal knowledge;
3) a formal statement by an expert after careful study.

All great stuff here. Here is more way too detailed analysis:

Judgment, from the same dictionary, in this scenario is best represented by this definition: Ã¢â‚¬Å“the process of forming an opinion by discerning and comparing.Ã¢â‚¬Â•

Ã¢â‚¬Å“A belief stronger than Ã¢â‚¬Â¦Ã¢â‚¬Â• I guess it comes down to how you assess the strength of your thoughts on the subject.

Ã¢â‚¬Å“An expert Ã¢â‚¬Â¦Ã¢â‚¬Â• is someone Ã¢â‚¬Å“showing special skill or knowledge.Ã¢â‚¬Â•

Ok, I think I was on firm ground in representing my experiences on the subject matter, yet Ã¢â‚¬Å“it Ã¢â‚¬â„¢s our opinion Ã¢â‚¬Â• that takes top level position.

Looking at my :Ã¢â‚¬Â•opinions,Ã¢â‚¬Â• I have found they have changed over time, as I have been exposed to, or gained more information. Am I correct in my opinions? Well, if it Ã¢â‚¬â„¢s an opinion I hold, then it is something I will have to admit I do not have Ã¢â‚¬Å“strong personal knowledge Ã¢â‚¬Â• of the topic, unless, as an expert, I am asked to comment, then my Ã¢â‚¬Å“opinion Ã¢â‚¬Â• takes on the weight approaching fact.

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While in the service, I had to conduct two JAG Manual Investigations as the investigating officer. I essentially wrote two more, but then they were signed by senior officers, who were the designated investigating officers. This is where I learned where Ã¢â‚¬Å“opinions Ã¢â‚¬Â• fit into the hierarchy of information.

A Ã¢â‚¬Å“JAGMAN Ã¢â‚¬Â• had three basic sections:

1) Finding of Fact
2) Opinions
3) Conclusions/Recommendations

The first section listed all the hard, cold facts you found. The supporting documentation for these facts were enclosed in the investigation ad appendices, in order to provide the reviewers up the chain of command with the ability to fact check you. If you couldn Ã¢â‚¬â„¢t find a source for it, it wasn Ã¢â‚¬â„¢t a fact. That Ã¢â‚¬â„¢s pretty easy to understand. For example, let Ã¢â‚¬â„¢s say some of the facts are:

1) Seaman Smotz was not aboard the USS NEVERSAIL on March 15th, 2005, when the ship departed 32nd Street Naval Station, San Diego, CA (Appendix A: OI Division Muster Report of 3/15/2005)
2) Seaman Smotz was present for Muster on USS NEVERSAIL on March 14th, 2005 (Appendix B: OI Division Muster Report of 3/14/2005)
3) The Plan of the Day for March 14th, 2005 aboard USS NEVERSAIL listed the time and date for reporting aboard on March 15th, 2005 for the planned Ship Ã¢â‚¬â„¢s movement. (Appendix C: USS NEVERSAIL POD 3/14/2005)
4) OI Division Leading Chief Petty Officer Smith read entire USS NEVERSAIL POD to the assembled OI Division during Muster on March 14th, 2005. (Appendix D: Sworn statement of OSC(SW) Leighton Smith, USN dated 3/31/2005)

The opinion section was not how you felt about it, but a series of observations of the collected factual information. From the facts, you derived opinions. You listed the paragraph numbers of the findings of

fact that led you to those Ã¢â‚¬Å“opinions.Ã¢â‚¬Â• This also allowed the reviewers with an understanding of how you arrived at these opinions. From the above facts, then opinions are formed:

1) Seaman Smotz was aware of the planned movement of USS NEVERSAIL on March 15th, 2005, to include the reporting aboard time that day. (FOF 1-4)

You couldnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t prove he paid attention to the reading of the Plan of the Day, which was read and the essential written orders for reporting time were delineated. By forming the opinion that his presence provided ample opportunity to hear the information allows an opinion of his understanding, but you can take it no further.

You got to add some of your Ã¢â‚¬Å“feelingsÃ¢â‚¬Â• in the conclusions and recommendations.

Not that opinions need to be left to the experts, but that, as more facts are gained, that an opinion will either be solidified into a fact, or it will have to change, when the facts show the presently held opinion no longer fits the conditions.

ItÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s great to have opinions, but when someone presents a personal testimony, not their opinion, and the response is: Ã¢â‚¬Å“Well, itÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s just my opinionÃ¢â‚¬Â• seems to be the mantra of these days, which seems to translate into: Ã¢â‚¬Å“I donÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t care what you say, IÃ¢â‚¬â„¢m hanging onto my opinion.Ã¢â‚¬Â•

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Category

1. Political

Date Created
August 19, 2006
Author
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