

Chapter Three — Some Work Sites, Schools, And Community Settings Tribalize, Hurt Themselves, And Feel Right Doing It

My work sites have all been working laboratories for the study of instinctive behaviors. I have worked in a number of settings — and each setting has given me a rich array of instinctive interactions to experiment with and study.

For most of the past three decades it has been particularly useful for me as a learning person to serve in the CEO jobs for the half dozen companies that have employed me. Being a CEO is a great job at multiple levels if you are the kind of person who enjoys being a CEO and it is a particularly useful job if you want to use your work site as learning grounds and test sites for behavioral theories and approaches.

The CEO position in a number of settings creates both leverage and flexibility. It offers the vantage point that comes from being able to make changes of various kinds in both operations and processes to see what their impact might be on the setting.

One of the most useful aspects of being the CEO for me in each setting has been that I did not need to somehow convince a boss in each

setting to allow me to do my various process-related or instinct-related experiments.

Being the CEO also meant that I could modify my approaches and that I could change my behaviors fairly quickly when my attempts to do experiments or my efforts to change approaches failed or hit rocks. I have had failures and I have hit rocks. But I have been able to learn from my failures and I have learned from direct experience how to detect and either avoid or prevail over many types of rocks.

Continuous Improvement Is The Goal And Strategy

My direct personal and professional goal in each work setting is to continuously improve. I believe in continuous improvement as a philosophy, a commitment, and a strategy.

Over the past couple of decades, I have become a formal continuous improvement process believer, disciple, practitioner, proselytizer, and zealot. I want to personally continuously improve and I want the organization that I currently serve as CEO to continuously improve in doing whatever it exists to do.

I love the whole concept and skill set that is functionally involved in formal continuous improvement processes. Continuous improvement is a

commitment to get continuously better. Getting continuously better generally requires the ability to make decisions and to react to new learning and to respond to new facts in meaningful and systematic ways when both new learning and new facts are relevant and available.

Being the CEO in the places I have worked has made that whole direct reaction process and continuous learning approaches that support continuous improvement much easier.

Because one of my goals since 1987 has been to build a functional tool kit that we could collectively use to improve intergroup interactions in our country in ways that will ultimately steer us toward intergroup Peace, I have done much of my thinking and I have done most of those work site experiments in a fairly systematic, focused, and process oriented way with that specific overarching learning goal in that mind.

The Art of War And The Art of Peace Use Lists

Those efforts to create continuous improvement approaches were foundational for creating the various lists of options, strategies, approaches, and relevant factors for systematically achieving and protecting Peace that are now included as tools for *The Art of Intergroup Peace* book.

The Art of Intergroup Peace is a sister book to this book. My Peace book was inspired and shaped in significant ways by a 2,000-year-old training manual on how to conduct and win wars.

Sun Tzu, the author of *The Art of War*, was actually my direct inspiration for the list building process and the strategy option choices that are used as teaching tools in the intergroup Peace book.

Sun Tzu wrote his own book of multiple lists to give guidance about both tactical and strategic choices to warriors roughly 2,000 years ago. He used an extensive array of lists in his book — with lists of terrain possibilities, organization approaches, and multiple strategic options and responses — all clearly based on his own actual personal practical and operational experience with war.

I read *The Art of War* several times early in my career. I actually used advice from that book to anchor some strategic thinking about competitive issues in a couple of my work situations.

Sun Tzu was a key inspiration for the strategy I used in one setting to turn several major — but entirely invisible — quality of care victories for my care system into an explicit ad campaign. That approach surprised people in our market.

It ended up changing the nature of the competition.

As one of my mentors said — “It doesn’t do you any good to be the very best baseball team if everyone else is playing cricket. You need to get everyone else to also play baseball — and then you can win.”

By changing the nature of what we advertised as our value and our key benefit to the customer, we converted major portions of that particular market from cricket to baseball — then we triumphed as baseball all stars.

Sun Tzu preached the advantage of surprise. He said the enemy was less likely to defeat you if you surprised them in some important way.

We completely surprised our competitors in that work setting by using that positioning strategy. People did not expect us as an organization to take the public high ground on quality and people absolutely did not expect us then to hold and reinforce that high ground with data and with extensive and focused public communications about quality topics and agendas.

