

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

We Need to Build Our Future United by Our Shared Values

WE NEED TO be a people united by our shared beliefs — instead of being a people divided by race, ethnicity, religion, or any of the other more primal divisions that can so easily divide and separate us if we allow those sets of divisions to define who we are and what we do.

If we allow those kinds and categories of divisions to define us, we could easily become just another tribalized nation at war with itself.

That would be the wrong future and the wrong destiny for us as a people.

One of the very best things that we can do for one another and one of the best things that we can do for ourselves at this point in our history is to have a shared set of principles, beliefs, and ethical expectations that can guide us collectively as a nation and that can give us a working framework and a functional context for interacting with one another as a nation and in each of the communities and settings where we live.

If we are going to be the people of America, united by our common beliefs, and committed to our common beliefs, then we will be well served by being clear with ourselves and with each other about what our basic shared beliefs and our shared values actually are.

When the 9/11 attacks on America happened, we had a shining moment when we were clearly united as one people — one America. That was a very powerful time where we all understood clearly our shared commitment to America and to our American values. We did not explicitly articulate those

values in that moment — but we all had a good sense of what those values were and we were very clear about why we needed to defend them.

We had great clarity at that point in time about what it meant to be an American and we had absolute clarity about why being an American was such an important thing to be. Our values united us.

Today, at this point in our history, I believe that it makes sense to again very clearly articulate those values. I believe strongly this is the right time for us to become very explicit about those shared sets of beliefs so that we can use them to unite us as a people.

I believe that we will all be better served as Americans and that we will all be better able to interact with one another in consistent and trust-generating ways as Americans if we interact with each other from the context of a clear set of core beliefs that represent both our commitment to America and our clear commitment to each other as Americans.

The List Was Compiled – Not Invented

To help make that process a success and to give that process and approach a clear momentum at this point in our history, I would like to propose and suggest that we could use the following list of values to help focus us all on our key and shared beliefs.

I did not invent or create this particular list. I compiled this list from the key core beliefs that we already espouse in various ways as a country and as a people.

We all believe in those key values today. This book chapter brings those basic beliefs that we share today into a single consolidated list so that we can focus more easily and more clearly on our shared beliefs and so that we can explicitly make those beliefs our unifying commitment to one another. We need to be able to trust one another in that commitment — and we need to be able to count on each other to use those beliefs to run our nation and to guide our behaviors.

My strong sense and belief is that for us to be good at being an American Us, we will be best served by clearly delineating this set of basic shared beliefs

and then making commitments individually and collectively to uphold and protect those beliefs.

The Art of InterGroup Peace book also describes the same list of key values as a shared commitment for America. That shared commitment anchors the Art of Intergroup Peace strategy for our country. That book describes that function for the list more fully and outlines the individual pieces of the list in more detail.

For this book, my goal is just to outline the list and to explain briefly for each point why I believe each of those value commitments is important to us and why each point should be included on the list of values that we all share with one another.

Our Founding Fathers Originated Those Values

Our Founding Fathers were the origins of most of those points. Our Founding Fathers clearly had their flaws, but they also had their genius — and when our Founding Fathers were enlightened, they were very enlightened. This list builds respectfully, deferentially, and gratefully on their work as a foundational set of beliefs.

The list also includes several additional commitments to various levels of increasingly enlightened behavior that we have grown to believe as a country in more recent years.

This list reflects the current version of those core beliefs. It is actually better than the original version for some of the key beliefs.

Our founding fathers believed deeply in Democracy, for example, but our Founding Fathers limited Democracy to White males. This list extends Democracy to all Americans with no exclusion and no exception by ethnicity, race, or gender or by any other category that might divide us.

We have already moved a very long way in that direction as a nation and this list reflects that movement.

And — from the perspective of an experienced and veteran CEO who believes in having strategy embedded in and richly intertwined with the relevant

culture, this list puts a couple of our key and most effective operational public policy practices and beliefs — like supporting innovation — into our cultural value set.

