

Chapter Thirteen — We Need To Communicate Honestly About Our Key Issues

We need to create trust by earning trust. We need to do things for each other that prove good intent in all settings and we need to communicate in open and honest ways with each other about key issues.

We will obviously not do that trust-building process perfectly. Errors will be made. We need to expect that to be true and we will need to deal with the errors that we make in healing ways.

Because we are imperfect, very well-intentioned people will sometimes say things or do things that are insulting, clumsy, and even damaging — without intending to be negative in any way or without understanding when a specific behavior might be perceived as having negative content or negative intent.

When that happens, we need to teach each other what we have inadvertently done in the spirit of having us all succeed in the end in becoming very effective and supportive in our interpersonal communications.

We all need to learn and we will all need to forgive other people's mistakes in the learning process. We need to be able to stumble, make mistakes, and then recover, because recovery is the only path to ultimate success in an imperfect process.

Inadvertent Misstatements Need To Be Corrected — Not Condemned

We need people who are offended by inadvertent clumsiness and who are offended or insulted by inadvertently insulting or negative words, deeds, or comments to reach out like sisters and brothers to help each other understand what we have said and to understand what we have done in ways that will let us all improve what we do and what we say for the future.

We need to reach out to readjust the dialogue when it is flawed, rather than just condemning inadvertent statements and attacking and rejecting things that are clumsily said or clumsily done.

Inadvertent misstatements and unintentional missteps need to be corrected, not condemned. We all need to help with that process.

To do all of that and to do it well, we need to build a collective community of trust.

Dwelling On Past Issues Can Perpetuate Old Issues And

Rekindle Old Angers

We clearly need to be able to move past old conflicts and old divisions in various ways that will help us create the needed sets of new alignments — and we need to do that work in ways that create stability for the new approaches.

We need to do that work in a way that combines honesty and candor about our negative past performance and interactions with a willingness to start fresh in each setting to build a current functional “us” for the settings.

We need to create a context of being “us” that works for each setting.

In several work settings where I have had a chance to bring people together who had been in a state of conflict and even intergroup anger before I had a chance to work with them, I have sometimes advised my leadership team to recognize the reality of that history of conflict and to clearly and completely understand those prior intergroup issues — but not to dwell on them going forward once we had given them a relevant resolution.

Dwelling on old problems and consistently recalling and talking about problematic past issues, I have found in many settings, can too often simply, directly, and very dysfunctionally continuously resurrect and reactivate old

negative energies at times when that reactivation too often damages our current level and state of interactions.

My experience has been that if we have functionally moved past particular sets of issues in a setting in a positive way, then we are often well served by not bringing those issues up at future points in ways that resurrect the old anger or renew the old pain.

When we make progress in an area, we need to build on our progress and we need to build on our current success. We are often well advised to avoid resurrecting old angers when the old angers and the old and inflammatory issues are not currently functionally relevant.

The Art of Intergroup Peace describes that rationale and that approach in more detail.

The Puppy Should Not Be Recalled

People who have worked with me for any period of time in senior leadership roles can all tell you “the puppy story.” I have used the puppy story in a number of leadership settings as a teaching tool, as a reminder and as a behavior prompt about the down sides of dwelling on old issues or the negative consequences that can result from revisiting areas of currently resolved and historic conflict.

The puppy story is this. A mother walks into a room and sees her child playing happily with his toys. She says, “Johnny. That’s great! That’s really good! You ate your lunch. You are playing with your toys. That is wonderful. You must have finally forgotten that your puppy died.”

Everyone on my leadership team in each complex intergroup setting tended to get the point of that story. Sometimes when an issue was raised at a meeting, we would ask ourselves — is that an actual issue for today and for now or is it really a dead puppy?

Avoiding dead puppies can keep groups who are making real and meaningful progress with each other from being emotionally sidetracked and even derailed by old, inflammatory, and currently functionally irrelevant issues.

That does not mean that we should ignore real issues. It also absolutely does not mean that we should pretend that the most significant intergroup damages for this country or the damages in any local setting did not happen or that those sets of prior intergroup problems did not exist or that they do not have their echoes in behaviors occurring today.

I do believe, however, that we should not choose to spend our time or our energy now on revenge, retribution, or even on retrospective recollection

and resurrection of remembered anger for evil and damaging past behaviors that are not functionally current and relevant behaviors for the settings where we are currently learning to be “us” and where we are functioning today in various “us” ways.