We surprised, outflanked, and outperformed our competitors. Sun Tzu very directly inspired that thought process at all three levels.

I actually read the relevant passages from *The Art of War* out loud to key members of our leadership team at the beginning of that process as I explained to that team what we were doing and why we were doing it. Some

people on our team were surprised to get copies of that book as gifts that year.

I still appreciate the help that I received for those settings and situations from that book on war.

Sun Tzu gave me a good context to do some key thinking on a number of competition-related topics and I continue to be grateful to him for that guidance.

His approach to his topic of winning wars also gave me the foundation and the context of building functional and practical lists that I used to write my own version of intergroup interaction strategies and then — echoing Sun Tzu — to call my own book initially, simply *The Art of Peace*. After a couple of drafts, it seemed more accurate to call my own book *The Art of Intergroup Peace*.

In either case, the title is a deliberate homage to Sun Tzu and his very useful book on war.

Both Books Love Lists

The two books, *The Art of Intergroup Peace* and *The Art of War*, each have some sections that are counter balancing and offsetting versions of the

other book. The two approaches are, in some areas, exactly opposite one another as you might expect given the very different goals of the two books.

In other areas — because both sets of strategies involve aligning relevant people and getting them to function well together — the sets of lists and the strategies they contain overlap significantly.

At the extreme contrast end of the comparisons, my Art of Intergroup Peace approach advocates ethical behavior — and Sun Tzu's Art of War approach says that ethics are irrelevant and that deliberately unethical behaviors in many areas can be among the most effective tools you can use to win a war.

The Art of War teaches, preaches, and strongly endorses the use of deception, for example. Sun Tzu clearly advocates and very clearly recommends deliberate and intentional deceit.

The Art of Intergroup Peace — in complete and very intentional full contrast — preaches, teaches, and advocates transparency, honesty, and deliberate, open, and clear intergroup communications and believes that deceit can undermine and destroy trust and alignment between people.

The Art of War focuses on achieving win/lose outcomes. Defeat of the other side is the key goal for *The Art of War*. *The Art of Intergroup Peace*

focuses on win/win outcomes — with each group in a win/win setting deliberately and intentionally helping the other group in the setting to also win.

Both Books Advocate Understanding The Other Party

Both books advocate fully and completely understanding the other group in a setting — but for very different reasons.

The Art of War preaches understanding all aspects and components of the other group deeply in order to most effectively damage, undermine, defeat, and destroy the other group. *The Art of Intergroup Peace* goes in the opposite direction and preaches understanding the other group in a setting deeply in order to help the other group thrive, prosper, and mutually succeed.

The Art of War believes in setting up skillful and deliberate communication approaches that are intended to strategically confuse and mislead the other party. *The Art of Intergroup Peace* calls for setting up skillful and intentional communication strategies to be sure that the other group in your setting is never misled.

Lists Are Useful Strategy Building Tools

The book outlining pathways to war and the book outlining pathways to Peace clearly have some very different strategic and very different tactical components. What the two books share is a love of lists and a focus on making the exact right strategic choices for each specific setting and situation. Lists are key to both processes and approaches for both Peace and war.

Both books are anchored in real life experience. Neither book is written as academic theory or hypothetical speculation. Both books use lists because people who are practitioners rather than theorists know that lists can be a good functional tool for creating practical arrays of choices, options, situation definitions, and situation relevant strategies that can create a context for optimal strategic and tactical thought processes.

Sun Tzu wrote his guide book to help leaders in winning a war. He knew how useful, functional, practical, and helpful it can be to describe both potential situations, potential issues, potential solutions, and potential strategies using lists that are based on real life situations and real life settings. His lists are based on his own direct and functional experience in the actual fields of war.

He recommends, for example, that if the enemy army is crossing a river, the best time to attack is probably when the army is halfway across the river.

That is clearly a piece of advice grounded in logistical realities and functional experience.

In a similar vein, *The Art of Intergroup Peace* book is also based on experience in real world intergroup settings where conflict was reduced or avoided and where Peace and alignment were achieved and supported.

The Art of Intergroup Peace book contains a number of Peace-related lists that describe actual functional sets of Peace-related opportunities, as well as strategies, tactics, situations, practices, realities, and approaches that also are experience-based and field-tested for creating and protecting intergroup Peace in various settings.

