

Lists

-Brent Skinner

Lists. We all make them. In fact, I believe that list making is one of the defining characteristics of humankind and is one of our innate behaviors that truly distinguishes us from other living species.

Lists are an important way to bring order to chaos. For example, my wife never sends me to our local Safeway Store without a list. In fact, she makes me read the list out loud to ensure that I understand it along with a few questions to test my comprehension such as “Do you remember what a cabbage actually looks like?” or “What store aisle is likely to contain packages of yeast?” You see, left on my own without a shopping list, I would probably aimlessly wander about the grocery store and return with a case of cola, a package of maple leaf cookies and three jumbo bags of barbecue potato chips.

Lists also provide a sense of accomplishment. When I was still slaving in the work force I always kept a handwritten “To Do” list on the side of my desk and took great pleasure in crossing out chores as completed. On occasion, I couldn’t read my own writing but stroked out these mysterious entries anyway on the grounds that if they had been all that important I would have made them more legible.

Lists have been around ever since people learned how to write, and I am told after years of intensive effort, academics have determined that ancient Assyrian cuneiform clay tablets are actually petrified shopping lists.

Lists are also a good way of exercising your mind when enduring a long plane trip or having a sleepless

spell in the middle of the night. In such circumstances I like to create mental lists of all the American states visited; past bedrooms that had west facing windows; year, make, model and color of previous automobiles; or, if I have a lot of time, embarrassing things that I have done.

Lists can also be problematic. There are some lists that you simply want to avoid. For example, you don't want your name to appear on the FBI "most wanted" list, the electronic robocall directory for any major political party, or any form of blacklist such as my sister-in-law's list of disliked and obnoxious relatives.

Lists can also be a therapeutic form of venting. Columnist Andy Rooney has written out a "don't you hate it when" list which includes:

- . Your suitcase is the last one off the airplane?
- . The bread in the toaster burns on the edges but doesn't turn brown in the middle where you want to put the jam?
- . Your shoelace breaks when you're are in a hurry?
- . You try to look up a word in the dictionary to see how it is spelled but you can't find it because you don't know how to spell it?
- . You take your shoes off and find a hole in the toe of a sock, the rest of which would last another ten years?
- . The only place to plug in an extension cord is down behind the couch?
- . The postman leaves an important looking letter in your mailbox but it belongs to the people next door?
- . The fire engine goes by your house and you don't know where the fire is?

Finally, you need to be mindful that the word "list" has more than one connotation and you need to be

particularly careful when using the word around cruise ship captains or piano virtuosos.

There you have it - my comprehensive 2 page list of everything that I know about lists. I wonder how many pages it would take to rate me as an expert?