

COMMUNITY VALUES OF THE FRESNO REGION
Adopted by the Fresno Business Council on November 8, 2001

Community Values

Guiding Principles for Community Transformation

Stewardship

We will lead and follow as stewards of our region, caring responsibly for our community assets. We will work together to achieve the greatest, long-term benefit for the community as a whole.

Boundary Crossing and Collaboration

We are willing to cross political, social ethnic and economic boundaries and partner with others to achieve community outcomes. We will lead beyond the walls to create an inclusive, cohesive community through partnership and collaboration.

Commitment to Outcomes

We are willing to take responsibility for tasks and achieving specified outcomes. We are committed to staying involved until the tasks are completed.

"Art of the Possible" Thinking

We believe that anything is possible in the Fresno Region. We will envision success without limitations and then backward map a specific, attainable strategy for achieving that vision.

Fact-Based Decision Making

To the greatest extent possible, we will base decisions and action plans on objective data, thereby avoiding distortion of issues by personal feelings or agendas. At the same time, we seek to get to the heart of the matter and recognize that facts without context can be misleading.

Truth Telling

We value the empowerment of everyone involved, along with all community stakeholders, to honestly and forthrightly share all knowledge, experiences and insights relative to the work at hand. We take responsibility for ensuring our truth is current, not historical. We all share the responsibility for maintaining the truth telling standard.

Power Parity

We respect all persons and recognize that there are diverse viewpoints. Positional power will not determine a strategy or preferred outcome, merit will. Viewpoints from diverse constituencies will be proactively sought to ensure the best possible outcomes for the community.

Commitment to Resolving Conflict

Conflict is inevitable and is sometimes required in order to achieve the best outcomes possible. Healthy conflict involves valuing every individual regardless of his or her stance on a specific issue and an unwavering commitment to working through the conflict in a positive manner despite its severity.

Asset-Based Approach

We are focused on using a strengths-based, asset-oriented approach to people and issues. We believe that positive change occurs when we appreciate value and invest in what is best in our people and community.

Conflict of Interest

We agree to disclose any personal or professional conflict of interest that may affect our objectivity before engaging in work that will impact the community. We seek to avoid even the appearance of impropriety.

Over a dozen years ago in assessing where we were as a community, it appeared that despite a lot of well-meaning effort, the problems that had plagued Fresno for decades were not getting better. If anything, they were getting worse. There was agreement that a lot of efforts were underway, but they operated too often in silos. This led to a mindset of competition where various groups seeking to tackle the same problems did not see each other as comrades in arms but rather, the enemy in competition for scarce resources and just as important, control. There was not only dysfunction within organizations but clearly between organizations. The business, non-profit, educational, and political communities did not seem to be able to truly collaborate on any important project. Again, the internal problems they each faced made working across sectors nearly impossible.

This presented a fundamental question, how do we tackle huge community issues in a way that leads to actual progress when the current structure did not support those goals? We had resources, but no coordination between various stakeholders to dedicate those resources in a cooperative way through synergy to maximize their effectiveness. The more the situation was looked at, it became clear of the absolute necessity of cooperation leading to collaboration between all segments of our community. So then the question became how to begin that process? How to change environment from one of competition to collaboration with aligned goals leading to aligned decision making? What became clear was the starting point in a process leading to different results was to begin with a different way of thinking and communicating in dealing with our problems. It was not that people did not see the problems and want to solve them; it was that we did not know how to work together cooperatively towards shared goals.

Out of this came the Community Values of the Fresno Region. Whenever you undertake to accomplish something important, a necessary starting point is to establish the ground rules under which you collectively agree to operate. This creates group expectations and facilitates communication within and between organizations. All the talking in the world is not communication until someone else understands what you are saying. Out of these values, we hoped and continue to hope to build all the bridges necessary between the stakeholders in our locale to have a solid foundation upon which to build a better Fresno Region.

Each of these values is central to what we are trying to accomplish and they exist as a whole. There is no reason to try to rank them because depending on a particular situation, any one of them at that moment might become the most vital. Also, this is not a choose 6 out of 10 and you are doing well. They are 10 co-dependent standards by which we must measure our own conduct and by which others should be invited to evaluate us. They are not intended to be adopted and then shelved never to be seen or heard from again. They need to be at the forefront of everything we do as a community. This also means they need to be enforced. When folks wander from these standards of conduct it needs to be dealt with, fairly, respectfully but also firmly. People need to understand that these are the expectations. If you cannot abide by these Community Values, it is quite likely you eventually will become the problem.

