

VILLAGE VIEW

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I keep a list. Well, let's face it; I keep lots of lists. Some I use daily, change daily, throw away daily. Others last for years, such as addresses and telephone numbers of friends and people to call in case of emergencies.

Several months ago I started making a brand-new lists. At the top is a three-word question, heavily underlined. It reads, "Why Don't They?"

Don't, please don't, ask who "they" are. Whoever they are, they could, if they'd only get their act together, save me, and everyone, plenty. Plenty of money, plenty of time, plenty of frustration. Hardly a day passes I don't have some reason to think of myself, "That's something that ought to go on my 'Why Don't They' list!"

Usually, though, at the moment I'm struck with the notion the list is buried somewhere in a four-inch-thick pile of paper scraps I call my idea file, and I can't find it. If the thought seems truly worth preserving, I find another scrap of paper and start a new "Why Don't They" list, and add it to the growing heap. Then "someday" comes, and I sort through all the papers and put related ones together. Then I write a column like this one.

Today was one of those "somedays;" I sorted; I found five or six lists. I also discovered that once I'd jotted down these troublesome items, a lot of my frustration evaporated. Noting them freed me from annoyance, a freedom valuable to peace of mind. If you carry around a burden of irritation because it seems the world is organized to make ordinary chores more difficult and complicated, perhaps a "Why Don't They" list would help you, too, shed some of the load.

What's on my list? One big item is supermarkets. Why don't they all get together, make a study to analyze the most effective way to display their goods so that consumers could enter any store of all the different chains, anywhere in the country, and find easily a needed item?

Suppose, for example, you have "toothpicks-round" on your shopping list. Did you ever try to find round toothpicks in a strange supermarket? Or suppose you need a shaker of Parmesan cheese for tonight's spaghetti dinner? Would you find it near the dairy counter with the other cheese products? Maybe. But more than likely, it's on the shelf in one of the aisles, since it doesn't require refrigeration.

I've gone round and round, up and down, in a market, looking for a jar of horseradish, only to find it, eventually, where I'd least expect it to be; over one of the frozen-food bins. If only "they" would standardize, all of us consumers could organize our shopping lists accordingly. We'd save untold hours of time, stores wouldn't be nearly as crowded, and could better serve more people faster. Just cutting down on back-tracking would relieve a lot of aisle congestion. Shoppers' time is valuable, too.

Another: Why don't they install timers on stove burners so they could be set for 10, 20, 30 or 60 minutes? In the last six months I've ruined four tea kettles because I've turned on the burner to heat water for coffee, gotten engrossed in my work, and forgotten about the kettle. Not until I'm brought back to reality by the stink of super-heated and melting plastic handles do I remember I put the kettle on the stove. What a mess! Replacing tea kettles is ruining my budget, too.

Those of us who must attempt to clean pots and pans containing burned-on carrots, beans, potatoes, broccoli, or worse yet, anything with sugar in it, will also sympathize. All this could be controlled with timers that would turn off the burners automatically after a pre-selected time period.

Or take electric outlets. Are they ever located exactly where you need them? And what happens when you rearrange furniture? Would it be too much to ask builders to install continuous strips of electric outlet along the top of baseboards in living and sleeping areas, and under kitchen cabinets?

We could then plug in with short cords, without extension cords. We could have power without the nuisance of long dangling loops, without the danger of tripping, without the dust-catching feature; or, worse yet, cords that stretch to a distant outlet, angling across walls...ugly.

Recently a local bank mailed questionnaires to its customers asking for suggestions. I've recommended statements list checks in numerical order and in one, not two or three, columns so we don't have to go through a whole string of numbers a dozen times to reconcile our statements. Another local bank does list checks in numerical order, but mixes deposits between debits for checks. Confusing. Debits and credits, for bank customer convenience, should be in separate columns.

Among my "Why Don't They's" I find one headed "Why DO They?" And the answer is self-evident, but if enough people complained, I think it might effect change. Why do they, on radio and television, play loud music together with conversation, especially in commercials? Nothing makes me more determined not to buy an advertised product than so-called background music usually rising to a crescendo and ending in a wild screech. While we're on the subject, why do they (in violation of FCC rules) tune up the volume of commercials so program listeners are either subjected to deafening rackets during advertising breaks, or must adjust their own receiving volume so the programs are barely audible?

We are, after all, the ones who ultimately pay costs for advertising. The expense is hidden in prices for everything we buy. The bombardment of sound contributes to our own discomfort; the discomfort contributes to stress; stress is identified with incidence of heart disease. Stress also induces anger; anger leads to child and spouse-abuse and contributes to the breakdown of family and social unity.

While I doubt that all social ills would be eliminated if radio and television commercials were banned, it would be valuable from a sociological standpoint to determine how domestic climates are affected by audio-visual programming. We're largely unaware of the subliminal influences in our lives; nobody seems to know much how they affect people.

If you're a list-maker and were to start such a list, yours might be different from mine, but we're all troubled by things we could change if enough of us got together and complained.

Wouldn't it be great never to have another pot boil dry? To be able to balance your checkbook in half the time each month? To walk through any supermarket anywhere and find what you want the first time?