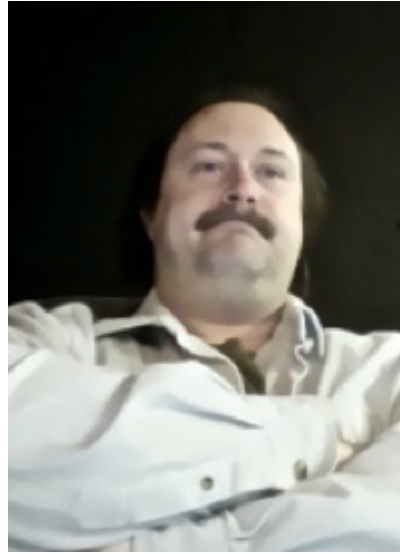




Never Try

It's one of the most penetrating statements ever uttered in the modern age, so insightful that in 2007 it was added to the Oxford Dictionary of Modern Quotations. What marvel of philosophical brilliance is this, you ask? It's nothing less than the timeless advice given to children by their father: "Kids, you tried your best and you failed miserably. The lesson is never try."



Spoken, as no one else could, by television's favorite beer-swilling cartoon father, Homer Simpson, as voiced by the incomparably talented Dan Castellaneta. But the credit for the line must lie with the writer, in this case Jace Richdale, who received the writer's credit for the episode "Burn's Heir" in which the timeless statement appeared.

The enduring appeal of *The Simpsons* is due to the show's smartly written, sarcastic dialogue that does a superb job of illuminating our real life follies and foibles through the light of the absurd. No real parent would tell his or her kids not to try — and yet, perhaps, there is some wisdom here.

Success in any endeavor requires discernment, or to put it another way, success requires "keen insight and good judgment." Being fallible, people fail to use good judgment all the time. One of the most common errors of judgment can be chalked up to hubris, believing oneself to be excessively capable. Humans, being uniquely susceptible to such self-delusion and arrogance, often attempt to do things that good judgment and discernment would identify as truly bad ideas.

A case in point is Michelle Obama's five-day trip to a luxury Spanish resort. The First Lady was accompanied by 40 friends, her daughter Sasha, and the Secret Service, to the tune of about 70 agents. Even though the trip was mostly paid for by private funds, taxpayers are still on the hook for \$75,000 per day, an enormous sum for a vacation, especially in the eyes of most Americans who struggle to make ends meet in a severe recession.

And then there is the obnoxious luxury of the vacation. The First Lady and her entourage stayed at the uber-luxury Hotel Villa Padierna, a stunning five-star hotel where a one-night stay starts at around \$600. Mrs. Obama and her retinue booked 60 rooms. When the party took a swim, the Spanish police very kindly cordoned off a beach, stopping and searching those who "strayed to close to the private party." Now that's service.

Under the circumstances, the trip demonstrated a fundamental lack of discernment and was a public-relations failure for the President. Commentator Andrea Tantaros at the *New York Daily News* called the First Lady a "modern day Marie Antoinette," while conservative syndicated columnist Michelle Malkin told *Fox News*: "I've heard the term tone-deaf used. And I would be a little bit more blunt. I think this was cold stoned stupid. The timing couldn't have been worse."



Written by [Dennis Behreandt](#) on August 17, 2010

Discernment — there wasn't any in this trip.

But taxpayers lose much more where serious matters are concerned. Consider foreign policy. Particularly with regard to war making, the United States has detached itself from the Constitution and its demand that war can only ensue after Congress declares so — an eminently reasonable restriction on a Republic that preserves the law but that also prevents abuse of power. In a constitutionally declared war, the military establishment is loosed in order to do what it was designed to do: kill people and break things, as modern parlance puts it. When the military is employed in activities other than constitutionally declared wars, it often achieves less than optimal results because it is doing tasks it was not designed to do.

Vesting the power to declare war in Congress also preserves the separation of powers at the federal level. The Founders feared investing a single executive with the discretionary power to command a standing army because they knew that any one person with that power at his command would be tempted to use it in pursuit of personal aggrandizement rather than in support of the common good.

Yet, since World War II, the military has been employed without a single declaration of war, always at the urging of the executive branch. What has been the result? All too often, scandal and failure.

The WikiLeaks scandal is a case in point: We've used our military forces for the purpose of "nation building" rather than war fighting, and in doing so we've engaged in sometimes-questionable tactics, and achieved sometimes-questionable outcomes. Those led someone disaffected within the ranks to leak a trove of documents to WikiLeaks. And those documents, containing names of Afghan citizens who work with American soldiers, put those people at risk of retaliation and allow our erstwhile enemies to gain insight into our operations.

Our hubris, and our unflinching belief that what we do around the world is always an unalloyed, glorious good, has led us down a dangerous path. With regard to our government's efforts to break the bounds of the Constitution, it's time to listen to Homer Simpson: We tried and we failed, the lesson is never try.



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