



Breakdown and Breakthrough – we have both

By David Wick and Dot Maver

A significant challenge in the Ashland, Oregon community, as well as communities across the country, is the decline of civil communications and the deep divides which has stressed community members, severed relationships, impeded community cooperation and well-being, and induced violence in some instances. This phenomenon is well known and creates a great deal of anxiety among many people. We have breakdown.

We also live in an age of significant breakthrough in peacebuilding and each of us has this choice in front of us every single day. I found this emphasized in the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission October 9, 2016 Ashland Tidings article I came across by Dot Maver, Co-founder of the National Peace Academy USA. The article is just as relevant today.

As she stated, "It all started at age 13. My anger exploded at my brother and then dissolved as I "saw myself in other." I swore off anger. Years later, while coaching softball, I realized my essential desire was to put an end to violence. I discovered a means to do so through sports, developing a shared-responsibility, shared-leadership model based on cooperative competition. Competing and striving together brings out our best: the basis of the Olympics.

Peace education became of interest as an integral component of every curriculum, not something separate. Peace is living in harmonious relationship with self, others, and all life. The very skills of peace building are those social-emotional and communication skills that we know are better indicators of success than IQ. We have the shared responsibility of taking a whole-systems caring approach to all life on Earth. Attitudes that separate are not serving us well.

My path of peace education led to co-founding The National Peace Academy USA and The River Phoenix Center for Peacebuilding, whose work can help communities beset by violence find ways to come together through community dialogue, restorative justice, empathy, trauma resilience, and conflict resolution — and to understand that unmet needs drive behavior.

Humanity is experiencing an all-systems breakdown. Peacebuilding is part of an all-systems breakthrough. A culture of peace is clearly emerging and all over the world, global citizens are speaking and acting out in this moment of crisis that represents both danger and opportunity. The danger is doing business as usual; the opportunity is intentionally building a world that works for everyone.

What can we do as global citizens on this pathway to a culture of peace?

- First, we can take personal and shared responsibility for being the change we wish to see in the world.
- Second, we can encourage and express goodwill — love in action — and begin naming and appreciating the signs of goodwill everywhere.
- Third, we can seek out Others who are inclined to a spirit of cooperation and who demonstrate a willingness to work for what they want instead of fighting against what they do not want. With an attitude of positive peace, we know that we get more of whatever we focus on.
- Fourth, we can offer our unique contributions on behalf of the common good, knowing that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

When we live the New Story into our communities, a culture of peace becomes inevitable. Let us continue to sacrifice personal differences, bridge ideological cleavages, and harmonize polarized schools of thought — personally, socially and among countries. As Dag Hammarskjold said, "The pursuit of peace and progress cannot end in a few years in either victory or defeat. The pursuit of peace and progress, with its trials and its errors, its successes and its setbacks, can never be relaxed and never abandoned."

When we connect, not convince, we touch hearts and minds. Although we cannot force a change of mind, a change of heart may occur, leading to a willing change of mind. When attitudes shift, behaviors change, and cultural norms shift. Ultimately, policies are instituted that more truly reflect our essential values.

Thank you for your comprehensive investment in peace, Ashland. You give us hope!"

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