

# Anger Management Class for Ron Artest? Let's Assign a Parrot as Coach Instead!

Carl L. Harshman, Ph.D.



I love it when the universe connects things. On the morning of November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2004, I saw Matt Lauer (NBC *Today Show*) interview Ron Artest, the Indiana Pacer who suffered from an “Amygdala Highjacking” in the game with the Detroit Pistons on Friday, November 19<sup>th</sup>.<sup>12</sup> Artest contrasted his role in the incident with the statement that he was “a great fan of the Noble Peace Prize.” That strikes me as a little like making Lizzie Borden the poster child for family values.

If you listen to his track record, this is not a guy who just had a bad day—although Artest offered a number of reasons why one ought to consider that option. He’s basically had a bad life based on his misbehavior record in the NBA.

In the NBC interview, which went way longer than I thought it deserved, the only people besides Artest, with his “suspend-me-until-the-All-Star-game” mantra, who would be interviewed were those with a major financial stake in Artest’s presence on the court. These were an Indiana Pacers’ spokesperson and Artest’s agent with his “\*&\$% Happens, Let’s Get Back to What’s Important” message. I think he means that Ron needs to be back on the court earning that \$5 million that went away with the suspension.

In addition, I believe NBC quoted Artest’s father as saying that everyone in the neighborhood liked him when he was growing up. I can understand that—the first thing that came to mind for me was the price one would pay for disclosing dislike of a guy like Ron.

There is, in all this, a silver lining. All professors of higher education teaching courses in EI—Emotional Intelligence and its counterpart, Emotional Idiocy—now have an extraordinary collection of video clips of the incident to use in their courses. Emotional intelligence, a concept that has been the focus of research for almost sixty years, refers to the affective and interpersonal abilities of an individual. Research on emotional intelligence suggests that EI may be more important than intellectual intelligence (IQ) in predicting long-term success in a profession or becoming a top leader in business. Intellectual intelligence seems to be a necessary but not a sufficient condition for success.

Ignoring, for a moment, that we may not have the necessary condition in this case, we surely have a solid, non-business example of the role of emotional intelligence in the venue of professional sports.

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<sup>1</sup> The part of the brain called the amygdala is a complex structure that mediates both inborn and acquired emotional responses. It seems to be involved in mediating both conscious and unconscious emotional feeling. Mike Jay, founder of *B-Coach* and the *Leadership University*, says “Amygdala Highjacking” occurs when the basic or reptile brain takes over in the fight or flight syndrome. The result is often extreme emotional behavior such as anger and is typically viewed as inappropriate with regard to the social rules in contemporary society.

<sup>2</sup> The video of that incident was posted on YouTube but has been removed due to a copyright claim by the National Basketball Association (NBA).

But then there's the question of Artest: What do we do?

Well, if the reports are correct, they've tried anger management with minimal success. If they want to try again, the Pacers could trade Artest to the Lakers and let him tangle with Jack Nicholson. Wouldn't that be a prime-time scene?

We could put him in jail for assault, but recidivism is high, so he'd probably just be back on the court and in the stands before long.

It's clear that we're running out of options here folks.

When I turned off the *Today Show* and opened my email. Voila! The answer appeared before me. A good friend had sent a Thanksgiving greeting with the following story enclosed:

*A young man named John received a parrot as a gift.*

*The parrot had a bad attitude and an even worse vocabulary. Every word out of the bird's mouth was rude, obnoxious and laced with profanity.*

*John tried and tried to change the bird's attitude by consistently saying only polite words, playing soft music and anything else he could think of to "clean up" the bird's vocabulary. Finally, John was fed up and he yelled at the parrot.*



*The parrot yelled back. John shook the parrot and the parrot got angrier and even more uncouth. John, in desperation, grabbed the bird and put him in the freezer. For a few minutes the parrot squawked and kicked and screamed. Then suddenly there was total quiet. Not a peep was heard for over a minute.*

*Fearing that he'd hurt the parrot, John quickly opened the door to the freezer. The parrot calmly stepped out onto John's outstretched arms and said: "I believe I may have offended you with my rude language and actions. I'm sincerely remorseful for my inappropriate transgressions and I fully intend to do everything I can to correct my rude and unforgivable behavior."*

*John was stunned at the change in the bird's attitude. As he was about to ask the parrot what had made such a dramatic change in his behavior, the bird turned and said: "May I ask what the turkey did?"*

Clean out the freezer, mom, I've got a guest coming to dinner.

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Postscript: Ron Artest was not the only player in the stands that night and there's no excusing fan behavior in the incident. As the NBA deals with the players, maybe Michigan could annex Detroit to Windsor, Ontario, in exchange for some less expensive, Canadian pharmaceuticals. In any case, there is plenty of blame to go around. My concern ultimately is that for whatever the contributions of many, the latest edition of American "Unreal"ity TV becomes only a talk-show topic and subject of research while we simply keep on keeping on in the American in the new tradition of society.