

Intuition?

By George Porter

An interesting word came to my attention the other day. The word was “intuition”. You don’t hear it used a lot these days but major industries have prospered because of it. Webster defines it as, “the power or faculty of attaining to direct knowledge or cognition without thought or inference.” What Webster means to say is “you just know!” Many companies base new products on the new users having an intuitive “sense” of how it works. Americans don’t have to read directions. (I think it is in the Constitution somewhere) We just know!

Go to a car rental company and get a car you have never driven or maybe even never heard of before. They will ask you for a driver’s license and a credit card but NOBODY will ask you if you know how to drive that particular car! They will not show you (unless you ask) how to turn on the lights or start the car, they will not tell you how to use the cruise control, tune the radio, adjust the seat or mirrors or where the gas cap is. You are supposed to “just know” and guess what, you do! Automobiles today are designed “intuitively.” Things are where you think they ought to be. Nobody would look for the gas cap under the hood or the turn signals on the dash under the heater controls. But I guess you could put them there if you wanted to. You don’t really need a steering wheel either, you could have a little “joy stick” like a video game and it would be cheaper and safer. It would use a lot fewer muscles, so there would be far less strain on your neck and shoulders. I don’t think you will ever see one any time soon until the computer generation starts designing cars. Right now it is not intuitive, but in 25 years it might be, what 20 year old will have not spent mega-hours at a video game by then and “know” how it works.

So, intuitive is not necessarily the best or even correct. It is simply an “assumption” based on your experience in that area or whatever you think is in that area. Major areas of manufactured housing don’t do well with intuitive thinking. It is why we don’t get zoning and why we get some very strange installation laws just to name a couple.

People don’t want “trailers” around because it makes the place look bad and the people in them are not too presentable either. This “intuition” is called discrimination. But in fact it is a real thing, it is what these folks “know.” How can we make them think differently? I really don’t know for sure but I know how the black population got it done. The government did it and for those of you who were around in the 60’s there was war in the streets, but they got it done. There are still some folks whose mind will never be changed but regardless of that, there is no more legal racial segregation in this nation. Maybe the Manufactured Housing Improvement Act of 2000 can do the same for us and our customers.

Building officials that have no background or training in manufactured housing act with intuition. They apply what they “know” and sometimes it is excessively expensive to comply with and unnecessary as well. You must have a full concrete perimeter foundation like a “real house” has been spoken as law in many places around this country. The frost line is 40 inches around here so see to

it that all the footings under the “double-wide trailer” are that deep; it is the county building code so do it! If the “act” works like it is supposed to and the people involved push with the power they seem to have, all these things can go away.

As an industry we have a few intuitive problems as well. Have you ever heard that “if we do everything like it says in the installation manual our customers won’t be able to afford the home!” There are many people in the business that really believe this, this is what they “know.” It is how they have run their business for 30 years and no one is going to convince them otherwise! I feel sorry for these folks because life is gradually going to get pretty disagreeable with them. They were the pioneers of the industry; they kept it going when there was no gas in the 70’s and lots of economic downturns along the way. They are not bad people but they are wrong. Some will not be able to make the transition; every industry goes through the same “evolutionary” process, why should we be any different?

The proper application of science, with as little politics as possible, can put this industry in great shape to deliver great homes to our customers. Ones that they can afford to buy and afford to keep for the rest of their life if they want.