

“Philosophy of the Closed Mouth.”

There is no more valuable or more humbling art, than the art of knowing when to say nothing. Unfortunately this is not a skill that seems to be embraced by our society. I understand that we all have the right to express ourselves but I think most everyone would agree, that there is just too much talking going on in the world right now and not a whole lot being said. News commentators, analysts, political pundits, weathermen and yes... politicians, seem to go on and on, like we're being paid by the word and not for the content.

But in all fairness, everyone from time to time, becomes ensnared in the trap of not knowing when to stop talking. Sometimes, adding just one more point to an explanation or statement... is just enough to cause us to lose our argument, unintentionally insult someone, make them angry or just cause everyone's eyes to glaze over and roll into the back of their heads.

My father was the first person that I ever heard express the sage “Philosophy of the Closed Mouth.” My Dad ran the local hardware store and was famous for his lack of patience with complainers, know-it-alls, salesmen... well, in fact, everyone. One particular fellow, back in early 1970, was bending Dad's ear, yammering on about how horrible everything was in Florida and how great everything was back where he had chose to move from... a kind of selective nostalgia that we all seem to get from time to time. My Dad was behind the counter, leaning against the gigantic cast iron cash register, his eyes peering out from underneath his freshly mowed crew cut, through black horn rimmed glasses. You could see it coming. It was like watching the Daytona 500. It went on and on and on... but you knew the “big wreck” was coming... it was just a matter of time. Sweeping the floor, I worked my way up a little closer... I didn't want to miss this. Suddenly, Dad raised his ham hock like arm and pointed his stubby finger at the guy. “Hey!” he said loudly, interrupting the man's monologue. “If you really want to impress everyone with how smart you are, why don't you start by just shuttin' up!” The guy snatched up the bag containing his 27 cents worth of nuts and bolts, turned and headed out the door. “And there goes another satisfied customer!” I mumbled under my breath, grinning, as I watched the man gesturing wildly, still talking and apparently giving the invisible man in his car a piece of his mind. My dad had already calmly gone back to repairing the fishing pole that had been waiting patiently on the workbench next to him. He glanced over at me, furrowed his brow and said sternly “What?” I put my hands in the air, surrendering and then with my face all scrunched up I answered uncertainly... “Nothing?” My dad just grinned and nodded. Sometimes, nothing is the right thing to say.