Those lists are a key component and tool for my book about Peace because lists can be a very useful way of both explaining and assembling the right set of strategies for Peaceful intergroup interactions in any setting.

We Have Nine Ways To Align And We Have Six Useful Tools

To Trigger Alignment

The fifth chapter of *The Art of Peace* book, for example, outlines the nine levels, types, and categories of functional intergroup alignments that we can put in place between groups of people. That is actually a practical, functional, field-tested list of intergroup alignment options. I have used or observed each of those types of interactions in real world settings for a significant number of years.

That list of intergroup interaction options begins with total and intentional separation between the groups on one end of the continuum and it extends to full blending and complete assimilation of the relevant groups at the other end.

The Art of Intergroup Peace book explains when and how each of the alignment options included on that continuum might have functional value and practical use for a specific intergroup situation or setting.

I have actually had a chance to work with all nine of those interaction models and approaches in various work settings. I have had a chance to use each of them in various settings to create levels of both intergroup alignment and functional interaction.

I have also been able to observe others who have used each of those approaches in various settings and I have learned from both their successes

and their failures. I have seen both successes and failures — often at very close range — and that experience strengthens the book.

As you can read in *The Art of Intergroup Peace* book, each intergroup interaction strategy and each approach has its relevance and its value in the right setting. Each approach can be a major mistake and can have unintended negative consequences if the situation where it is applied doesn't actually lend itself to that particular approach.

The Art of Intergroup Peace book, the *Primal Pathways* book, and this book all explain the six instinct-linked triggers that can be used to bring people in any given setting into levels of internal alignment. The alignment triggers range from danger at one end of the continuum to a sense of shared missions and purpose at the other end of the continuum.

I have found both of those lists to be highly useful to me at a very functional level in my own CEO functions. I have also found them both very useful in my various public settings and industry roles.

The Alignment Triggers And Tools Work In Multiple Settings

In addition to serving as the CEO of my own organizations, I have had the opportunity to participate in a number of commissions, trade associations, alliances, and coalitions that were each created to help achieve

various objectives using multiple organizations functioning in various and sundry aligned ways.

Over the years, I have served on nearly 50 task forces, commissions, alliances, or formal associations of one kind or another. I have personally chaired more than a dozen commissions, committees, conferences, associations, task forces, or boards.

I have found the tool kits that are outlined in those books to be very useful in those kinds of roles at multiple levels. I have also found those industry and public involvement roles to be great testing grounds and solid research fodder for the theories, strategies, concepts, and approaches that are outlined in the set of books that make up the initial intergroup book package.

Being Chair In Intergroup Settings Is A Great Learning

Opportunity

In my overall industry roles, I have very directly helped a couple of trade associations create their own categories of alignment and their own direct strategies for intergroup interactions. It has been particularly informative to chair several of those groups. My chair roles have included both national and international trade associations.

Being chair in those intergroup settings gave me an additional set of useful opportunities to do some experiments and to test some theories and approaches in real world intergroup situations.

As part of the overall community activity process, I have helped create several coalitions on relevant public issues. I have used the approaches that are described in *The Art of Intergroup Peace* book to help set up joint efforts at various levels between the various organizations and groups who have been participants in those coalitions.

That has been fascinating and sometimes fruitful work. Some of those joint efforts have actually helped to create better care outcomes in specific settings. Some of those collaborative efforts, I believe, have also helped to improve public policy in a couple of settings and situations.

I have found that being chair of multi-group organizations and the convener of multi-party coalitions with diverse and independent components and memberships has been both a chance to use the alignment, and motivation tools that are included in those books and a chance to learn in practical settings about various ways of ending intergroup strife and creating aligned values and mutually supportive intergroup behaviors.

The Six Alignment Triggers Can Be Used In A Community

Context As Well

It is a good thing to help people actually do good things. Bringing people together in a common cause for good purposes relating to health care delivery issues and public health issues has been an experience that has had some good consequences and also created a very useful set of learning experiences that have been part of the two decades of functional research that has resulted in the writing of these books.

My overall goal for the specific lists of situations, issues, tools, and strategies that are included in those books is to have the lists be universally useful both to groups of people and to the leaders of those groups.

My goal is not to simply use those tools to make businesses or other similar organizations perform at higher levels. Those tools actually do work for those basic purposes, but that was not the primary reason why I created them.

