

Garbage In, Garbage Out

“The computer made a mistake!” Have you ever said that? Most of the time, you eventually had to admit the truth: The computer didn’t make the mistake—you did.

Entering bad data into a computer produces bad output. Faulty assumptions deliver flawed conclusions. Our minds work exactly like computers do. The quality of what we feed our minds produces the quality of the results we achieve.

Input controls choice. Choice drives actions. Actions determine results. Garbage in, garbage out.

Your mind is a storehouse of facts, figures, images, beliefs and opinions. The supply in your storehouse has been collected since childhood, added to by parents, siblings, teachers, neighbors, friends and acquaintances. Your storehouse is further supplied by what you read, what you watch and what you experience.

What you have stored in your mind creates the assumptions that drive the decisions you make and the actions you take.

So how do you know you have the right stuff in the storehouse? How do you know the right data has been entered? If thoughts produce results, how do you know you have the right thoughts to create the right results?

Garbage Check

One way to know is to do a garbage check. Ask yourself: Do I have areas of repeated failure in my life? Am I:

- * always broke, existing from paycheck to paycheck?
- * constantly entering or leaving a painful relationship?
- * continually worried about my weight?

* dependent on alcohol, food, cigarettes, work or drugs to give me momentary relief from that gnawing feeling inside?

If the answer is yes to any or all of these, then the voice in your head—which I call the High Priestess of Guilt and Condemnation—has set up a community in your head and populated it with thugs assigned to enforce wrong ideas. The High Priestess and her little friends strive to focus your energy on taking action, knowing that focusing on actions produces defeat.

The answer isn't in the actions; that's the end of the pipeline. The answer is in the assumptions that create the actions—the beginning of the pipeline.

I Needed Drano

I used to work 60 hours a week, convinced that work gave me my identity. I smoked cigarettes until my office looked as if a dragon worked there. I was overdrawn at the bank and in debt up to my ears.

I thought the next promotion would be the answer, the next diet would be the ticket, the next raise would get me out of debt, the next cigarette would be my last. Yeah, and the tooth fairy pays off in hundred-dollar bills.

My life was filled with promises to myself that always ended in failure—followed by shame, frustration and a solemn promise to try again. I figured God was trying to teach me something to build my character.

Here is a news flash: God is a good God. He wants only the best for us. He doesn't put us through turmoil to teach us something.

God loves us more than we love even our own children (see Luke 11:11-13). His Word is a manual for life. The problem is that most of us were never given the owner's manual. It sure missed

my mailbox.

God doesn't create an obstacle course for us to see how well we perform. Want some proof? Look at James 1:17: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning" (NKJV).

Does that sound like somebody who's putting you through trials to teach you something? No way. So where does the bad stuff come from? Simple—check out John 10:10. We enter into error because we don't do what our Maker tells us in the owner's manual.

Here's the Deal

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2). That's the bottom line.

The patterns of this world are driven and reinforced by you-know-who in your head. She'll point you to the world for answers, but the world doesn't have the answers. In fact, the Bible tells us not to be conformed to the patterns of this world. Instead, we must be transformed through the renewing of our minds by the Word of God.

We have a choice: We can follow the wisdom of the world or the wisdom of the Word. One produces failure, the other success.

Easy choice. I know which one I want! But wanting it and having it are two different things. I had to want God's wisdom enough to pursue it—and study it—to find out what was mine.

It wasn't until I stopped resigning myself to a life of consuming carrot sticks and lettuce leaves, a life of working 60-hour weeks and being overdrawn, that it occurred to me I had a head full of misinformation that was driving me to

overeate, overwork and overspend. Only then did I see the necessity of calling in the Roto-Rooter man to flush the garbage out of my head and replace it with truth.

Truth Prescription

Take out a sheet of paper and list your areas of failure. Create two columns. Label one column "The Lie" and the second "The Truth." Under each failure area, write down all the lies that the High Priestess tells you.

Then run, don't walk, to a Christian bookstore and invest in a concordance, a rich storehouse of truth that will help you understand the Bible. Look up words that pertain to your area of weakness (such as lack, bondage and discipline) and write down the scriptural truth about that weakness.

Select a few Scriptures to write opposite each lie. Confess the truth daily. Over time, the truth will transform your mind and push out the lies.

I promise you, this procedure works. I followed it, and I'm out of debt, with a savings program under way. My weight is stabilized at size 10. The cigarettes are gone. And, oh yes, I work 40—count them—only 40 hours a week.

You see, I finally figured out how to use the owner's manual. OK, so I'm a late bloomer. How about you?

What's Your Source?

Most of us give far too much attention to the television set. The morning local news is a festival of fires, stabbings, drug busts and city council scams. The evening national news is a celebration of Ebola virus outbreaks, terrorism threats, economic deficits and the whining of special-interest groups. It's enough to make you want to lock yourself in a room filled with nothing but Archie and Jughead comic books.

Like it or not, we all define reality based on those things we

give our attention to. Recent research indicates that the average American watches 6.5 hours of TV a day, a horrifying thought. Think what's on television these days!

So What?

What's wrong with this stuff? We believe it! Faith comes by hearing.

Hitler knew that. Quotes From Thinkers on the World Wide Web credits his minister of "disinformation," Joseph Goebbels, with saying: "If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it." At the other end of the spectrum, the Bible says, "Faith comes by hearing" (Rom. 10:17).

If you define happiness based on input from friends, co-workers and the entertainment industry, you'll live your entire life feeling trapped and hopeless. I know. I took every test in Cosmopolitan for a decade.

I flunked every one. I never could get the hang of decorating rooms so they looked like the ones in Better Homes and Gardens, dinners that tasted as if Martha Stewart prepared them or closets that didn't look like a habitat for small animals.

My friends told me things would never change. Television told me things would never change. And my own experience, aided and abetted by the High Priestess, cemented the pattern. But when I got sick and tired of the pattern, I was ready to do anything to break the mold.

Silencing the High Priestess

Here's a foolproof way to replace the lies told by that negative voice in your head with life-changing, positive thoughts.

1. *Turn off the TV.* Ask yourself, "Is what I'm watching

building me up spiritually, mentally, emotionally or physically?" If not, pull the plug.

2. *Read.* Thousands of new books are published every year, books on every conceivable subject. In our age of ever-increasing knowledge, performance experts tell us that if we do not choose to read two books a week, we choose to fall behind.

3. *Listen.* Most of us spend more time in the car than we'd like. Why not turn your car into a traveling library? Audiotapes on every subject are available. You can put lots of good stuff into your head if you're willing to turn off the traffic report. Isn't it worth it?

4. *Write down the names of the four people you spend the most time with.* Then ask: "Do these people support me, nurture me and encourage my creativity and ideas?" If the answer is no, get rid of those people.

OK, so they're your family. You can't blow them away. But if those four people drain you, you must augment your list with others. It's a matter of life or death.

People you spend time with frame your world and influence your ability to make decisions. If you're surrounded by the Bad News Bears, make some new friends.

More importantly, forge a relationship with the One who loves you best. The Lord Jesus Christ paid a price for you. He laid down His life so you could live. He paid the price for your bondage so you could be free from it. Spend time in His presence. Find out who He is through His Word.

"In Your presence is fulness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Ps. 16:11). Who needs garbage when you can have this?

Jane Pierotti is the founder and president of her own

consulting company, Counterpoint, Inc. She is the author of Super Charged Living (Creation House.)