It is a call to civility in public discourse. None of this tells a person what they should think. This is not about one's ideology. It is about how we approach our problems. We welcome different ways of thinking about problems. Diversity is a great asset in Fresno especially if we see each of our diverse background through the lens of the Community Values.

The goal is to build bridges of trust across what, at times, has been wide and hostile divides. While our community has many challenges, may be of equal importance to solving them, is how we solve them. The Community Values place an importance on the process and by doing that, creates the environment where process leads to successful outcomes.

What follows is a brief discussion of each of the Community Values. This is not intended as a static monologue, but simply a starting point of what should remain a dynamic discussion of how we see these values and how to best make them central in how we commit to operate one to another.

COMMUNITY VALUES OF THE FRESNO REGION

Stewardship

“We will lead and follow as stewards of our region, caring responsibly for our community assets. We will work together to achieve the greatest, long-term benefit for the community as a whole.”

Any time we as humans try to move collectively from point “A” to point “B”, it requires that someone take the responsibility to lead. Whether the ultimate goals sought are noble or ignominious, leadership is a must. In fact, to even get to the point of having a set of well-defined goals to pursue takes leadership.

While leadership is a must, it is not in and of itself either good or bad. History is full of leaders who were horrible (albeit effective) people creating a wake of misery and suffering behind them. Of equal measure, we also have the example of many leaders who truly worked for the betterment of mankind.

Every leader has some motivation to lead otherwise, they simply would not lead at all. The real key is to determine, honestly, what is your motivation to lead? What are the results that you wish to achieve through your leadership? What would you see as success from your leadership efforts? Where do the benefits from your leadership flow?

A community is benefited by leaders who truly seek the best for the community at large, and is damned by leaders who see everything through a narrow prism of what is in it for them or their small constituency. Fresno is as diverse as any community in the world. It needs leaders who can take the broader perspective and seek the greatest good for the larger community.

There is a responsibility for those in positions of leadership to lead. If you are in a leader position, but are not willing to do the heavy lifting involved, then get out of the way of those that are willing to do it. Also, if your leadership is based on what is in it for you, please reassess why you are involved in this community. Over the years, the Fresno area has been negatively impacted by personal agendas being pursued with little thought as to the overall impact on the citizenry as a whole. It is not our socioeconomic challenges that have been the greatest obstacle to moving Fresno forward, but rather, a lack of consistent leadership that has truly sought the general welfare.

It all begins with attitude. The first question leaders should be willing to ask themselves is why and how they are leading? After those issues get squared away, you can focus on where you are leading. Fresno desperately needs to increase its ranks of steward leaders. We need folks that answer the “how” and “why” questions of leadership with a true stewardship approach. A steward leader has the right heart and attitude towards the work they do.

Stewardship is a form of leadership where the leaders see themselves as serving the greater good. It is not about setting a series of personal goals and leading others towards those ends. Servant leadership keeps yourself from ever being the focal point. Who is the object then

of this stewardship, in other words, whose interests are we serving? It is the entire community. It is about doing for all segments of the population.

The true community steward is a leader that understands the following:

1. This is not about competing forces wrangling over a set of limited benefits, this is about expanding opportunity for everyone.
2. This is about seeing things beyond the narrow focus. There is a lot to learn from those you are trying to serve. The focus is not just to do for others, but to truly reach out and understand others so that they can better serve them and make them a part of the process.
3. This is about results not recognition.
4. This about feeling successful when you see those within the community being benefited, even when your efforts have no direct benefit back to you.
5. This is about developing the next generation of stewards, and that our next generation of steward leaders continue to represent the broader Fresno. They coach the value of being a good steward.
6. This is about being in it for the long haul. They are willing to invest today's blood, sweat and tears for the future, even when there is no immediate payoff.

Ultimately, the key is to be focused on the good you are doing for others. The steward leader has a goal to make things better for you and yours. It is where the heart of the good steward leader lives. Do you wish to dominate others for your purposes or serve them for their betterment? The steward leader knows the right answer to that question.

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Border Crossing and Collaboration

“We are willing to cross political, social, ethnic and economic boundaries and partner with others to achieve community outcomes. We will lead ‘beyond the walls’ to create an inclusive, cohesive community through partnership and collaboration.”