My broader goal has been to figure out how to make those same tools that work in our business and trade association settings actually useful and functional to the point that we can use those same tools to create positive

intergroup interactions in a broader community context when those tools are needed for intergroup Peace in those broader settings.

I have been very intentionally working on strategies to achieve intergroup Peace since the early 1990s when I became so painfully aware of intergroup conflict.

My goal for that process has been to learn how to build tools to bring us together as a nation and that can also be used to create internal alignment in each community and in each relevant setting.

My work in those various community areas has not been purely academic or simply theoretical. It also has not been entirely anchored in pure and situation specific community service. I did the work to actually do good and I did that work to learn how to do good at the same time. That was a good dual agenda.

As a result of that approach, I have had a chance to field test the tool kit that is described in those books in very real ways and I can vouch for its validity in real world situations and real world settings.

Eleven Alignment Options — Six Alignment Triggers

Probably the most important list that I have used multiple times in a variety of settings is the set of six alignment triggers that can be used to

bring people together to function as a group. That set of six extremely useful alignment triggers is described in more detail in this book and in the *Primal Pathways* book, the *Cusp of Chaos* book, and *The Art of InterGroup Peace* book.

That list of six alignment triggers is in all four intergroup books because it is such a useful tool to understand and have.

I have used those six triggers very directly inside each of my own organizations and I have used them more broadly in a number of community settings. They work well in both contexts. It has been particularly reinforcing to use them to help create coalitions that shape public policy.

As one example, in Minnesota — a few years ago — when the health care reform process in that state was floundering a bit, I used those six alignment triggers and I used my role as the current chair of the Minnesota HMO Council to help steer and guide the reform process in that state back on track.

The Bill Was Floundering

I helped put together a broad, industry-based reform coalition that involved the health plans, the hospitals, the medical society, some political

leaders, and some key labor leaders to tee up and then support the process that was known as the second round reform agenda for Minnesota Care.

A Minnesota Care bill had been created by a very hard working and very bright commission that I had served on as a member. That official commission bill had significant merit, but it had not passed the Legislature the year before. Many people in the state thought that the health care reform opportunity was gone forever when that initial bill did not pass.

So the trade association team that I chaired the year after the Legislature had refused to pass the initial commission designed bill made some changes in the approach, put together a new coalition to support the reform agenda, made some collaboratively agreed upon amendments to the legislation, and we managed to succeed in passing a good bill. The Governor of the state both supported and signed that bill.

That bill ultimately brought the number of uninsured people in Minnesota down to the lowest level in America — exceeded or tied only by Hawaii who had their own universal care bill already in place at the time we passed the Minnesota Care Bill.

We used every step on the trigger pyramid described in this book to create that coalition of powerful parties. We identified the dangers of failure.

We created a sense of being a reform centered “us.” We identified collective gains to be achieved by passing the bill. And we created a shared vision for that reform for the coalition.

The bill passed. It had a very positive impact on Minnesota health care. I loved doing that work and helping create that collaborative approach.

Helping bring that coalition together to pass Minnesota Care and to support the very good foundational work that had been done by the Minnesota Health Care Commission turned out to be a good training process for helping to organize and create a similar coalition to do very similar health care reform a few years later in California.

We Created A Minnesota-Like Coalition For California

Again, as we did in the Minnesota effort, we brought the California hospitals, health plans, physicians, community clinics, some business groups and a few key labor leaders together to propose a very specific major reform agenda for California.

Very intentionally and very deliberately, we worked as a team to bring those key groups together. We created shared support for the effort in California by involving and invoking all six of the trigger points on the pyramid — including identifying common enemies and creating a sense that

bad and dangerous things could happen for all parties and for California if we did not succeed in getting that legislation passed.

That set of clearly communicated triggers helped to create and focus the coalition we needed in California and we almost succeeded in passing the bill.

That bill was supported by the current governor of California and it ended up being derailed by a single vote in a single Senate committee. It was a near miss. I still mourn that key and unexpected vote in that last committee.

No one expected us to get that far in California when we started the process. It was painful to lose by such a small margin — but no one believed we could get anywhere near that far when we started down the path to building that coalition and getting that legislation passed.

Again, that bill represented the work of a solid coalition of diverse, interested and situationally aligned parties who generally did not work together on other issues to achieve common goals in those settings for that proposal. It was a good bill and that bill was made better because we had the coalition members each bringing their expertise and their own competency to creating that bill.

