



IDIOT SAVANT

(OR
AVANT
IDIOTS)

WORDS BY DAVE REGAN

So, with winter finally under our proverbial belts, and the promise of thousand-degree, sun-cracked days in our future, the smell of love permeates all and everything around us. Or maybe that's just diesel fuel. Maybe love smells a lot like gasoline. Maybe I should open the garage door when the car is running. Which I would, but I... I'm just so tired. A strange thing, love is. And with this ideal of love, we must ask ourselves, "How is it this guy keeps writing this crap?", and, "Everybody knows tattoo mags are just for the pictures, that's why they sell them next to all the porn.", et cetera. Which is certainly not a knock to the journalistic caliber of some of the finer tattoo magazines out there, but what does it say about porn? Porn doesn't want some sickly, scumbag, tattooer connotation polluting its... uh... hallowed halls. Ahem.

Moving right along, I bring love up, namely because there is an unspoken bond between those of us that cram ourselves into the same space everyday and suffer through our personalities, opinions, politics, ramblings, and musings. We are there, day in and day out, through thick and thin, good and bad; we endure each other. Why? Because it's a relationship. It is your rock, and it is your thorn. It is literally everything about a relationship, minus the sex. Well, hopefully, anyhow. I think the fellas might not like it if I got fresh. Plus, it doesn't count if they're sleeping. But seriously, the shop is your significant other.



OKAY...

How many hours of your life do you spend at a shop? How much time are you putting into building a better future for you and those around you? You are creating a family with these people, whether you know it or not, and as with lots of baby-making, be aware of the genetic pool in which you swim. Each of the people you work with forms a different facet of your singular-shop-relationship. For example, you may have the funny one, the emotional one, the angry one, the quiet one, the boisterous one, the piercer (... sometimes), the dreaded rock star, and of course, who can forget the ol' wild card? All of these are characteristic of the larger picture, the shop you love, which is also the shop you hate every once in a while. When you love something, only it has the power to bring out the worst in you. And when something loves you, it has the power to elevate you above and beyond what you thought yourself capable of. When you can harness that power, it

can yield tremendous successes. But when that power is a weapon, it can also turn against you if you're not careful with it. Kind of like when Obi-wan gives Luke his first lightsaber, and Luke immediately points it at his face.

So it's this very powerful thing. Be it good or bad, it boils down to how, just like how in any relationship, you work together. When we put our egos aside and focus on the bigger picture, we are able to work together as one unit with a singular vision. We don't necessarily fight, but we talk about how things may work, who it affects, and how to best approach certain situations. Or, all we do is fight, because we can't agree on the simplest of things.

WHAT DO YOU WANT FOR LUNCH?

"You pick."

"I don't want to pick, I always pick."

"C'mon, pleeeeeeease?"

"Fine. How about Indian?"

"...I don't like Indian."

And that is how it begins. Just as in a relationship, this question is a trap. You will never choose correctly, because that implies that there is a correct answer out there. But, this is all circuitous logic, destined only for the failure of the decider. You will pick correctly once out of every 12 or 13 times, and even then, if the food is not up to everyone's expectation, it is easy to throw the stone of, "Well, Steve picked, so it's his fault lunch is ruined." Is it really Steve's fault? Or are you too weak to admit you wanted the same food? That yours wasn't even that bad? That maybe, Steve is a really good guy, who always has good things happening to him, and it sickens you, so you just want to knock him down a peg or two. That'll show him. Or better yet, send the counter guy to get barbeque, but belittle him when he returns with no sauce or silverware. Contemptuously chewing your food, muttering under your breath about how that asshole always does this. And yet, you always manage to send him to pick it up. Until you get so flustered that you go and pick up the food. Contemptuously driving, muttering about how much of a dumbass he is, and then you return to the shop with food. And no silverware. Or sauce. Why don't they just put it in the damn bag?! And then, you realize the error of your thinking about Steve. He's not so bad. Always helping his grandma, doing nice things for folks, volunteering at the dog shelter. And you can tell him this, because a. you love him, and b. you can now unify, and hate the BBQ people for being so damn stupid in the first place. And the counter guy. ...Especially the counter guy. Crisis averted.