From a purely functional perspective, we need to include those explicit values that support innovation as part of our core set of beliefs in order to thrive as a nation. I personally believe innovation will be key to our success and to our survival because we live in a changing world and we will need to respond effectively to that change to both survive and thrive.

We already function with innovation as a shared belief and it is already our normal practice as a nation, so I included that specific shared belief as an explicitly delineated value factor on the list.

There are no weak elements on this list.

Democracy Leads This List

Democracy leads the key value list. Democracy is a basic value that anchors who we are as a nation. I believe that we need to be explicit about Democracy as a shared value at the top of this list.

We all need to believe in Democracy and we need to support Democracy as the underlying foundation for how we govern ourselves. Democracy is a wonderful value. It tells us how to behave for multiple levels of our society, and for our lives.

We need to democratically run this country. We don't want to be an autocracy, a theocracy, or a dictatorship of any kind. We need to believe in the right and the responsibility of us as a people to govern ourselves using democratic processes.

We need to have us, as the people of this country, be our main governing factor. We need to elect leaders and appoint representatives to do key governing work on our behalf, and we need to hold those leaders accountable to us through the democratic process.

Much of the world is not democracy based today. Autocrats and various kinds of dictatorships rule today in multiple settings around the planet. More autocratic approaches to running countries are entirely possible and they can be a very real threat to our own democratic self-governance.

We should not take our democratic self-governance for granted. We should understand it, cherish it, protect it, and use it often and well.

We should all, as fellow Americans, agree to a joint and mutual commitment to Democracy as a core part of the beliefs that unite us as Americans.

Equality Is Key

We also need to mutually commit to a belief in equality. We need people to be equal under the law relative to all other people. We have no superiors or aristocrats or legally privileged classes of any kind.

We need absolute equal protection under the laws and we need equal responsibility for creating and upholding our laws.

We need to have equal voting rights, equal rights to own property, equal rights to hold public office, and equal rights to each of the basic entitlements of being American.

We all need to support each other in the achievement and the protection of those rights. We need to be able to trust collectively that all of us respect the equality of us all and that all of us can be trusted to support our equality as a key aspect of who we are as Americans.

Inclusion Is Essential

Inclusion is another key belief that we need to share and support. We need our national community to be inclusive of all of its wonderful variations, components, and parts.

We need to celebrate our diversity as a strength and an asset with the understanding that in addition to us each holding our own direct allegiances and our own direct alignments with our diverse component parts, we all share a collective commitment and collective support for including all of us as the people of America in the American Us.

We need to base that sense of American Us on inclusion for all of the people who agree to these core beliefs and on inclusion for all of the people who support our core beliefs and who honor those core beliefs in their own lives.

We need to be a fabric woven from many threads — rather than a single blended new set of people who functionally replace the old alignments with a new single definition of who we are.

We need to be collectively aligned and we need to do that very deliberately and very intentionally in an open and inclusive way.

We Believe in Freedom

We very much need to believe in freedom as a key value and a shared belief. Freedom has anchored our belief system from our earliest days.

Many of the people who came here to this country came here to be free. The vast and shameful hypocrisy of spending centuries as a nation where slavery was permitted is a blight and a sin that we must always regret — but at the same time, our founding documents have very powerful language embracing and defining freedom in important ways and we need to build on that language and that belief for us all.

We need to fully achieve freedom as a belief and a shared commitment, and we need to be sure that the freedom of each of us to make our own choices

and to make our own decisions in the key areas of our own lives is protected, supported, and celebrated as a key part of who we are.

We also need to support freedom of speech — with each of us having the right to express our own beliefs and opinions in all of the ways that we have set up to protect and enable free speech in America.

We will lose our ability to be free in other areas if we lose freedom of speech as a key right and freedom for us all.

Freedom of Religion Is Essential

Freedom of religion is a particularly important area of freedom that we all need to support. We need to be a nation that protects freedom of religion at the most basic level.

We need to be free to each have our religious beliefs and we need to each be free to practice our religion without anyone telling us what to believe or telling us how to act relative to our religious beliefs.