We used a number of the steps that are outlined on the alignment pyramid used in the Art of Intergroup Peace process to bring all of those parties together to support that bill. We listened to all of the parties and we interacted in a win/win context with all of the parties to create a better bill that all parties could support.

The National Reform Coalition Included All Key Parties

Similarly, when the national health care reform agenda was being written by Congress a couple of years ago, I had the chance to help bring together a coalition of the most relevant health care trade associations in the country in support of significant reform.

Again — as in Minnesota and California — we brought the hospitals, physicians, tech companies, pharmaceutical companies, labor unions and health plans at the most senior level for each industry together to create a shared pathway to reforming and improving American health care.

We built a lovely and practical vision for improving care in this country and making better care available to all Americans. We brought that set of key leaders for key industries together to the White House as a coalition and as a group to endorse an approach to reform that was based on

care improvement rather than on care rationing of any kind as the underpinning strategy for reform.

The proposal we brought to the White House was a very good proposal. Again — as in Minnesota and California — the constituent parties in that coalition each added their direct expertise and their own competencies collaboratively to that process — and the result was a very well designed and well directed set of important reform elements for American care.

Those exact pieces, as we proposed them to the country in that setting through that coalition, were unfortunately not entirely included in the final bill that Congress passed. But those pieces and that coalition were both very important as a key step in getting people who had been on the fence relative to reform on the record and aligned in favor of real and meaningful reform.

That Reform Effort Was Focused On Better Care

Again, those of us who organized that coalition effort used each of the steps and each of the triggers on the alignment pyramid to help bring that group of key parties together. I had the good fortune to work clearly with a couple of collaborative geniuses to do that work.

I also know from direct experience in multiple settings that the pyramid works to help bring people together in a more focused organizational settings. I have field-tested it in the real world of both communities and companies and I have found it to be useful in almost every setting where alignment has been my goal.

As part of the national health care reform effort, I had written a book a year earlier about the key steps that were needed for the reform process in this country that was called *Health Care Will Not Reform Itself*.

Our collective efforts as a coalition of major health care players who were seeking care reform for this country in a collaborative way were intended to make my negative book title completely and entirely wrong.

The coalition we brought to the White House actually was a noble, well-meaning, patient-focused, and nicely designed attempt by key elements of health care to actually reform itself. The group alignment process processes that are outlined in the *Art of Intergroup Peace* and in *Primal Pathways* worked to help bring those groups together.

We Created A Strategy For Internal Alignment

When I joined my most recent employer over a decade ago as CEO and Chair, I sat down immediately with the leadership team at a retreat and I

shared that same exact six-element alignment trigger pyramid with that group.

I explained to our senior leaders the various ways that we would begin to use that pyramid in that setting to bring us together as an organization. I teed that strategy up in that initial meeting as the approach that we were going to use functionally and operationally to create internal alignment.

Then we actually used those steps in that organizational setting. Over the course of the next several years, we did exactly what I had predicted and had advocated that we would, should, and could do in that first set of meetings.

We created alignment. We functioned in aligned ways. Alignment was very real and alignment was extremely effective.

We Become The Highest Performing Plan and Care System

We became the highest performing health plan and the highest performing health system in the country at multiple levels and we did that because we were a total health care system and because we had all of the pieces of our total system aligned.

People in that care team setting loved alignment. People also loved being the best at doing a high percentage of the key things that were done to make care better for our patients and our members.

When Consumer Reports, Medicare, and JD Powers all ultimately gave number one ratings to that care team and to our health plan, that was affirming and reinforcing for all of the people who had achieved alignment in that setting.

Continuous improvement was a core point of that agenda. We cut the sepsis death rate in half and then we cut it again by almost half by continuously improving our hospital care. Sepsis is the number one killer in American hospitals, and we reduced the death rates to some of the lowest in the country.

We cut the HIV death rate for our patients to half of the national average by being completely aligned and by very systematically continuously improving our care for our HIV patients.

We cut the death rate for strokes by half as well by systematically going up stream in the care processes and in the health status of our relevant patients to both prevent strokes and improve treatments for stroke patients.

The book *KP Inside* outlines dozens of those achievements that were based on functioning in aligned and systematic ways to improve care for our patients.