MUSIC

Look, everyone listens to different music. I, like most of us, love music with my entire being. I collect it, I listen to it, and I play it. Nothing makes me happier than sitting down and popping a record on, or playing some jams with the homies. But

there is a LOT of music out there. Which probably means some of it isn't good. Or a lot of it, really. One of the beauties of a relationship is the ability to share your diverse tastes with the person you love. Hopefully. The shop is no different. My musical horizons have been so greatly expanded from being in shops and hearing a myriad of amazing tunes over the years that, even though I collected music from a young age, I feel that without a shop environment, I would have never sought out most of things I seek now. And thanks to all the personalities at the shops, we usually get a pretty vast mix of ear candy. Everyone gets a pick, so sooner or later you'll hear something you don't like. And each one of those people will usually have some kind of soundtrack they take with them. Johnny likes Ukrainian sheep shearing songs, jazz, and Fugazi. Mike likes first and second wave ska, as well as the timeless hits of Sting. Katie likes pop punk, Bjork, and Joanna Newsom. Elron listens to hip hop and new wave shit. Demogorgon (Terrence is his real name, but he hates you calling him that) listens to Emperor, Dimmu Borgir, and nothing else. So we have the varying mutations of tastes, all of which have merit to the individual. It's like a burger with ketchup. And cheese. And peanut butter. And cereal, and ice cream, and liquor, and cigarette butts, and an old shoe. If you're constantly fighting over the radio, it may indicate there is a bigger communication problem in your relationship, or in your shop. You play a song or a record, they play a song or record. And you'll probably hear stuff you don't like, but at least every one gets a say.

In the shop, it can be important to pay attention to who your clients are as well. As an example, I dig a lot of different kinds of metal. It's a small portion of what I listen to, but I enjoy listening and playing it. What it boils down to is time and place, time and place. It can really help or hurt a situation by making people feel comfortable or very uncomfortable. Sometimes, I don't want to listen to music that sounds like trucks downshifting into a shipping container while I'm tattooing a 75-year-old lady. Great Aunt Ophelia might not be into Burn The Priest as much as you are. I mean, sure, she's 75 and full of hate, but she lets you know she hates by making some kind of bigoted remark, yelling at children, or just by generally not giving a shit. In addition, she may also dislike the sounds of transformers trying to make babies with trash compactors as we hear so often here in Colorado,

apparent dubstep capitol of North America (I did actually read that somewhere). And it's real cool that you listen to Skrewdriver, but maybe the downtown Atlanta shop isn't the smartest place to broadcast? Point being, it pays to be wise about when and what you play.

Also, in case folks are unaware, musicians usually make more than one album. I have worked in a few shops where this conclusion has not been reached. I have been in relationships where this has also been an issue. You know, I'm really glad you like the Black Keys. But those guys have a few records under their belts, not just the one you've been listening to. Incessantly. For three years. A while back, an old friend decided that we should hear 'And Justice For All' at the shop 2-3 times a day for months on end, until we just microwaved the damn CD. Sometimes you have to take action. "No dear, I haven't seen your Lumineers album. It's not in the microwave, I know that much. I certainly don't mind that you can't seem to listen to anything else. Of course I agree with you, they're excellent songwriters." Sigh...



WE NEVER GO OUT

"We never go out anymore." It begins... I'm sure all of us have heard this at one point or another in a long-term relationship. Yeah, sure it's easy to burn out the rest of your life at home, watching Netflix and being boring as all hell. Reducing your

conversations between the two of you to the shared autonomous "hi, how was your day", weekend plans, or your mutual interests in Game of Thrones. Time can be a slow, barely noticeable waning in the quality of a relationship, and can ultimately result in never having any kind of meaningful conversation, and even gradually losing sense of why you're together in it in the first place. But by going out, and really dating one another—still— you sustain a healthy relationship. And it lets you know where each of you is in your head and in your life, outside of your home and outside of your work.

