Harvest from "Creative Conversations Across Differences"
A one-day experiential workshop on Dynamic Facilitation / Empathic Inquiry
Fletcher, NC   February 12, 2016

Our harvest begins with a summary of where we ended up, after almost three hours exploring the topic of government, as described in the following initial statements:

"How do we limit the influence of $ in politics? Does our vote count? What is the right role of government in our lives?"

We don't think that there is a right relationship between the government and the people right now. This leads to a lot of fear, anger, and frustration.

Emotions are high, and many of us are feeling disturbed.

There is a collective desire for change.

We all agree that we have to take an active role in creating the solutions.

Some of us feel inspired by the call to a nonviolent revolution; others of us are unwilling to endorse this. (Clearly, more conversation is needed here! ☺)

We are not yet clear where the starting points are.

Next, you will find the details of the conversation we had, along with the issues we explored…

Please note: no group agreement is implied with regard to any of the statements below; each was an individual contribution. Items have been grouped according to theme.

I. How can we make our current government be more accountable to "we the people?" How can we limit the influence of money in politics? How can we protect ourselves from politicians who are not looking out for the common good?

Background perspectives
1. Some of us feel angry that we are no longer in right relationship with government. We no longer have statesmen; we only have politicians. Civil servants are supposed to serve the people, yet many politicians are only serving themselves and their own agendas.
2. As a result, many people are not participating in government.
3. Some of us feel that government is not working hard enough, and getting paid too much.
4. Some of us perceive inauthenticity and deception in some aspects of government.

5. Some of us believe in the separation of church and state, and we are concerned that many politicians seem to be blurring the lines.
6. Some of us see back room deals going on, and don't feel represented.
7. Some of us don't trust that if we express our concerns, they will have any impact.

Possible solutions
1. Limit terms, so we can more easily vote people out of office.
2. Take lobbyists out of the system.
3. Create an oversight committee, whose job it is to make public what our government does while we are sleeping
4. Take money out of politics by creating a government fund for election campaigns.

5. Limit amount of time for campaigning; would lead to less need for $ in campaigns.
6. Limit number of terms -- total time that a politician can be in office, just as with Presidents.
7. Have politicians represent us, rather than following the dictates of their parties.
8. Revitalize our institutions so that we can create accountability

Concerns
1. Concerns about limiting terms, as it takes time for someone who is newly-elected, to figure out how the system works. Might be good to have them stick around for awhile, so they can learn to do their job.
2. Limiting terms would lead to more frequent campaigns.
3. Some of us are not sure that term limits will work. We feel we need to focus more on empathy-based solutions.

II. How can we design a government that we truly want?
How can we design a government that we can be "in good relationship with"?

Background perspectives
1. Some of us feel that government is not doing what "we" want them to do. They are not taking care of infrastructure, nor providing housing.
2. Some of us are fearful of government. As business owners, we are always under scrutiny, and it feels like big brother is watching. Many of the regulations do not feel helpful or conducive to the work we are trying to do.
3. Some of us don't feel connected to gov… it feels like "government is a mean monster".

4. Some of us feel grief, at living in fear of our government. We are still feeling the effects of Kent State. We see our government as shooting people and creating wars.
5. Some of us feel tremendous grief at what is going on. Young people are struggling to make ends meet. We no longer have visionary leadership in government. It feels like we have lost our way. The system is broken, and the problems feel endemic. Our government is not representing us properly in the world; it is not standing for our visions, dreams, and hopes. Instead, it is doing horrible things in our name.

Problems with two-party system
6. Some of us are seeing a lot of problems with the two-party system. It seems like each party has its own government, that sets the party agenda. Elder politicians dictate to the younger ones. So it ends up that the politicians are not working for us, but for their party. Meanwhile lobbyists generate funds for parties, to support their own agendas.
7. Some of us feel that our conversations with one another, are siloed by two-party system. We are not talking with one another; instead, we are trapped in separate "islands of thought". As a result our ability to engage in creative problem-solving is diminished; and, we are being run by a corporate agenda.

8. Some of us are frustrated to see all institutions that represent public in state of failure.
9. Some of us feel that our system of government is broken, and that patching it won't work. Instead, we need to change the system.

Proper role of government
10. Some of us see the proper role of government as working toward the common good, and engaging in long-term thinking about the future.
11. Some of us see proper role of government as a) creating safely, b) creating equal opportunities for everyone to succeed, and c) helping people who can't help themselves.
12. There is controversy about role of government in "helping people who can't help themselves". On one hand, some believe that government should not be doing this; people should be helping themselves. On other hand, some believe that government should be creating systems to help people help themselves.
13. Some of us believe there is no "right role" for govt; each one will have own answer. How we perceive govt is based on our own perceptions & conditioning around authority.

Possible solutions

1. Take responsibility for our government.
2. Start by having more conversations like this.
3. Create mechanisms for people to have difficult conversations. Link the outcomes of those conversations, as input to government.
4. Have conversation in communities across silos.

5. Create a shared public agenda by having transpartisan conversations.
6. Create conversations around our values, and what we have in common, to help us understand our differences.
7. Find balance between having people help themselves, and receiving government help.

8. Bring empathy into public issues, and into the public consciousness.
9. Work on bringing the power of empathy to the world (long-term goal), and in the meantime, encourage the government to take care of people who are in need.
10. Change the system by creating a non-violent revolution.

III. How can we create more empowerment and agency in people?

Background perspectives

1. Some of us feel that people complain a lot but don't take action. Since we don't have mechanisms in place to hold politicians accountable, that makes people feel helpless.
2. Some people are distracted by consumerism; consumerism is a drug.
3. Other people are distracted by the difficulties of making ends meet, and having to do anything they can to make money.
4. Some of us believe that people are basically good.

