Building Bridges in Divided Communities

Presented by Tom Horner
Today’s political discourse

- Mistrust
- Immediate, anonymous
- Opinions based on myths, fear
- Narrow values; angry

*Actual citizen comments from recent affordable housing debates in Chaska, Savage, MN.*
Information Overload...at the Speed of Rumor

90% of history’s data has been generated in last two years; much of it transmitted in the 35 daily texts sent/received by average texter. (Digital Intelligence Today)

Mainstream or Social Media? It’s no longer OR...it’s AND.

The “Daily Me” is becoming the “We Media.”

Facebook drives 20 percent of the traffic to news sites and 30 percent of U.S. adults get their news directly from Facebook, according to NY Times

Every 60 seconds:
- 72 hours of video uploaded to YouTube
- 278,000 tweets
- 204 million emails sent

We don’t search for ideas/products. New ideas and products search for us, often with peer endorsements.

- 90% of consumers trust peer recommendations. Only 14% trust advertisements (Socialnomics).
- 7% trust government great deal/a lot; 22% trust newspapers great deal/a lot (Gallup).

Facts, rumors, opinions merge in people’s desire to be validated more than informed.

55% of people use mobile devices to keep up with the news; among 18-44 year olds, it’s 70%. (Reynolds Journalism Institute, U of Missouri)
How do we have conversations on big issues...

...when we have little common ground to start water-cooler conversations?
Losing common cultural touchstones

- Fewer “melting pot” events.
- Television programming target smaller audiences.

- In 1953, more than 67 percent of American households tuned into TV watched “I Love Lucy.”
- Today’s top-rated shows draw 13.5 rating (percent of homes tuned into a program)
- Racial divide among television viewers.


**Most Important Child-Rearing Values**

Consistently Conservative:
- Being Responsible: 61%
- Religious Faith: 59%
- Hard Work: 44%
- Obedience: 17%
- Being Well-Mannered: 15%

Consistently Liberal:
- Being Responsible: 47%
- Empathy for Others: 34%
- Helping Others: 28%
- Hard Work: 26%
- Curiosity: 23%

Pew Research Center
February 2015
Political engagement is most active at the extremes...

Contacted Elected Official in Last 2 Years
- Consistently conservative: 19%
- Mostly conservative: 34%
- Mixed: 45%
- Mostly liberal: 22%
- Consistently liberal: 0%

Always Vote
- Consistently conservative: 39%
- Mostly conservative: 50%
- Mixed: 43%
- Mostly liberal: 58%
- Consistently liberal: 58%
...but ideological purists often aren't open to other views

- 47% of “consistent conservatives” say the opinions they see on Facebook are mostly/always in line with their own
- 44% of “consistent liberals” are the most likely to block/stop following others on Facebook because they disagree with their views

Pew Research Center
October 2014
We don’t just disagree... We think THEIR motives are suspect

Unfavorable Views Partisans Have of Each Other

Dems View of GOP
- Very Unfavorable: 38%
- Unfavorable: 41%

GOP View of Dems
- Very Unfavorable: 43%
- Unfavorable: 39%

“Most...intense partisans believe the opposing party’s policies are so misguided that they threaten the nation’s well-being.”

(Pew Research, June 2014)
Facts often don’t matter

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**Safe to Eat Genetically Modified Food?**

- **U.S. Adults:** 37%
- **AAAS Scientists:** 88%

**Climate Change Mostly Caused by Human Activity?**

- **U.S. Adults:** 50%
- **AAAS Scientists:** 87%

- *Scientific American*, Jan, 2015; based on survey by Pew and American Association for Advancement of Science

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“Head-on attempts to persuade can sometimes trigger a backfire effect, where people not only fail to change their minds when confronted with the facts—they may hold their wrong views more tenaciously than ever.”

(Yale Law School Professor Dan Kahan quoted in “The Science of Why We Don't Believe Science,” Mother Jones Magazine, May-June 2011)
In this environment, anger is big business

The ‘Outrage Industry’

- Media environment promotes anger.
  - Reality TV
  - Talk radio
  - Online newspaper comments

- Social Media fueled by anonymity, immediacy.

- Inevitable outcome: The “Outrage Industry” is growing local roots

“Insight or Incite?”
‘Richfield Becomes the Servants’ Quarters ‘Workforce Housing’ for Edina’

“At the risk of being called a racist, will we need to add police officers to handle these problem ridden folks? The whole deal sounds like Cabrini Green West to me. Has any government subsidized housing project not turned into a crime ridden slum?”