Fresno, at times, can be seen as a multitude of walled enclaves within the larger city. This leads to various groups trying to address systemic problems from their narrow, albeit well intentioned perspective.

Our diversity can be our biggest strength or our complete undoing. Diversity means that many different ideas and approaches can be brought to bear on any problem. Out of this expansive gene pool of ideas comes better solutions leading to more effect results. When thinking is incestuous, it results in a very narrow range of options that often only appeal to those who are already similarly minded.

Border Crossing is the idea of **us** taking the first steps. To move outside our comfort zone and meet those who, in a myriad of ways, are different from us and to meet them on their turf and on their terms. We need to understand that in taking meaningful steps to reach out to other dissimilar groups we may face the twin challenges of resistance from our normal collaborators and distrust from those we are attempting to reach.

Collaboration is the idea of working **with** those that you have crossed the various borders to meet. This is not us taking our solutions and imposing them on the world around us. This is not as the British used to call it carrying the “White Man’s Burden”. As Steven Covey, the author of 7 Habits, has so wisely advised, “strive first to understand and then to be understood.”

Real communication begins when we are prepared to listen. You cannot learn by only listening to yourself or even by listening to those that are like-minded. Real learning takes place when you are open to different approaches and different points of view.

When you get the opportunity to interact with those you have crossed borders to meet, a teachable attitude is a real must. Honest communication is a vital building block of any healthy collaboration. The powerful impact on a person when they feel you having truly heard and understood them can never be underestimated.

For effective collaboration the question should never be what is in it for me, but rather, what is in it for us. The old expression that “a rising tide lifts all boats” really applies here.

We will be more effective in our role as leaders as we embrace the opportunity our city provides. We need to see our diversity as a resource to be taken advantage of rather than a problem to be managed.

One final thought on this issue comes from a missionary who recently spoke at my church. He said “before you can save souls, you must first deal with some very basic needs that people have.” You must be prepared to do the real spade work to be able to reach people. He identified five walls that must be torn down to truly be able to reach people:

Ignorance
Poverty
Violence
Addiction
Disease

Just as this is true in third world missionary work, it is also something that has a bearing on our efforts in Fresno. I was struck by how much of his list was applicable to Fresno. As we cross borders, we may venture into territory where our agenda may pale in comparison to immediate real day-to-day struggles those folks face. Before we can get others to address our set of lofty goals, basic needs may have to be addressed. This is part of our challenge in re-making Fresno.

Just because the above issues do not appear to affect my little circle in a direct way, does not mean that it should not be my concern or that it does not in reality affect me and mine in real and significant ways.

Border Crossing and Collaboration requires real work and sustained effort. There are easier ways to go about issue solving. The only problem with the alternatives is that they are ineffective and result in you developing new game plans every few years to deal with the same set of problems, but never seeing you reach a point where real sustainable progress is made.

Border Crossing and Collaboration will give us the opportunity to moved forward as one community.

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Commitment to Outcomes

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There is an old saying that is sadly often true, “Talk is cheap”. While talking is an invaluable preamble to acting, it is not an end in itself. The exchange of ideas is vital in moving a community forward, however, the real steward takes the ideas and make them into something real and tangible. Get your vision and then strive to make it a reality. The goal is never to talk an issue to death, but rather, talk things through to a point where the goals are both appropriate and clear. We are looking for real concrete measurable outcomes.

The goal is always to reach outcomes that move things forward in a positive direction. Outcomes should be both practical and also challenging. They should stretch us without causing us to become unraveled. Our best learning always occurs just outside our comfort zone. The outcomes sought ought to be clearly defined without hidden agendas. We do not want to lay out one public vision while pursuing a very different private vision. Hypocrisy is poison that pollutes the very life blood of a community.

Commitment to outcomes requires real perseverance and diligence. When the going gets tough the tough gets going and sunny day-ers drop off. Too often it is at this point that many in the group seem to disappear. They enjoy the conversation about problems and have opinions about anything and everything, but when it comes to rolling up one’s sleeves and doing the hard work, they are nowhere to be found. Don’t engage in the debate unless you are interested in sticking around to do the hard work of solving the problems.

Creating a great vision can be fun. The real work occurs in the trenches where great visions become reality. It is here in the trenches that the heroes of the community step forward. Anyone who enjoys sausage should not watch it being made. This can be very true of pursuing outcomes. We all enjoy the sausage, but who is committed to going in and doing the hard and, at times, disagreeable work of getting it made?

