



NEGOTIATOR'S NOTEBOOK



2012, Quaking and Collective Wisdom

To shake or tremble, as from instability or shock is the definition of “Quaking”. As we enter 2012, are you quaking? I am.

So much of what we believe is right and common sense does not seem right or common sense to others. So much of what we believe is right and common sense in our profession and our industry does not seem right or common sense to others. The stakes for ourselves, our communities, our nation and our world seem to escalate. So much challenge, conflict and change is happening now. We have never been here before. Elders are limited in their guidance to us. Where may we turn for wisdom? Will 2012 mean the end of the world as we know it? Yes. And I will tell you why.

In 2011, some of my American clients were challenging me on Dirty Oil, the Keystone XL Pipeline, shale gas fracturing and more. At the same time, some of my Canadian clients were challenging me to help them gain or regain their places in the executive suites of organizational power. We also see the massive challenges our youth, our aboriginal peoples and our earth experience. There is a way to enlighten these conversations and challenges.

Question: what and who's interests are served by these perceptions of anger and animosity? Might the media sell more from a place of fear and separation than dreams and oneness? Might the politicians? Might the environmentalists? Might the oil industry? Would it be conceivable that the funding for hard-line environmental groups come from American companies whose interests are served by monopolizing the market for Canadian resources? What is leadership? Where is leadership? Leadership is a scarce resource. Leadership is not ramming your way through obstacles. Leadership is listening and leading.

I coin a new term; MEDIOTS. Mediots are those in the media (and the world) who subscribe to narrow, exclusive, one dimensional thinking, who cast fear, separation and mis-understanding in their pronouncements on current events and issues.

So here is where we can show our leadership and to actively take part in solving our many challenges; a circle. A circle is its many forms throughout history (a campfire, forum, round table...) has been a place to come together, listen, speak, connect, solve, learn and be a community. Our earth is a circle. Our life is a circle.

Consider that all the expertise and experience we each have may not be enough to effectively and successfully deal with the great challenges we face today as individuals, families, organizations, professions and nations. Consider the collective wisdom that is possible from a circle of listening, speaking, understanding and co-creating solutions.

This is an invitation to engage with people who care about subjects and questions that matter to you and your organization. Your circle will be most successful in solving significant challenges when you bring in others whose opinion and experiences are very different from yours. We can no longer afford “group think” or “yes men”. The stakes are high. We must invite in the first nations, the environmentalists, the Americans, the Asians, the youth, the wise women.... We must embrace conflict.

These are the principles of great circles;

- 1) our intention must be authentic,
- 2) we build relationship and trust first,
- 3) We invite and respect diversity of opinion,
- 4) We establish key questions that matter,
- 5) We listen,
- 6) We seek new ideas from the collective wisdom,
- 7) We are open to unexpected outcomes,
- 8) We take as long as it takes,
- 9) We commit to action and hold accountability.



So what are the questions that matter? From our list of significant challenges we face, choose with courage and vision. Remember not to sell or attempt to convince others. Understand what the underlying interests are and be open to what arises.

Forming the right questions is key. Einstein is quoted to have said that whatever the time available come to a solution, 95% of the time should be invested in finding the right question. Too often, we believe we already have the solution.

So is this circle stuff a bunch of hooey? I can give you many examples of how this approach has led to powerful economic breakthroughs. Here are two.

- a) Three years ago, the Alberta Government and industry wanted to combat the dirty oil mudslinging and do better for our economy and environment. Along with others, I was invited to work with them in dealing with Tailings Pond remediation. This became ERCB Directive 74. We convened world cafes/ circles as above. We invited the 35 oil sands operators, environmentalists, first nations, community members and more. Some of the questions we posed were; how do we ensure appropriate and effective management of the tailing ponds? What can we collaborate on? During the world cafes, people with diverse interests started to trust the process and offer new solutions. As a result of many things including these sessions, the industry now has a far better approach to and success in tailings ponds remediation. The industry deserves respect. The regulator had to be firm. All had to be open to new ways.
- b) In the Kootenay Rockies, a toxic environment of distrust and anger infected the business and political relationships around a proposed new subdivision near Cranbrook BC. I was invited to work with the various interested parties. After six months of world cafe circles, everyone was welcome, every perspective was honored, over 500 ideas arose and the design of the proposed subdivision was transformed into one of the most “green” community plans ever considered in North America. The investors and government authorities realized the insights that came from listening.

As leaders, let's work with all the diversity of opinions and perspectives we can. Let's create outcomes never believed possible. And let's move from "Mediot" championed division to inclusive vision. A wonderful outcome is that business may then do better business and create better bottom lines. We have seen too much of the fear based mentality that serves select interests.

Circles do not always result in great outcomes; sometimes they fail if the intention is not honest or conflict is feared. The effectiveness of a circle is determined by the quality of the intentions and actions of all participants. Circles may result in transformative relationships and outcomes. That is worth it. That is how 2012 will be very different than prior times. Quaking is real and building. And leaders will lead now with respect, patience, vision, purpose and engagement. Welcome, leader.

At the start of 2012, I share the beautiful old wisdom of the ancient Persian poet, Hafiz:

All the Hemispheres

Leave the familiar for a while.
Let your senses and bodies stretch out
Like a welcomed season
Onto the meadow and shores and hills.
Open up to the Roof.
Make a new watermark on your excitement
And love.
Like a blooming night flower,
Bestow your vital fragrance of happiness
And giving
Upon our intimate assembly.
Change rooms in your mind for a day.
All the hemispheres in existence
Lie beside an equator
In your heart.
Greet Yourself
In your thousand other forms
As you mount the hidden tide and travel
Back home.
All the hemispheres in heaven
Are sitting around a fire
Chatting
While stitching themselves together
Into the Great Circle inside of
You.