I Am A Zealot For Continuous Improvement In All Settings

So when I write in this set of books about collective efforts that we need to do now as communities and as a nation in the interest of our common good, I advocate that approach from the perspective of being a believer in the value of collective effort and I do it from the vantage of being an actual practitioner who has done the work needed inside my own organization in practical and functional ways to help create both alignment and to tee up continuously improving operational successes.

I also write from the perspective of someone who has done a number of successful efforts in the outside world to get coalitions of various kinds in various settings to function together in aligned ways that also create excellent results.

The Partners For Quality Care coalition of labor unions and key health care employers, for example, put together some collaborative care improvement approaches that have saved many lives and that now influence health care policy in a couple of states. I had the great pleasure of sharing

the Chair role in that coalition with the health care head of America's single largest union.

Currently, I am serving as chair of a lovely and focused statewide commission for the State of California whose role is to support development and best life outcomes for very young children. I am working through that First Five Commission for Children and Families to help create a set of collective efforts and related coalitions that can work together to support our children in ways that our children really do need that level of coordinated community support.

The State of California gives us roughly \$500 million in Tobacco tax money each year to do that work — but we can't succeed on our own. We need a coalition of key players — caregivers, educators, faith leaders, community groups and leaders — to make that effort the success it needs to be for the children of California.

That set of child-related issues and opportunities, I believe, needs to be a major focus for public policy leaders for our country. The book *Three Key Years* explains the importance of that work and describes in practical terms what we can do as parents, educators, caregivers, regulators, and policy makers to support our children in their hour of need.

The first three years of life are the years when the key connections that determine the strength of each child's brain happen.

Children whose brains are exercised in those key months and years have stronger brains. Children whose brains are not exercised in those first years have smaller vocabularies, lower learning skills, significant learning challenges, and find it extremely difficult to ever catch up to the children whose brains were actually exercised — by talking, reading, and interacting with each child — in those key years.

That is my current top focus for my own public policy efforts and goals. We need to help every child. We need community support to be sure every child is helped in those key time frames.

I will be using all of the steps on the alignment trigger pyramid to help support that work.

We Need A Commitment To Win/Win Outcomes

Overall, in each of my work, industry, and public policy settings, I have had a great chance to work with multiple parties in a real world context to create alignment around shared objectives.

What I have learned in dealing with all of those parties in all of those settings — and what I have learned dealing with multiple parties inside the

organizations I have served as CEO — is that a very effective way of getting people aligned and keeping people aligned over time is to create win/win situations and win/win outcomes for all of the key parties.

Win/win is the key to long-term success in many settings.

That was also not an approach that I understood or even knew about back in 1987 when I started writing those books. That was an approach that I have learned over the years since that time and it is an approach that I now support deeply and entirely.

Win/win, I now know, is the best collective intergroup strategy. When all parties perceive that their group will end up with a win/win consequence for their own group, then getting support for that aligned work from people in each group is much easier.

That is not a rhetorical, theoretical, hypothetical, or even ideological statement. It is a functional reality. I have very directly field-tested win/win strategies in multiple settings and they work. I know from using win/win approaches in real settings that they work and I know from experience that they can achieve successes that can't be achieved any other way.

My most recent employer, Kaiser Permanente, put together a labor management partnership with more than 40 labor unions and more than

100,000 union workers. It is one of the largest labor management partnerships in the world. Books have been written about what we did.

That particular labor management partnership has been very intentionally and deliberately focused on win/win outcomes for the workers, for the patients, and for the overall organization.

The Kaiser Permanente LMP may actually be the longest lived, largest, and most successful labor management partnership in the world — and it has been built very specifically on team behavior, shared vision, transparency, trust, and a clear and honest shared commitment to win/win outcomes for all parties.

Win/win is a very powerful way of thinking and behaving. When everyone wins, everyone benefits. There is great power to that agenda and there is huge value that can be created by win/win outcomes.

Multiple Experiences Reinforce The Sense Of How Those

Instincts Affects Our Lives

Before I knew how to set up win/win outcomes, I saw a number of work related settings where us/them instincts were activated and caused people to turn their worksites into win/lose interactions and even in some sad cases — to lose/lose outcomes.