If you have a commitment to outcomes, you are willing to allow the results you achieve to be analyzed and assessed in terms of the outcomes that were sought. Too often groups try to take credit for positive outcomes that are naturally occurring, having nothing to do with their efforts, simply because it makes them look good. Stewards give credit where credit is due and do not take it where none is due, they do not build resumes on fortuitous circumstances.

Simply serving on a committee is not doing. It is what happens between meetings where the most important stuff almost always occurs. Stewards are those people on the committee whose raise their hands to do work that the committee identifies and then is truly accountable for getting it done. They keep at it until the outcome has been achieved. They do not declare victory early, trying to cover the less than stellar results with clever semantics.

When striving for the outcomes, we should never lose sight of the process. The process by which you strive to achieve the outcomes either builds a framework to make pursuing the next goal easier or leaves a lot of wounded people, and you have to find a whole set of new troops because of the poor experience. These Values of the Fresno Region are as much about the process by which we problem solve as the problem solving itself. So we need to put a priority on outcomes without sacrificing the process by which the outcome is achieved.

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“Art of the Possible” Thinking

“We believe that anything is possible in the Fresno Region. We will envision success without limitations and then backward map a specific, attainable strategy for achieving that vision.”

Imagine for a minute three things that, if accomplished, would make the biggest positive impact in Fresno over the next 20 years. Rather than considering the obstacles that are presented in striving to accomplish those goals, just think in terms of what would need to be done to accomplish those goals and put together a game plan to get there (again, without thinking in terms of how easy or difficult any particular step may be).

We need banish expressions like, “That is not the way we do it around here,” or “That will never work because ...”. The thinking that is represented by those types of statements hang like an albatross around our collective civic neck. We are often held back by a “can’t do” attitude. Too many of us have little Doubting Thomas’s whispering in our ear that it cannot be done.

What things don’t we accomplish because we never try? We live in a world that seems to reward risk avoidance. We become trapped by a fear of failure. Edison made 3,000 attempts to create a workable light bulb until one finally work. He never looked at it as 3,000 failures, but rather, being successful 3,000 times in discovering how not to do it. So often the path to the thing truly worth doing is littered with a lot of missteps and catastrophes along the way.

There are sometimes a hundred routes to failure and only one to success. In those cases, it is easy to identify reasons why it won’t or you can’t. The trick is to continue to seek that one path that results in accomplishing your goal. So often when victory is not swift, enthusiasm starts to wane and you are abandoned by many who simply are not willing to impose a discipline and diligence to stay focused on the goal rather than the set back.

We too often accept the conventional wisdom which guarantees that nothing bold ever happens. We are tied to the past which serves as an anchor that keeps us from being able to move any further than the anchor chain allows us to go. The status quo is safe, but does nothing to address the needs that surround us daily. As Einstein pointed out - You cannot solve your current problem by limiting yourself to the level of thinking that got you there in the first place.

If you did not start out by identifying all the reasons something might be impossible, what might you be willing to try. Then by trying, what you might be able to accomplish? We so often create our own limitations that in reality exist only in our minds.

It is hard to get the troops excited about taking on a job when the goal is little. We must work on imagining a great Fresno Region. We then set goals based on arriving there as soon as we can. The Art of the Possible means realizing that things are only truly impossible when you never try in the first place. Even apparent failure is success if you learn something that helps you

the next time out. We must expand our horizons. Accomplishing 50% of a great plan is better than accomplishing 100% of mediocre plan.

It is time to see Fresno from the perspective of all the opportunities that exist before us. We get to create the community that will be home to our children's children and beyond. Nothing should stand in the way of imagining the best tomorrow for them and then working diligently to build it.

COMMUNITY VALUES OF THE FRESNO REGION

Fact-Based Decision Making

“To the greatest extent possible, we will base decisions and action plans on objective data, thereby avoiding distortion of issues by personal feelings or agendas. At the same time, we seek to get to the heart of the matter and recognize that facts without context can be misleading.”

As the old saying goes “facts are stubborn things.” They are also often used in conjunction with adjectives like “cold” and “hard.” As John Adams once said, “Don’t confuse me with the facts, my mind is already made up.” We have all, at times, been faced with facts that we had to deal with which we desperately wished were different than they were. Many of us when so confronted, opt to put our avoidance mechanisms into full operation. Of course, that approach solves nothing and only leaves you to deal with the truth at a later time when you are forced to leave the alternate universe you have created for yourself.