Spending time outside of the shop as a group is no different. I have been in shops where we never did anything aside from work together, and while that doesn't necessarily imply a strained relationship, it doesn't do much to strengthen the one you have. You show up, do the dance Tuesday through Saturday, and head home for a few before the cycle repeats. Conversely, I have worked with people that I travel with, eat with, drink with, and

spend most all of our free time together, with each other and our families. And this creates a strong bond, which galvanizes the group in unity. It helps to facilitate a clear vision of what you hope to achieve as a shop. You remove the familiarity of a work environment, and instead learn about each other out of your comfort zone. It can be bad, but it can be amazing. It gives room for ideas to grow that may get trampled under the foot of a busy shop. It puts you in situations where you have to work together to get out of them. A few hours in a car together can really let you get to know someone, the good and the bad. And time out of the shop teaches you how to accept and rely on one another. That's love. The kind where you love them so much, that you want to bludgeon them with a shovel every so often. But isn't that a real relationship? If you love someone and they don't drive you crazy every now

it's your significant other or a coworker, no phrase better ends a dispute. And I say end in the same way that an infection is the end of a cut. Symptoms include (but are not limited to) quiet scowls, deafening silence, snappy quips, cheap shots, and the underlying festering anger or hurt, which is usually completely unrequited. Or best of all, the "I just need to go spend time with my friends" maneuver, which usually translates to general griping directed your way, but never actually said to you.

As is the case with relationships, things can get hairy at the shop. You may have disagreements, opinions, or arguments that can grow into nastier issues when you can't just address the root problem. Most of us are 'too proud' to talk it out, or can't seem to bridge the communication gap enough to address it.

flare ups. Granted, sometimes the heat of the moment isn't always the best time to try and sort things out, but after everyone has cooled down, you have to take care of it before the cancerous side sets in. Odd though it may be, fighting helps people to understand one another. Fights are like chips in a block of marble. When you can't reach an amicable end, the chips keep coming, until they eventually lead to the block collapsing. But when the chips occur and are negotiated well, it reveals something beautiful in the stone.

As the belt tightens around this craft, we need each other more than ever. When we learn that we can surround ourselves with people that we care for and respect, the future possibilities seem vast and without limit. When we are in a bad shop environment, just as in a bad relationship, this does nothing to strengthen either

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and again, by what do you measure love? Yards, duh. The only correct answer. When you 'date' your shop (for lack of a better term...) you continue to grow as people, as well as strengthen your creative bonds together. Look at some of your favorite shops or artists. You can tell who spends more time together in the shop just based on their stylistic conclusions. Or, the shop creates a unified style, exclusive to it. The little sneaky moves everyone uses, color combos you wouldn't have thought of otherwise, inspiring everyone to paint or draw more, and so on. Those conclusions are usually reached by spending a ton of time with these people, and you can't wash off the impact they have on you. At least, not without seeing a doctor first.

IT'S FINE. DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT.

Ah, the classics never die. Nothing better lets you know how dunked you really are as does this little gem. Whether

If we are able to tell everyone else about our problems, shouldn't we be able to tell the person with whom the problem originates? I mean, there are tactful ways of letting someone know that you have an issue with them without sabotaging everything. That's a big part of navigating the tight spaces we share every day, that ability to directly speak to one another without a poisonous tongue.

Ideally, when communication is open and without attack or defense, we are able to work together smoothly. Even so, feelings can get hurt. People can be irrational. You just have to do the best with what you're given, and try to make the situation better. Say what you mean, mean what you say. It's hard hearing someone say one thing, only to immediately do another, but it doesn't set the guideline for you to do the same. It's important to close the lid on small stuff so that it is dealt with and done, preventing future

party. We focus on the negatives, and eventually our environment becomes a mirror of ourselves. We focus on the positives, and eventually our environment becomes a mirror as well. Peace within, peace without. Worst to worst, just remember that, girl; you are a strong independent woman who don't need no man.