- Comment on “Richfield Patch,” a community news site
Fear, frustration fuel discontent; discontent fuels opposition

“Families that are neither rich nor poor may be under more downward economic and financial pressure than common but simplistic rank-based measures of income or wealth would suggest....(O)ne reason many Americans viewed themselves as struggling was that their real incomes had not advanced significantly beyond their parents’ even when they reached higher educational levels, while those who matched their parents’ achievements were actually worse off.”
Getting to ‘Yes’

Consensus and Action

- Common Values
- New Voices, New Forums
- Respect for all issues
- Compelling Vision
## Will ‘Your Solutions’ change ‘My Community?’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What We Like About Our Communities</th>
<th>What We Fear Change Brings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nice people with a sense of community.</td>
<td>People who aren’t involved; “they aren’t like me.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Safe, peaceful.</td>
<td>Crime, noise, social problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open space, parks, trails.</td>
<td>Density, congestion; it changes the “character” of a community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good schools.</td>
<td>Disruptions in classrooms. Resources siphoned off by non-English speaking residents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well-maintained, nice homes.</td>
<td>Residents who don’t take care of their property, especially residents of multi-family rental units.</td>
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*Source: Survey of Minnesotans, McKnight Foundation, Decisions Resources, 2009*
Start conversations where community is; not where you want it to be

Why aren’t MY interests as valued as THEIR interests?

Why do we want THOSE people in our community?

What happened to pulling yourself up by your own bootstraps?

I like our community the way it is.
Respecting the starting points isn’t accepting the premises.

Community action to improve health of kids starts with parental responsibility.

Climate change? Lots of snow in my back yard!

Transit

I like my car

Why should my taxes subsidize others?

Health reform starts with political ideology
Changing the conversation, not just the language

- Framing, messaging, advocacy are helpful...but honest conversations are essential.
- An honest conversation begins with listening.
  - Solutions are created, not imposed.
  - Incorporates actions, not just words.
  - Educates and informs community choices.

Be like Flo
- Friendly
- On your side
- A broker of information
The words you use make a difference. The most effective words do three things:

- Tap into core values and emotions.
- Clarify; drives understanding of need, shared benefits.
- Simplify.

“The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug.”

- Mark Twain
Respect your audience’s values

Casselton, ND...BNSF train derails in December 2013, spills 400,000 gallons of crude oil; 2,400 residents urged to evacuate in dead of winter; accident comes six months after Quebec derailment kills 47, incinerates town.

BNSF Statement:
“We are thankful there have been no injuries...and are terribly sorry for the inconvenience this derailment has caused residents in the area.”

Mayor Ed McConnell:
The North Dakota oil industry “has to convert from wildcatting to being a responsible neighbor.”
Homeowners’ have valid concerns

- How will you protect the value of my home?
- Will property taxes go up to pay for new social challenges?
- Can we maintain the character of the community?
- Will new residents have the same commitment to the community I do, or will they create new problems?
- Will this action benefit ME?
Conversations are two-way

- Government hearings aren’t conversations.
- Starting with defined solutions don’t promote understanding and sharing.
- Words and actions define conversations.
- Conversations occur in multiple settings.
Connect with new voices

What matters to me is...

I care about the same things!

Conversations that engage community with affected parties educate, build mutual understanding, change opinions.
Actions, honesty, respect make the long-term difference

- Think creatively about how new and old residents can be connected.
- Open the door to honest conversations about what new solutions mean to all stakeholders.
- Create a process for defining, addressing shared challenges.
- Respect those who are concerned with their self-interest.
Get opponents to stand down or supporters to stand up?

Focus is on “Problems”

- **Vocal Opponents**
  - Firmly and actively against

- **Quiet Opponents**
  - No public protests,

- **Uncertain**
  - Believe in the “idea” of affordable housing, worried about their community

Focus is on “Benefits”

- **Advocates**
  - Social justice issue

- **Quiet Supporters**
  - Support is soft, vulnerable to attacks from opponents

Source: Survey of Minnesotans, McKnight Foundation, Decisions Resources, 2009

- Advocates - 10%
- Quiet Supporters - 43%
- Uncertain - 21%
- Quiet Opponents - 10%
- Vocal Opponents - 16%
Create new forums

In communities in which people increasingly live, recreate and worship with people like themselves, places of employment are one of the few places in which we engage with people who aren’t like us.

Businesses have a stake in healthier communities.

How can communities leverage that mutual interest?

There is a widening gulf between educated, wealthy white professionals and their less educated, less affluent, working-class white counterparts.

Charles Murray, “Coming Apart”
‘Voice of Understanding’ or ‘Voice of Authority’

Authority

Decisionmakers

Vested Interests

Providers

Consumers

Understanding
Voice of Authority

- Define Solution
- Engage Supporters; Rebut
- Implement Through Government Action

Voice of Understanding

- Engage Community in Defining Vision
- Build Consensus on Benefits
- Implement Shared Solutions
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