We tend to ignore or avoid facts that we do not like, especially when those facts run contrary to our own well-ordered world view. Facts should lead you to truth rather than you deciding what truth is without facts and then simply trying to find facts that support your truth. In most cases if you look long enough some fact will emerge to support your thinking especially if you are willing to twist it from a square to a tetrahedron. This is especially true in the information age in which we live where opinions truly have become a “dime a dozen.” The blogosphere is full of unsupported poppycock parading itself as hard news. In fact, as the news media becomes more competitive with multiple 24-hour news channels, the one thing that seems to be sacrificed more and more is substantiated facts. There is both a rush to beat the other guy infused with loads of editorial comment parading itself as hard news.

Opinions are fine things as long as we remember that not all opinions are of equal value. In most cases, if you dig a millimeter of most opinions you will find that they rest on a little more than opinions based on speculation with that speculation based on emotion. Try this experiment - next time someone states a strongly worded opinion, ask them to give you the facts that support that opinion. It is an uncomfortable position to be placed in based on personal experience. How many of us have ever forwarded an e-mail trumpeting some important fact only to find out in the end that the e-mail based on erroneous factual underpinnings?

Too many people try to use facts for their ends to change others rather than to be open to allow facts to change them. Facts are our friends when they truly inform our world and reality. You must not only embrace the facts that you like, you must be willing to change based on the facts you do not like. The best way to approach facts is with an initial dose of skepticism. Check it out, make sure it is accurate and supported by something beyond mere whimsy. If the fact passes muster, then you should respect the fact and allow it to influence your thinking. Statistics can be your ally if you honestly seek to understand them and allow them to bring you knowledge rather than using them in some twisted manner for your own desired outcome.

We desperately need accurate facts to order our lives and make decisions. The better the facts, the better the opportunity to make the best decision. Some facts are objective based simply

on hard data. For example, the Washington Monument is 555 feet. Others are more subjective in nature such as the turning point of the Civil War was the Battle of Gettysburg. This does not mean that they are not factual, just that they themselves need to be supported by other objective facts and are subject to various opinions. Other “facts” truly are just opinions such as: pizza is the perfect food. Not that opinions are not in their own way valid, they are just not facts. You have to know what you are dealing with: objective fact, subjective fact or mere opinion, to know how to treat it.

When making decisions, you want to assemble the best set of facts that you can that are relevant to the decision you are trying to make. Objective facts are great, subjective facts are important and even opinions help to spice the decision making process. The facts should form the basis of what you do. They are the foundation upon which you operate. A bad foundation will lead to a bad result. Often, when you start out with bad facts (or no facts) you only end up making the situation worse than when you started. All the best intentions in the world will not overcome bad facts.

Facts can focus change and also measure change. The Fresno Business Council has developed a Community Scorecard for the Fresno Region. It is chalk full of all sorts of data for the region in which we live. It is designed to help us see how we are doing against data pulled from multiple reliable sources. It will hold a mirror up to our progress and force us to look honestly how we are doing as a community. We welcome and also fear what it may show from time to time. But at the end of the day, it will help us envision a better Fresno and help us track our way there.

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Truth Telling

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In Old Testament times, the job title for the truth teller was “prophet.” This was not a highly desired position almost all of them initially begged off when approached by God. Rarely was the prophet given a message that the crowd wanted to hear. He held forth with the unvarnished truth and often took his lumps for his forthrightness. Hebrew mothers probably did not hope that their sons would grow up to be prophets. It was clearly an important responsibility, but not one with a lot of fringe benefits.

Little has changed over the last several millennia. Truth often bucks popular sentiment, with an emphasis on the word “popular.” It can set long, cherished conventions on their ear. A popular saying is, “Do not blame the messenger” (this saying is especially popular among messengers). Some truth is comfortable (meaning I agree with it and it does not cause me to have to change), while other truth can be completely unsettling.

There is the story of the team of road builders cutting a new road through a thickly, overgrown forest. Several miles into the job one of the engineers climbs up one of the tallest trees and realizes a horrible truth. He shouts down to the men that are working that they are cutting their way through the wrong forest. Their response, “Shut up we are making good time.” Sometimes we get so focused on the task at hand we forget to figure out the truth in what we are doing before starting off. Every task worth doing is a task worth examining from the outset.