OLD DRAMA (and other insecurities)

This is the other half of, "I'm fine, don't worry". There is nothing in a relationship I enjoy more than hearing about that one time you came home late and didn't call because your phone was dead. 6 months later. You remember that, right? 'Cause I sure don't. I know I remember that we already talked about it and smoothed it over. Yes, I ran the battery out on purpose so as not to be able to call. And I could have sworn we sorted this out. So why is it an issue now? Did something else trigger

this crazy line of thought? Insecurities are dangerous places to lose yourself, at home and at work. I have certainly worked in environments where that theme ran rampant. A problem arises, is addressed, and somehow resurfaces down the line. You may be better at something than a coworker. No problem, right? You're happy to help with any questions you can answer. Well that isn't going to be good enough.

I have definitely had issues with coworkers who were jealous or angry at my abilities, earlier on in my career. I don't think I'm anything special, but as soon as you do something better than someone who isn't very secure in themselves, instead of it being a springboard to help elevate them, they may respond by lashing out. It's the same healthy competition you find in a relationship; that constant push to better yourselves together. For instance, if you help someone struggling with a drawing, usually they appreciate it. But occasionally, they feel stupid because it came easily to you (or at least, that's how they see it), but not to them, and it can plant a nasty little seed. Maybe you talk about it after work, try and sort it, and you think all is well. And maybe you come to work a few weeks later, and I don't know... say, one of your machines found its way lodged halfway through the drywall. And, according to eyewitness reports, the machine propelled itself through the air, unaided by the hand of man, as if angels had entered the room to push the machine through the wall, not unlike the camel through the eye of the needle.

Point being, I had thought things were squared away, and almost a month later, my gear was damaged with the intent of hurting my ability to work. It boiled down to someone being angry because of how they reacted to a situation. And the truth of that didn't come out until long after I left that shop, trying to maintain a good relationship with that person. I believe the expression

is, 'let sleeping dogs lie'. We make sweet tats, we don't read minds. If there's beef, say so! Get it out as soon as possible. If you're bummed at someone, and they have no idea, it gets to a point where it's pretty unfair. If you can step up and address it, it's amazing how often people are unaware that you even have an issue with them in the first place. I can't sleep because you snore. I'm not going to tell you that, because I'm trying to save face. But after 6 months of it, I hate you, and you don't know why.

WELL, THAT WAS TEN MINUTES I WON'T GET BACK

So what is the point of all of this? I mean, aside from trying to tastefully fill space in this fine publication... You may be married, you may be in a relationship, you may keep to yourself, you may engage in unnatural activities (West Virginia, I'm looking at you. I know what y'all do back there...) but as soon as you are in the shop, you are in a relationship. As is the case with any of them, we face trials, we face problems, we face diversity. But, in order to make it a successful time, it takes a lot of effort from all parties involved to develop a working understanding of one another, to be able to access our strengths and weaknesses, to be able to rely on one another, and to learn how to form a bond. It comes easier to some than others, yes. Sometimes, you just don't jive in certain environments. If you are committed to where you are, what you're doing, and the people with whom you do it, then put that work in! Have a paint night, take some trips together, remember why you love where you are, and it will return that feeling. Love the ones that love you, and love yourself. Set your goals, do work. Do work together. Possibility and potential can be very strong words.

And also, don't be mad, but it's probably important to mention that at the time of my writing this, I am five years single and unemployed. Take that, hypocrisy! Huzzah! Hahahaha.

Editors Note:

In the first two Idiot Savant articles, we incorrectly identified Mr. Regan as Mr. Robinson. Sorry Dave!

**Fin,
Dave**

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