That particular problem of having people working to create lose/lose outcomes has not happened in recent years in my own direct work sites. But I have seen intergroup anger activated at a very instinctive and primal level in various other work settings where those levels of anger and the willingness — and even eagerness — by various people in those settings to damage the other party in those settings in material and meaningful ways seemed illogical, unexpected, and even incongruous, but was entirely and sadly, all too real for those settings.

The anger and the intent to do damage to other people was all too real for too many people in too many of those settings. It was clear to me that the people who felt that anger in both sides in those settings believed their own intergroup hatred to be valid and justified.

We have all seen worksites at war with themselves where people do damage and feel very right making damage happen.

Those are extreme cases. It is, however, fairly common for less extreme levels of us/them instincts to be triggered in work settings that undermine the work done in those settings in ways that people feel good and to feel right about very dysfunctional behaviors and very damaging and destructive thought processes.

Several of the very first settings where I personally worked early in my career were training grounds for observing those kinds of dysfunctional and damaging instinctive us/them workplace behaviors.

A couple of very dysfunctional work sites that I was in early in my career taught me a lot about a wide range of intergroup anger activation issues. I have worked very hard since that time to avoid having those kinds of damaging work site behaviors and negative intergroup energies happening in the work settings where I have been a manager or CEO.

The Hospital Staff Was “Them”

I saw some hospital settings early in my career where the medical staff and the administrative staff deeply disliked one another and behaved in very negative, dysfunctional, and even damaging us/them ways against each other.

I have been in a number of care-linked settings where perfectly reasonable physicians who delivered care in that hospital would tell me how much they hate the people who run their hospital and where the perfectly reasonable people who ran their hospital would tell me with equal passion and equivalent clarity how much they hated at least some of those same physicians.

I have been friends with people from both groups. I know absolutely beyond any doubt that both groups have good, kind, intelligent, and caring people.

But I also know that when any set of people in any setting manages to get their us/them instincts activated, then each side in that setting can actually hate the other side and each side can far too often be willing to actually take very intentional and deliberate steps to do damage to whoever they believe in that setting to be their “Them.”

Amazingly primal behavior happens in some unexpected settings. I have seen those experiences and those behaviors at a very immediate and personal level enough times to know that those feelings and those ethical standards, thought processes, and behaviors are not limited to tribal conflicts and to armies at war.

Work sites often have us/them battles, where people suspend conscience in their dealings with other groups of people in the worksite.

The behaviors in many organizational settings end up to be very tribe-like in their energy, emotions, and thought processes. Negative tribal behavior for what are clearly non-tribal issues is often comfortable,

desirable, and even seductive for many people in the most badly divided work settings.

Academic Sites Functionally Tribalize

Care sites often functionally tribalize — as do academic environments. I have seen those particular sets of behaviors happen a number of times in a number of settings.

Tribalized sets of people in each of those settings sometimes hold internal wars with one another. A number of academic people make woeful and very profession-consistent jokes about some of the intense, angry, and often deeply petty intergroup political battles that can happen in academic settings.

People in some academic settings do fierce tribal battle with one another with a level of intensity that makes no sense at all to the people outside the scope and boundaries of those conflicted settings.

I have had a number of professors from various institutions tell me stories about fierce and petty internal political battles in their institutions of higher learning that were hard to believe.

One professor who knew I was writing this book told me he was going to write his own book called “Office Space and Parking — a Murder Mystery.”

Some amazingly mean-spirited petty, angry, dysfunctional, and deeply conflicted behaviors obviously can feel very right to the people in those settings. Some people, I have seen, actually make those internal political battles in both academic settings and care settings a major priority for their lives for significant periods of time.

It has also been painfully clear to me that various business settings can be hot beds for instinct activated negative intergroup behaviors as well.

Actuaries Were Clearly “Them” To The Sales Team

I have actually seen some amazing and intense us/them battles within insurance companies. In one setting where I worked, the Actuarial team and the Sales and Marketing team hated each other so much that they ultimately got to the point where senior management literally and functionally issued paper passports to allow designated people from each side to cross into enemy territory.

Again — I knew people on both sides of those conflicts. I knew them well. They were good people. But they hated each other in a very us/them

way and they tended to demonize, denigrate, depersonalize, and dehumanize each other with great energy in their entirely internal intergroup conflicts.

The people on both sides in some settings where I worked ascribed very evil motives to one another and I knew from knowing those people personally that they each believed what they were saying about the other people to be true.