How many times while sitting in a committee setting or a business meeting or for that matter, with your spouse, have you been hesitant to speak up, not because of what you had to say was not relevant but rather, because you feared the reaction to what was said. Truth tellers often pay a price for their honesty. Of course, you should be sensitive in the way you tell the truth if you want to have a better chance of being listened to, but that should not cause you to bury the truth. Remember, the visionary truth teller usually has a statute erected in their honor at least a generation or two after they have died.

Often, you can assess a person’s emotional maturity by how they react to truth that is new and challenges their established norms. For the mature person, that truth is often the catalyst for change. But that truth also often upsets the status quo. For the most part, we are uncomfortable with change and tend to be, at least initially, resistant. Truth often takes us to unfamiliar places and undercuts the world in which we have grown accustomed. We can all use a little truth in our lives from time to time even if it is unsettling. It is the brave person who brings the truth and it is also the brave person who allows that truth to change them.

We should all be interested in the truth of what we spout before we begin confidently opining on some subject. There is an old saying that “truth rarely catches up with the lie.” The story is told about a man coming to Martin Luther and asking him what he should do after he discovered some gossip he shared was in fact untrue. The contrite fellow was clearly concerned on how this would reflect on him, let alone the subject of his gossip. Martin Luther told the gentleman to take a pillow of goose feathers, cut it open and spread the feather liberally around the town square. Martin Luther then told the gentleman that 24 hours he was to go back to the town square and collect every last feather from the day before. Martin Luther’s point is clearly obvious, it is equally difficult to reel in a lie once it has been spread.

It is our responsibility to both be open to telling the truth as well as hearing the truth. Between the two hearing sometimes can be the most difficult. Often our reactions to the truth never get to intellectual processing because emotional processing takes over and kills the truth before we really have a chance to dispassionately assess it. So often we simply do not want to hear the truth. So often the audience that needs to hear the truth the most is the audience that shuts down mentally. In fact, in some ways, maybe a better Community Value might be truth listening as opposed to truth telling. We each need to make the commitment to listen and consider other opinions. We are free to discount them, but only after considering them. So often, rather than allowing the truth to stand on its own, we apply all sorts of filters based on our view of the messenger so that our own prejudices can cause us to miss the whole point.

Truth flourishes in an environment where openness is welcomed and differing opinions are respected. If someone is being less than truthful, they must be challenged. In order for the truth to hold sway, the half-truth and the outright falsification must be called into question. Truth is our friend and a real friend challenges us when we need to be challenged. Truth will challenge us and change us for the better if we are open to it. People uninterested in the truth will never, in the end, be able to solve the real problems that we face. If we care about positive change, we care about positive truth.

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Power Parity

“We respect all persons and recognize that there are diverse viewpoints. Positional power will not determine a strategy or preferred outcome, merit will. Viewpoints for diverse constituencies will be proactively sought to ensure the best possible outcomes for the community.”

Power parity is a term borrowed from macro-economics and is a technique used to determine the relative exchange rates between currencies of different countries to create equivalent purchasing power. In the marketplace of ideas the goal is to set up a structure where equivalency is achieved so all opinions have an equal chance for fair consideration. When considering and sorting out various ideas the competition should be based on the value of the viewpoint and not the weight of the person advancing it.

Legitimate voices are often drowned out by louder voices until they give up trying to be heard. Sometimes it means listening harder to the person speaking from the far end of the table, especially when you do not hear from them very often. You should be interested in encouraging the group in a way designed to get as many positions on the table as you can. It means creating an environment where people are willing to share and hopefully anxious to express their thoughts.

Some folks simply attempt to shut down others by the volume of their convictions. This type of bullying needs to be confronted. Intimidation is the enemy of healthy discussion. Some folks are skilled in debate and use that talent to control the conversation. The problem is that a skill in debate does not mean that one's ideas are better. What it means is that you are skilled at making your ideas sound better. You want to create an environment where what is achieved to the greatest extent possible is civil dialogue in measured tones. There is an issue of respect here that needs to be recognized. While you do not need to agree with everything people say, you need to respect their right to say it.