The Maid Of Sarajevo Has Been Gone For A Long Time

We have to walk a fine line between not forgiving unforgiveable sins and not having those past and historic sins keep us from making a fresh start today on key areas of intergroup relationships and intergroup interactions where we will benefit hugely from a fresh start and a collective alignment and commitment.

In the most recent set of very bloody Sarajevo conflicts, one side frequently invoked the death of “The Maid of Kosovo” as a reason for the war. Look it up in the history books. That death was not a recent event. But it did put a very divisive and a very incendiary puppy into the context of those confrontations at a very consistent and directly inflammatory level.

That doesn’t mean that old issues are not relevant. Issues that are relevant might be very old.

The truth is that there are still very real barriers that are still being created by being either a woman or a member of a minority group in

America today and we need to recognize those issues and deal with them as we work to create Peace in each setting.

We need to get past those old issues by doing the right things in each setting today.

We Will All Do Well When We All Do Well

We need to make significant progress for us all by bringing all of us into the American Dream.

We will all benefit from bringing everyone into the American Dream and doing that now. We need to make a commitment to win/win results for all groups in America — and bringing all groups into full inclusion in the American Dream is an anchor element of that strategy and commitment.

We have made great progress in many wonderful ways as a country in achieving the American Dream with only a subset of our best resources in full play and only part of our population able to participate fully relative to the dream.

I strongly believe that we will do even better as a country when we bring all of our resources and all of our people in an intentionally inclusive way into our functional meritocracy and into our economy.

We will do well when we all do well. There isn't a cap or a limit on how well we can collectively do. Doing well is not a finite opportunity. We can all do well at the same time. We can all benefit from meritorious behavior when merit is inclusively activated for us all.

My own personal set of direct experiences in running a couple of large, complex, and ethnically diverse organizations is that meritocracies in those settings do work.

My own personal experience is that the performance levels are significantly higher for an organization when women and minority all have a chance to fully contribute and to be high performers.

I believe we are stronger and we are better overall in a work setting when all of our best players in the setting are very inclusively allowed to contribute. That has worked in the places where I have worked and I believe that will be true for us as communities and as a nation as well.

Our Economy Will Be Stronger When It Includes All Players

I believe that the truly beneficial and highly productive American Dream that has made America so strong, so safe, and so prosperous up to now will make America even stronger, safer, and more prosperous when we bring all of our people into full participation in the American Dream. I

strongly believe that our entire economy will be stronger when the economy includes all players.

To create an environment where we have all parties included in our economy, we do now need to function as an inclusive American Us. When we are an us in any setting, we are more internally collaborative and we are more collectively productive.

We practice higher levels of internal ethical behavior, and we are more supportive of each other's successes when we see each other as "us."

That functional environment that is created when we are an "us" allows us to achieve win/win outcomes inside of our us and win/win outcomes across each set of "us."

We need to create a sense of community identity in each relevant setting. We need to do team things that are real and relevant to bring us together in each setting.

Win/Win Is A Key Commitment And Strategy

Win/win is very important.

It took me a number of years to fully appreciate the value and benefit of win/win strategic directions and approaches. Early in my career, I was

personally a win/lose strategist. I loved competition at any level for a very long time and I felt good when I won and my competitor lost.

There was a long period of time when I was fairly good at winning in the context of traditional win/lose business related situations. I did some win/lose contracts with other parties in some settings that were almost legendary for their one-sided impact in our favor. There are some people who were on the other side for some of those contracts who may remember some of them even today.

The leadership of one other company made an effigy of me that was based on a Grinch doll and I was told that some people in that setting did things that were not pleasant to that particular doll.

So I did not begin my own personal learning process about basic intergroup interactions or even about internal group actions from a win/win perspective. I had a win/lose perspective and I believed very much in having my side win.

Then I learned in a moment of enlightenment at one of the human potential training sessions that I attended that my thinking on that point had been both incomplete and wrong.

I had always assumed that there needed to be a loser in order for a winner to exist in any setting or situation. A lovely seminar leader showed us all examples where having all sides win was both possible and actually better for everyone than having one party lose and the other party win.

I literally did not sleep that night after that lecture because I was so sure he was wrong. I mentally prepared rebuttals both for his perspectives and for his approach to use in the morning. On day two, he offered us several more very real and functional examples that showed that all sides in a setting could, in fact, win and could do better by winning in that way and I became a convert.

Win/Lose Settings Often Have Inherent Instability

I had already learned from both direct experience and frequent observation that any time there is a long-term context or long-term contract that has a significant loser embedded in it, that loser in that setting or circumstance tends to always be trying to create instability for the situation in order to reverse or even avenge their loss.

