

All.Net Analyst Report and Newsletter

Welcome to our Analyst Report and Newsletter

Without an opinion, you're just another person with data.

“Without data you're just another person with an opinion” – W. Edwards Deming

I like twisting other peoples' words around, especially smart famous people who are quoted to me as somehow being authoritative and wise.

It's not that I disagree with Deming – or anyone else whose words I flip around. It's that I think you can only gain wisdom by looking at the other side of the coin. And sometimes you get a whole new meaning and idea out of the flip.

The wisdom of flipping the script

I was brought up to play with words like this, and it's one of the reasons some people foolishly think I am smart, or an “out of the box” thinker. It's really just a simple trick, but it really works.

Somehow, wisdom reworded seems wise, but when you actually look at what it says, you change your mind. But the notion of flipping the expression to get new meaning is really a strange thing that I think may somehow reflect the nature of human language. For clarity, when I flip the terms in computer programs, this essentially never works.

So much for the meta portion of today's program

Returning to the problem of data without opinion, it is fundamental to the nature of science and the legal systems of much of the world that the data has to somehow be interpreted, and that interpretation ultimately comes down to opinion.

Did I really just say that science comes down to opinion?

I did indeed... expert opinion

If you make mechanical keyboards for a living, you likely know more about mechanical keyboard construction than I do. That means you are an expert – compared to me – in that area. And when you tell me something about making those keyboards, it's your opinion. When you back the opinion up with data, and show the reliable basis for concluding the same result from the same or sufficiently similar conditions, then your opinion is based on science.

- But science tells us to start with a hypothesis about cause and effect via mechanism.
 - The hypothesis is supposed to be testable – so you gather data to refute the hypothesis ($C \rightarrow E$), and by failing to do so you end up confirming it... for now.
 - So a hypothesis is really just an opinion, and without it, you cannot do the scientific process of testing the opinion with data, to confirm or refute it.
 - So without an opinion, you're just another person with data.

Conclusions

I've heard lots of people say something to the effect of gather lots of data and then figure out what you should do with it. My view is, figure out what you want to know, then gather data to come to know it. What's your opinion? Then tell me what data do you have to test it?...