You never know where the answer will come from. Sometimes it can come from the most unlikely source. Keep asking yourself “Who have we not heard from yet?” Diverse voices and new voices add to the quality of the final decisions. Ask yourself “Do I listen carefully to what each person says or do I allow personal prejudices or preconceived expectations color my attitude before the first word leaves their lips?” If you are going to let one or two voices always dominate, the rest of the folks sitting around the table are simply wasting their time. In such cases, you do not need a committee but rather, you establish a dictatorship or in some especially unfortunate cases, a theocracy.

Of course, promoting and wanting to hear diverse ideas can lead us to an equally dangerous place. Living in a post-modern world, we sometimes get sold on idea that all positions are of equal value. This paradigm says that all points of view merit equal consideration. The fact is, that some ideas are brilliant and others are silly pieces of uniformed fluff. It is important that we recognize the difference. The point is simply to make sure the

evaluation of ideas is not based on who leaves the biggest wake behind themselves but rather, against the merit of the thought itself.

Martin Luther King's thoughts touched on this issue when he said "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." He was talking about reaching a point where the externals do not control how a person or their ideas are treated. It starts with each of us. Put aside any pre-judgment and let the ideas themselves drive the discussions and the solutions.

COMMUNITY VALUES OF THE FRESNO REGION

Commitment to Resolving Conflict

“Conflict is inevitable and is sometimes required in order to achieve the best outcome possible. Healthy conflict involves valuing every individual regardless of his or her stance on a specific issue and an unwavering commitment to working through the conflict in a positive manner despite its severity.”

The best results are almost always achieved when the ideas behind the solutions that have been tested and challenged. You want to have an environment where alternate points of view are freely expressed. Never get to the point where you feel like you have reached perfection and no further challenging is allowed.

One of the signs of a healthy organization is that it is marked by spirited give and take when courses of action are being plotted and decisions are being made. Conflict has its place and can be positive when handled correctly. Some suggestions for processing conflict:

1. Make it about the ideas not the person.
2. Focus on using the conflict test and improve the ideas on the table.
3. Respect each person’s right to have their own point of view.
4. Work to prod input from all the participants, especially alternate points of view.
5. Respect the consensus reached even if your ideas did not prevail.
6. Just because everyone agrees the answer is X if you think it is Y, enter into the discussion.
7. Affirm everyone’s contribution, even those whose ideas did not prevail.

The other nine Community Values ,when followed in any discussion, will allow you to have healthy conflict. Remember, the Community Values are not a matter of picking 8 or 9 out of 10. They are synergistic when they are taken as a coherent package.

Of course, the commitment here is resolution not to conflict for conflict’s sake. The idea is not to avoid conflict but rather, use it as a tool. The purpose is to move through process to resolution. We do not argue to argue, we argue because we want what we do, in the end, to be the best solution possible. This reminds me of one of my favorite Monty Python sketches. It is much more entertaining than what I am writing, so take a look at it and see what pointless arguments look like:

I have served on boards where everyone was too timid and/or polite to engage in anything beyond surface agreement. This is especially a problem with boards and committees where folks do not know each other very well. I call this the “Painting the Barn Green Syndrome.” You are part of an organization where someone suggests that the barn needs to be painted green. There is little or no discussion about the idea. No one asks if the barn needs painting, no one suggests that green is a poor barn color and there is no discussion about whether the barn is even the focus of the organization. Pretty soon you are all outside painting the barn green with everyone thinking (but not saying) this is a huge waste of time and resources. In fact,

it is quite likely before you are done, the person that suggested in the first place is scratching their head as to why they are out there.

Ignoring problems rarely make them go away. Too often the elephant is in the room, everyone pretty much knows it, but no one will point it out because they know that conflict is a necessary part of addressing and dealing with the pachyderm. Too many times we see conflict coming and we think of discomfort and unpleasantness. Our minds think of the famous line “Can’t we all just get along?” Avoidance of conflict is often the default position taken by organizations. However, denying responsibility is disempowering and results in little good actually being done. So be bold, be a leader and throw out that contrary point of view without being a contrarian. It may be the first step to really tackling the issue.

COMMUNITY VALUES OF THE FRESNO REGION

Asset-Based Approach

“We are focused on using a strengths-based, asset-oriented approach to people and issues. We believe that positive change occurs when we appreciate value and invest in what is best in our people and community.”

To some extent, this value reflects whether your general approach is to see the glass as half full or half empty. So often we focus on what is wrong or lacking (deficit thinking) that we are defeated by what we do not have. Instead, we need to assess what we do have and figure how to use that to move forward (asset based thinking). It is much easier to build enthusiasm around an asset based approach. Deficit thinking constantly places obstacles in the way of opportunity. Naysayers can always make their point, but they do little to create progress. Both approaches can be anchored in reality, it just reflects the attitude you bring to that reality.