We need to not discriminate against anyone either because of religious beliefs or because the person does not have or share religious beliefs.

We have spent a lot of years and thought defining the separation issues between government and religion. We need to continue to build on that foundation. We should not allow religion to intrude on government and we should not allow government to intrude on religion.

That approach protects religion from people who would use the powers of government to attack and damage it and it protects government from becoming the tool that any religion uses to impose its beliefs on people who have other beliefs as their own belief system.

Freedom of religion is a clear and major asset to America and freedom of religion deserves our collective support.

Justice Is Also Key

Justice also deserves our collective support. Justice is a basic and fundamental value. We need equal justice under the law for us all. None of us should be above the law and none of us should be unfairly treated by the law.

We need our laws to be just and we need enforcement of our laws to be justice based and to be anchored in just practices.

We need equal protection under the law and we need justice enacted when there are violations of the law.

We need to be able to count on our system to be anchored on justice and we need to be committed to justice as a core belief.

Accountability Is a Core Belief

We also need accountability to be a shared belief. We each need to be accountable for our own behaviors. We need to accept accountability for what we say and what we do. We each need to be accountable for making the contribution we can make to the society we live in.

We need to have accountability as a basic belief — and we each owe it to all of us to do our part to make us collectively a success and a safe and prosperous society.

We need society to help each of us be accountable for what we do and who we are in very basic ways. We owe it to each other to support the other beliefs and the other values included in this core value set — and we need to make our own life decisions in accountable ways.

We need to make accountability a highly valued and well-supported set of behaviors and beliefs.

We will be challenged in our collective success if we have people who are not accountable in a personal way for the basic areas where personal accountability creates the fabric of interactions that help us collectively and individually succeed.

We Support Merit and the American Dream

We also need to continue to believe in merit. In too many settings in the world, people who work hard or who are creative and inventive can have the results of their hard work taken from them and can have their creativity results stolen, arbitrarily removed from them, and even used, in some settings and instances, against them.

We have made great progress and we had great success as a nation at multiple levels because a key component of the American Dream has always been that people here can work hard and can benefit from their hard work. People still immigrate to this country from all over the world to work and to benefit from their work.

We need to support people in benefiting from what they do — and we need merit to be a value we support and share.

We have failed in multiple ways in making the full elements of the American Dream available to all Americans. The American Dream has worked very well for the people who have had the Dream available to them.

We need to make the American Dream work even better and more broadly by extending it to all people, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, culture or belief system. We also need to support the positive results that happen when people achieve those results.

We should respect merit as a key part of our shared belief system.

We need to make sure that our overall society has a safety net for people who need the safety of a net — and we need to make sure that we create that safety net in part by having people able to benefit from their hard work and creativity.

Creativity and Innovation Need to Be Supported

Creativity should be another of our core and key beliefs. We need to celebrate and protect our innovation and our creativity.

We are one of the most innovative parts of the world and that has been true going back to our earliest days as a country.

We have been a nation of tinkerers, inventors, problem solvers, and innovators — and that trait and those behaviors have given us better lives and given us a stronger economy.

Some cultures around the world inhibit innovation. Some cultures impose rigidity on creativity that makes creativity rare or non-existent.

Rulers and ruling classes in some settings ban creativity and innovation and some even ban flexibility. We should not take our creativity, innovation, and our sparks of invention for granted. It is a blessing and a benefit to us all and it needs to be encouraged as we go forward into a challenged future.

We need to actually encourage a culture and a mindset of continuous improvement. Continuous improvement is a very explicit intellectual commitment to use data, process engineering, invention, and creativity to make outcomes, protocols, and processes continuously better.

We want America to be continuously better. We need to be sure that our laws and our economic infrastructure support and do not impede continuous improvement, innovation, and creativity for the key areas of our lives.

Honesty Is a Foundation

We also need to mutually commit to honesty as a core belief and as an expected behavior. We need an ethics that is anchored in honesty. We need behaviors and we need communications that have honesty embedded in them at their very core.

Honesty has vast value at multiple levels. Some societies are not honesty based — and those societies cripple themselves with distrust and with damaging internal dysfunctionality.