Losers tend to want to change their situation. Losers in any situation or setting often have consistent and constant motivation to create that change.

As I thought about the win/win alternative approach that was presented as an option by that lecturer, I understood more clearly that having a loser woven into any process or woven into any situation or setting very logically creates an inherent level of future instability and even future fragility for that process, situation, or setting.

I began to recognize and understand that in a standard win/lose situation even when you win, your own wins are always at risk to some degree for the future if the loser in that setting or that situation has the power to survive and to try to turn your current win into a future loss.

Win/win outcomes, I learned, also gave me a win for my side that I wanted and they were often much less fragile and vulnerable than a win/lose outcome. Win/win solutions, I learned as an organizational leader and strategist, are often easier for me to both protect and sustain.

That win/win perspective had major positive impacts in multiple work settings. I also learned to value win/win outcomes in my personal life at a very practical and functional level as part of my own personal growth counseling.

I also strongly came to appreciate the value and the merit of shared winning outcomes with all parties in the context of what we used to call “common interest” labor negotiations.

Over the past couple of decades, I have experimented with win/win contracts, win/win agreements, and win/win alliances in multiple settings — and I have found them to be both an easier way to win and a much easier way to negotiate, once you get the win/win negotiation processes in place and then learn how to actually do them.

My strong sense today is that in a Peace by piece context, for our country, we need to figure out how each party in each relevant setting can achieve the win levels that each party in the setting needs.

We need to look at our cities and our schools and our work places to figure out how to create win/win outcomes for all relevant parties in each setting.

Win/Win Negotiations Make Us Smarter

I discovered fairly quickly that doing win/win negotiations actually also makes me personally smarter about any given issue or setting.

Win/win negotiations in any setting make me smarter because they require me to personally need to learn what the actual key issues are for the

other side in any intergroup setting. *The Art of Intergroup Peace* book explains that phenomenon in more detail.

Sun Tzu, in *The Art of War*, calls for understanding the other side in great detail in order to damage and defeat Them. In *The Art of Intergroup Peace*, I also advocate understanding the other side in great detail — but the Peace book advises doing that learning in order to help the other party succeed.

When I am doing win/win negotiations myself, I clearly need that knowledge about the other side in my win/win negotiations because I can't help the other side win until I know what a win actually is for the other side.

I also discovered, to my great surprise, that I generally also needed to have a clearer sense of what a win was for my own side in order to create the best win/win positive outcome for my own side in a setting.

I did not expect to acquire that additional insight about my own side in a setting as a result of using that win/win approach. We often take that part of a negotiation for granted — assuming that we simply know what our own wins should be and assuming that we know what our side's actual wins will be if we do win.

I discovered that when I needed to understand my own needed wins better because I needed to know them well enough to describe my desired wins clearly and to explain their merit and their basic features to the other side. I sometimes gained very important additional insight into what was really needed by my side to best benefit from a situation or agreement.

I learned more about the real situation and the real set of issues for my side in the process of preparing to have those conversations with the other people to explain and defend my position about our issues.

I sometimes discovered in that process that I had been focused on a simplistic version of a win definition that wasn't as good for my side as a new definition that I functionally derived from going through a careful and intentional discernment process about my actual targeted win. That happened with a high level of frequency. My own wins actually often get better because of the fact that I needed to go through that explicit win definition discernment process.

Win/Win Outcomes Create Allies

I learned a lot about what an optimal win is for us in many situations by going through that process. I actually usually understood my own side's issues more clearly and more elegantly when I was working to create

win/win outcomes. *The Art of Intergroup Peace* book explains a number of those issues and those strategies in much more detail.

Building win/win outcomes also creates allies. That also initially surprised me but then it made sense as well. It is, of course, entirely logical. When both sides win, the other side becomes your ally in order to perpetuate their win for themselves.

Your instincts relative to intergroup interactions are triggered to reinforce and support each other when that mutual alliance and the intergroup support in a setting happens as the result of a win/win agreement.

Your Enemies Are Expensive

It is always good to have an ally. Allies are better than enemies. It is usually not good to have an enemy.

My father used to say — “Choose your enemies carefully. They are the most expensive things you own.”

I did not understand that piece of advice for a very long time — but once I finally did understand it, it became a key part of my own strategic thinking.

I now very strongly believe that we need to bring that level of win/win thinking as a key strategy for our intergroup interactions in this country. We

need to bring that thinking to each community — in order to create Peace by piece in each setting.