I have seen people in those work settings suspend conscience and lie to one another and deliberately deceive one another in their work context in order to prevail in their intergroup conflict issues.

All Is Fair In Love And War — Even In The Office

“All is fair in love and war and this, my friend, is war” was what one sales leader told me about a particular piece of his behavior that I asked him to help me understand. “This is war” seemed a bit extreme. But his face was blazing and the hand holding his martini was shaking when he made that statement to me.

“This is war” clearly made entire and complete sense to him at that moment in time.

He had just done what I perceived to be a very unethical thing and it clearly felt right to him to sink to that unethical behavior. He was telling the

plain truth to me about what he had done to the other person in that setting with no sense of guilt and he didn't disguise his actions as he told the story to me because I was situationally an "us" to him in that moment and he considered me a friend. He had great comfort in telling me clearly what he had done and he equally clearly felt no guilt or ethical qualms at any level about very deliberately not telling the truth to "Them." He told me the story without changing the facts or disguising his actions because he believed that any true "us" would support his behaviors and would not question his decision to be unethical to "Them."

The Truth Was Only Morally Relevant To "Us"

I realized in that moment that if that particular department head for some reason ever found cause of some kind to change my own personal listed and defined status in his mind from "Us" to "Them," then he would also no longer feel the need to tell the truth to me.

That insight made me sad. My respect level for him diminished because I realized clearly as he was telling me with some glee and some basic and primal pride what he had just done to "Them" exactly how situational his own personal ethical standards actually were.

They were not absolute ethical standards. They were not inviolate personal ethical standards. They were not rigid standards of clear personal ethical direction. They were, instead, absolutely situational and entirely circumstantial ethical standards and he was very comfortable with using those widely variable ethical standards in very situational ways based on whether the person he was dealing with was an “us” or a “Them.”

I have since seen similar split behaviors in work settings relative to ethical standards since that time on the part of many people — with people who treat me personally in very ethical ways as an “us,” but who clearly treat other people with the situational ethical standards that their us/them instincts trigger for a “them.”

I had seen the situational impact of our us/them instincts on values and ethics long before I read the story about the concentration camp guard who acted in warm and caring ways in one setting and who was pure evil in another setting that I write about in Chapter Two of my *Cusp of Chaos* book. That was a major reason why I knew so quickly that the guard that I write about in that chapter of that book actually had not done any things that were evil to local people in his exile years after the war. That particular guard had not activated evil in those particular exile years.

He lived with an “us” group of people in that postwar time frame and he exhibited the behaviors, thought processes, and ethical standards that are generally triggered in each of us by being in an “us” situation.

We Need To Create A Sense Of “Us” In Relevant Settings

I have learned over the years in all of those work settings that it is a very good thing to get the people in any setting to perceive themselves to be an “us” — in order to activate all of the ethical standards in that setting that we instinctively apply to our dealings with “us.”

I have also learned over the years that it can be a very bad thing when people in any work setting or community are perceived by other people in that setting to be “Them.”

We tend to do bad things to Them. Minimally we tend to feel some stress and to feel some levels of anxiety about the physical and functional presence and impact of “Them” in any setting

As a leader for the half dozen companies where I have been CEO over the past 30 years, I have worked hard to create a sense of us in each setting and I have worked equally hard to have no internal sense of “Them” in any setting

Because I have been the CEO, I have been able to steer people's perceptions in those settings in those directions — and my experience has been that the steering process has helped set up beneficial interpersonal perceptions and interpersonal behaviors in those settings. At a very practical level, my experience is that the steering process that has happened very intentionally in those directions has helped make my job as CEO much easier to do in each setting.

My strong belief is that we need people in all settings — both leaders and group members — to understand those issues, thought processes and behaviors and we need all people to act accordingly in defining who we are and what we do in each setting.

Knowledge is power. It took me a very long time to learn enough about those issues to have the knowledge level reach the point where I could use it to influence behaviors and thought processes in various settings and situations.

That knowledge has definitely made my job in those settings easier to understand and easier to do.

We need to apply that same set of strategies to our larger settings — and we need to work hard to increase the sense of us and decrease the sense of “Them” in each community, organization, and relevant setting.

That will only happen if we understand those issues and deal with them directly in an organized and strategic way.