



VIOLENCE: COMMUNICATION ABOUT A LACK OF COMMUNICATION

In my 20s I attended riots that were about to explode into full-scale riots. It was a part of my job. First at San Francisco State College (now University) as an assistant to Acting President S.I. Hayakawa, and later for various governmental groups.

In most all cases I got to the edge of the crowd, made quick observations, and got the hell out of there. Once at San Francisco State I was arrested and later released. That was an experience I won't forget. Even though years have passed I believe the principles of riots are still current today as they were then.

Observe: First people observe the event from some level of distance mentally and sometimes physically. During this phase of involvement a person answers two questions, "What's going on?" and "Do I belong here?"

Participate: This aspect is like going swimming in the sea. Most people worked their way into the water slowly. Of course, there are those who fly by like an organic bullet. Most of us however, ease ourselves in. Involvement evolves as interest increases.

Perpetuate: When we get hooked on the message or solution to a problem we often want to proselytize by telling the world our good news or keen observations. Sometimes when we do that others are disinterested or even judgmental about our new reality.

Provoke: When we feel passionate about a subject and others seem in denial or rejecting our views we sometimes provoke them with strong judgments about themselves, the group to which they belong, or even their motivation, values, and patriotism.

This cycle of involvement is recognizable and even explainable by simple observations about human behavior. What becomes difficult for us to fathom is how these recognizable steps can result in violence, injury and even death. What's underneath all of this uproar we see in our current presidential race? Let's look again at the various stages I have just discussed.

Underneath the sequence of involvement is the word motivation and human need. We are a curious class of life seeking alternatives and answers to the problems that plague our daily life.

Some of the ways that politicians get elected and reelected is to speak to those needs that are unfulfilled or feel overlooked. It should not be a surprise to anyone that an individual noted for boisterous behavior, provocative actions and simplistic solutions should draw like-minded people. Some audience participants may have a few screws loose. Some may have a short fuse wanting and waiting for an opportunity to justify dropping the pressure in their system by lashing out.

Simple questions often require complex and well thought out answers that are generally absent in debates in our sound bite culture. Impulsive behavior often reflect a short circuit of the real thinking and reflection. No one wants to hear an action-oriented person delving into detail or providing an in-depth analysis of the underlying aspects and causalities to complex problems. They want to hear why and how their anger is justified and worthy of expression.

“Shooting from the lip”, bypassing the complexities of an issue and will stir an audience faster and deeper than solemn reflection and insightful observations. It is quite a dangerous balancing act for the speaker addressing an audience who looks for instant insight as opposed to thoughtful solutions.

Nobody goes to a circus with the expectation of receiving a lecture on eating habits or mating rituals of the animals. They want to see the animals perform — they want action!

Why do we go to a boxing match? To see skill and agility? Or blood in a good fight with action and violence? The answer is probably a little bit of both. But that's the danger! It's all about balance.

This reminds me of the inaugural address by John F. Kennedy in 1961. He remarked, "Those people who foolishly sought power by writing the back of the tiger ended up inside."

And so it is with Donald Trump. Many people have different definitions of the word action, as people become inspired to express their viewpoint when an individual speaks to those unfulfilled needs. The problem becomes exacerbated when someone nearby says or does something that implies their viewpoint is wrong, misguided, or just plain stupid.

When that audience member feels (s)he is with a group of like-minded citizens a kind of camaraderie and a special atmosphere develops. And the speaker is telling you that you are right in endorsing his beliefs and that you should be embraced for your courage and insights.

Moreover, an audience is stirred to action and there is nothing at that moment that they can do other than to shout and tap into their frustrations and repressed anger. If they perceive someone in their midst who verbally and maybe even physically attacks their philosophy and belief then violence is often the answer, period!

Having watched crowds become agitated all over the world, I am not surprised to see a brash and bold speaker like Donald Trump trigger the heretofore repressed rage in masses of people that he regularly gathered at his public functions. He is without a doubt a showman, skilled performer and in fact an agent provocateur at times. Some would say that he violates the ruling of the United States Supreme Court when they said; "It is unlawful to yell fire in a crowded theater."

People come into the theater of Trump expecting him to yell "FIRE!", as they feel the fire in their own belly about injustice, and a denial of the needs they feel are blocked from full expression.

So who is to blame? Is it the passengers on the Trump bus? Is it the bus driver himself? Is it the implied sanction to express that which has heretofore, been repressed? Is Trump out of control? Are his audiences out of control?

My answer is simple, it is a combination of all of the above.

He has garnered a group of what Eric Hoffer called true believers. It is a collection of people who do not doubt their needs, and the man who presents himself as the answer to those unfulfilled needs. What is clear is that he has tapped into, and exposed the years of frustration of a population who feels disenfranchised and forgotten.

So what shall we do after the lid has been blown off the Pandora's box? And what can we expect? How do we go forward?

Perhaps a reality check is in order. Even though the press is quick to correct Trump's overstatement of attendance by most accounts the turnout is extraordinary.

There should be a universal statement made by all people running for the presidency in 2016 that collectively they agree that *violence is a communication about a lack of communication*. And what's essential, as we go forward in the marketplace of ideas, is goodwill, good judgment and good listening to the needs of the people as they encourage them to exhibit non-violent behavior.

What can we expect if this will not happen? There will be more outbursts and violence. Unstable individuals find themselves attracted to the circus tent where the world is simplified into black and white — good and bad.

Donald Trump is the Ring Master and a smart man. He is riding the back of a tiger and needs to bring balance in alignment with his provocative worldview, lest he end up inside!

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