Instead of creating win/lose intergroup situations in our communities, we need everyone in each setting very consciously and explicitly committed to win/win situations — with all of us helping all of us win in each setting.

Actually creating benefit for each of us is a key part of that strategy.

We need to look at each setting to figure out what a win/win outcome can be for that setting that benefits people in a real way.

We Need Team Goals And Real Teams

We need to look at the win/win opportunities that we have and we need to take advantage of those opportunities.

At a macro level, we need win/win approaches that will make our cities safe. We need win/win approaches that will improve everyone's health.

We need win/win approaches that will make our education system and our child support systems better so that those systems can produce top levels of education and success for all students from all groups from birth through college.

We also need our functional health care delivery systems in each setting to be accessible to us all. We need our caregivers to be significantly focused on best care and best outcomes for everyone.

We need jobs for all people who seek jobs and we need to have places to live in each setting that meet our needs for living places.

We need our communities to come together to do team things to achieve each of those relevant sets of goals. The goals need to be specific to the settings and our teams need to be set up to create internal alignment and mutual support around each goal.

We Need To Build An American Sense Of Us

We clearly need — in all settings — to create win/win for every group by doing the things that need to be done in each setting to help strong neuron connectivity levels in the brains of all babies.

We all love our children. Helping each other help all of our children to succeed builds on that love of our children and it has the potential to create intergroup benefits, intergroup support and interactions, and intergroup trust.

The book *Three Key Years* explains very directly and clearly how we can improve the brain strength and seniority levels for all of our children.

We need a combination of parenting, programs, and sheer levels of reaching out directly at a personal level to help with that process to get us to the success levels we need for all children from all groups.

We Need To Add A Layer To Who We Are That Is Based On

Our Shared Beliefs

My core belief is that if we want to succeed as a country, and if we want our communities to be great places to live — then we need — at a very basic level — to create a sense of “us” for all Americans that is based on a shared belief system and a shared set of values.

We need to move past our various racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, and political categories of us in each setting and as a nation to create an additional overarching sense of us that is very explicitly based on our shared, enlightened beliefs.

We do not need people to change identities. We don't need people to change our basic affiliations. We do, however, need people to add an important functional layer to our individual and collective sense of who we are.

We need to continue to embrace and celebrate all of our primal definitions of us and then we need to very deliberately and intentionally add

on top of those definitions another very real layer of “us” that is explicitly based on our shared beliefs.

I have seen that happen in a number of settings. I have helped that to happen in a number of settings. It can be done.

We now need to very consciously do it as a country and we need to do it in each community setting.

We Need To Be United By Our Beliefs And Values

We need to start with a set of core beliefs that can anchor all of us in a collective “us.” There are chapters in both *Cusp of Chaos* and *The Art of InterGroup Peace* that explain those shared values in significant detail.

That explicit and specific list of beliefs is anchored on the core beliefs that have given America much of its strength up to now. Those dozen beliefs should not be a surprise to anyone in this country who knows who we are and who knows what we need to do.

We need to make collective commitments at an explicit level to democracy, to freedom of speech, and freedom of religion, to equality, to inclusion, and to full opportunity that unites us as an American Us and that allows us to avoid division by race, ethnicity, or any other category of division.

The key for our success as an American Us will be to have those core values accepted by all of us in a way that lets us all trust one another and lets us help each other win in making those goals and those commitments real.

We need our police departments and our law enforcement processes in every community in our country to do the right things in inclusive, insightful and caring ways to earn the trust of all members in each community.

We need our school systems and our public institutions in every setting to equally serve and equally support all people from every group that makes up the complex, fascinating and highly diverse fabric of America.

We need to very intentionally reach out to do healing things in all of the troubled settings where healing needs to happen.

We have had clashes and incidents that need to be understood for the opportunities they are for us to help each other to do better now and to be better aligned in the InterGroup interactions that will define our future.

Ferguson and its protests and clear behavior patterns gave us an opportunity to learn. The energy and the focus of Black Lives Matter gives us another opportunity to listen and learn.

We are in a time of intense learning and we need to turn that time of learning into a time of caring and understanding and alignment.

We can use our core values to get us to a better place. We need to make the commitment together to be in that better place and we need to go there together, understanding exactly why we have made that commitment and how we will succeed in making that commitment real.

Peace in our time needs to be a strategy and a commitment. Not a slogan or a vague and unfocused wish or dream.