Honesty is a virtue and a functional and operational best practice. We need to commit, as a people, to honesty as a core behavior.

We need to be honest with each other, honest in our public dealings, and honest in our business and commercial transactions. We need to expect honesty and exhibit honesty and it needs to be a core way that we, as a people, communicate with us all as individuals and as a people.

Dishonesty is so dysfunctional at so many levels, that it needs to be an unacceptable behavior for all of us who commit to the American Us. We need to be a nation that tells the truth and keeps its word.

We can avoid brutal honesty by figuring out how to be honest in gentle ways where gentle ways of communicating are called for by the situations that exist — but we need honesty as our constant guide in helping us figure out the forms of communication that tell the key truth and minimize either anger or damage from the communicators.

An honest nation is much more likely to succeed in many key areas than a nation where trust does not exist and where people cannot count on each other to do the things that people are committed to do.

We Need to Respect Human Dignity

We also need to respect human dignity. Human dignity needs to be a key and core shared belief. We need to treat all of us with dignity.

We need to treat other people with the dignity that we want and expect for our own treatment and for the treatment of our own family and community.

We should honor human dignity, respect human dignity, and we need to take steps to protect it when someone's dignity is at risk.

We Need Win/Win for All People

One of the key goals and shared beliefs that we all need to embrace is a sense and strategy of creating win/win outcomes for us all. Win/win outcomes are a basic commitment by all of us to have all groups of people who are part of America benefit from being part of the American “Us.”

Too often, intergroup relationships and intergroup interactions have a win/lose component to them — with groups contending with each other in ways that create winners and losers.

In worst case settings, groups of people hate each other so much that people set up lose/lose situations — where groups want to hurt other groups as much that they are willing to take losses themselves in order to inflict that damage on the other group.

Lose/lose situations have their own obvious very negative consequences, and win/lose situations also create, inherently, negative consequences of some kind for at least one of the involved parties.

By contrast, when people in a setting aspire to and commit to win/win outcomes, that situation can result in each of the groups in that situation winning and in each of the groups doing well with the process. In win/win settings, people regard each other as part of a larger us and people work to help both their own groups and the other groups in that setting achieve positive outcomes.

There is an inherent stability to win/win approaches and win/win outcomes. There is also an obvious benefit for each group when each group wins. Everyone always wants their own group to win. In a win/win situation, that win for their own group is assured for each person because the win happens for everyone.

Win/win needs to be the way we all think about all of the other groups who make up the wonderful and diverse fabric of America. If we all aim for each of us to win, then becoming an American Us is both bonding and beneficial. It is good to be both bonding and beneficial.

We Need Our Diversity to Be One of Our Major Strengths

We need to build on our diversity and we need to make our diversity into a strength and an asset instead of having our diversity be a risk and a liability.

Creating a sense of us based on our shared values is a key step in that process of turning our diversity into a major strength. Agreeing collectively to the goals, the beliefs, and the values that are included in this list can functionally help make that strength real.

We need all groups in this country to look at this list and to agree that we will all commit to make this country a success with the beliefs on this list functioning as a goal, a strategy, and a commitment that we can trust.

Those Beliefs Can Focus Us as Americans

The goals and the beliefs on this list can serve to keep us focused on what it means to be an American. We need to commit to those goals and we need to be able to trust one another in making those goals real.

When we all have access to the American Dream, then we will have even more people succeed. When women and when minority Americans all succeed, then the overall success level for America is clearly going to be a higher level of overall success.

We have done remarkably well up to now including only some of our people in that Dream. We will do even better when we include everyone in that Dream. Our diversity will make us stronger because it will increase our creativity and our collective energy in ways that other countries — who are either at intergroup war with themselves or who are committed to less enlightened intergroup values as a country — will be unable to equal. We will surpass them.

The three books in this intergroup interactions trilogy are each intended to give us a context to use to make those goals real in our increasingly diverse world. The last chapter of this book is focused on how we can go forward from here to create the America we all want to have and share.