5. Some of us are wondering, how much all this has to do with the educational system.
6. The media plays a large role in institutionalizing fear. There is often a disconnect between the media and reality.
7. Some of us are wondering about, 'What is the back story? What are the conscious and unconscious dynamics that are unique to this country?'

Possible solutions

1. Find ways to help empower people, so they can re-examine their values and prioritize what's important.
2. Find ways to create deep healing around authority issues, relationship w/authority figures.
3. Start with ourselves, with how we practice authority in our own communities and in the decision-making processes in our own organizations.
4. Help people learn to embrace diversity. If we see we are all one heart, we won't kill anyone.

5. Pay people to live their passion, so their needs are met by living a juicy life. Currently people are trying to escape their lives because they are not allowed to live them; if they were able to follow their passion, they would embrace life and there would be no more war. If we were happy to live our lives, we wouldn't be killing people.
6. Have schools teach people according to their learning style; no more testing.

IV. How can we build alliances with government employees, to help improve government?

Background perspectives
1. Some of us feel that there is a difference between government employees and politicans.
2. Many government employees are working hard, but are constrained by political leadership.
3. Some of us don't feel it is helpful to demonize government employees. Many government employees also share these frustrations. They are hungry to talk to one another, and they are feeling just as disempowered as we are.

Possible solutions
1. Move away from seeing things as "them and us", stop demonizing government.
2. Include people who are part of government (public administration) in these conversations. They have very similar frustrations. Have them in the room.

V. How can we find some good starting points?

Background perspectives
1. Some of us find it hard to figure out where the changes need to start, what the starting point is.
2. The complexity of the system is daunting. Some of us worry that this may be by design; it may be designed intentionally complex, so nobody can understand it or fix it.
3. Some of us see the complexity as a byproduct of attempts to put patches on the problems in an attempt to fix the situation.

VI. More "how to" questions that were asked along the way…

How can we learn to embrace diversity?
How can we create a non-violent revolution, to get our needs met and to become a great country in the world?
How can we get the average person to see and say, that the Emperor has no clothes?

In a non-workshop context, we would begin the next meeting with reviewing the notes from last time (including any action items). Then we would see where people wanted to go from there… in this way, we open up the next spiral of the conversation.

Our "learning edge": questions that we came in with

1. How to capture all of the information?
2. How to refine my skills?
3. How to better communicate with people?

4. How can I use this work better in my personal life, and as an author?
5. How can I better deal with people's anger?
6. How to be compassionate and clear, yet not cave in?

7. What does Beauty mean to me?
8. How to create graceful endings?
9. How to be open to people, yet still having enough management / control to be able to balance group and individual needs?

10. How to create more efficacy / efficiency, with regard to changing the world?

Participants in our workshop:

R. B. – founded non-profit in Durham. Focused on creating worker co-ops. Trained as a coach, has done three trainings in Dynamic Facilitation. Has also trained in Technology of Participation; was part of the hosting team for Speaking of Aging event.

S. M. – Initiated bringing Dynamic Facilitation to Asheville area. Helps coordinate the local DF practice group. Has also trained in Technology of Participation; was part of hosting team for Speaking of Aging event.

C. K. – Air Force veteran; business person, web consultant. Experience in dealing with people in diverse environments. Is creating Asheville for Social Change.

A. S.– background in construction; creating a non-profit to address homelessness and to create affordable housing.

R. B. – background in group facilitation; worked in corporate for decades as OD specialist. Currently active as entrepreneur; created Griswold Home Care. Co-founder of Speaking of Aging.

K. T. – writer and artist; centered on recovery, art, communication, and listening. Has book that will be coming out soon! Has experience with Dynamic Facilitation, uses listening skills for sponsoring people in 12-step programs.

R. H. – works as executive coach; worked at Center for Creative Leadership. In midst of life transition and transformation: seeking Beauty, and how to weave it into her work. One of her current clients is a large hospital system.

N. K.– facilitator of Systemic Constellations work. Has business background, worked in chiropractic, also with equine facilitated learning. Enjoys working with communities.

D. R. – 30 years in Navy, where first learned facilitation; afterward, consultant in firm, then started own firm. Former head of MAFN, non-profit organization for facilitators in DC area, now coordinates their online webinars. Organizer for DF practice community in Asheville.

L. R. – created consulting company in strategy, for foundations and non-profits. Works on social justice issues internationally. Facilitating collaboration among eight national groups on aging. Taking drawing classes: "my heart opened up, and color is pouring out".

R. C. – gerontology; blend of work and spirit: contemplation and community engagement at Naropa University. At Land of Sky for 8 years. Consulting, trained in NVC, intrinsic coaching. Honoring the wisdom in the room; feeling "called into leadership".

S. W. – background in experiential education; working with differently-abled people, sports; held leadership role in Play for Peace, an international peace organization. Co-founder of Speaking of Aging.

M. H. – former psychology professor at UNC Chapel Hill, specializing in aging. Now focused on building community across lines of race & class in Durham; social justice activist, buddhist meditator. Part of planning group for contradance retirement community.

R. W. – NVC trainer, buddhist practitioner, mediator. Background as civil rights lawyer including age discrimination cases. Bridging individual transformation and social issues. Sees shift in larger culture: people no longer ask "what does inner peace have to do with activism?"

L. G. – developed systems perspective at IBM, technical problem-solving with computers. Community planning & geography with local & regional governments: group facilitation & consensus, planning meetings in public settings. Mediation, ToP, Co-housing. Part of Culture Change in Aging Network.

With much appreciation to each of you, for your valuable contributions to our shared experience!

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with much love,
Rosa