Instead of focusing on what we do not possess in terms of resources to tackle a problem (especially if those resources are not practically available), the idea is to focus on what you have and assess the resources. All David had was a sling shot and a few smooth stones and yet, was able to fell his Goliath. You need to be honest about the resources and figure out how to best utilize those resources to accomplish your ends. You need to commit to using those resources wisely. This takes planning committed to effective strategies. Remember, that while you have assets, they are limited and should not be wasted.

If you want to empower people and make them effective as part of a team, you need to look for their assets and especially encourage them in those areas. Some folks deal with others by finding their weakness and exploiting them for their advantage. Some folks deal with others by finding their strengths and using those for everyone’s mutual benefit. When you see a person, do you look for their strengths or their weaknesses? Which do you try to put to work? There is a lesson for our entire educational system here.

People have personalities that involve all sorts of attributes. Those qualities that make them successful can also be their ruination depending on the situation they find themselves. Often, the situation and environment will determine how this will play out. You do not change people’s personalities, but you create environments where those personalities thrive. A lot of times, those personality attributes can be an asset or liability depending on the environment into which they are placed. The more we build positive environments in which people are able to work we allow them to use those personalities in an asset based manner.

There is a real fundamental issue buried here. It is how we each see Fresno. So often, even those most committed to making Fresno better, see it from a pretty negative perspective. While we know that those outside of Fresno, to a large extent, have a pretty negative view of the “Ag Capital” of the world, of more concern, is how we see it. Every time we look at a long term community problem, do we see extensive liabilities without the necessary assets to address them? If that is where we begin, we are defeated before we start. We need to change our thinking. We need to start our analysis by determining our resources and then rally them with

enthusiasm to take on the problem. Asset based thinking will engage people and always give us a fighting chance to make tomorrow better than today and the future great.

COMMUNITY VALUES OF THE FRESNO REGION

Conflict of Interest

“We agree to disclose any personal or professional conflict of interest that might affect objectivity before engaging in work that will impact the community. We seek to avoid even the appearance of impropriety.”

One common theme that runs through all of these Community Values is the proper definition of the role of true community steward. A steward understands that personal agendas, for personal benefit, especially when hidden, are always unacceptable.

This is another one of those values that focuses not only on what we attempt to accomplish, but how we go about accomplishing it. Process is always important because with each task we undertake, we are not only trying to do a good thing today, but to build the foundation that allows us to do even better things tomorrow. Are we building trust and a reservoir of good feelings with each task we undertake, or are we getting the job done without regard to how we are perceived in the process?

This was the last item added to the Community Values and was not initially on the list. Knowing those that initially fashioned the Community Values, I think the reason for the omission was that, for them, conflicts of interest were not a personal challenge. They were people naturally capable of making decisions, taking the greater good always into account. So this issue did not immediately spring to mind. But unfortunately, the majority of folks in this world are not wired in such an unselfish way. So once it was suggested, it was immediately added to the list.

Nothing undermines confidence of those in leadership more than when they make decisions in situations where they have a significant personal benefit to derive from the decision being made. It is not an answer to explain that others benefitted also if a disproportionate benefit lands in your lap. Too many times in the past, the only reason a person got involved in a civic project was because of the upside they could derive personally. The goal of these values was to move beyond that.

How often do you sit in a meeting where someone starts to state a position and immediately your mind goes to all the personal benefits this person will derive from getting others to follow their recommendation? Those people just drain the enthusiasm of others. While people may be excited to follow you when you are taking them somewhere that is providing benefit to others, it is less likely to get people to sign up to follow you on a journey basically designed to benefit you.

For a number of years in my former life I was chair of the compensation committee that decided everyone's year-end bonuses. There was one guy on the committee that throughout the process constantly argued in favor of doing things that benefitted others, but only because those same arguments would benefit him when it came to his bonus. He simply was willing to trade his credibility in an effort to obtain a few more dollars. It was transparent and embarrassing.

The importance of the final sentence of this value cannot be over stated. It is not enough to avoid conflicts of interest. You must avoid even the appearance of it. You must always evaluate what you are doing in terms of how it looks to others. Nothing causes your credibility to plummet more quickly than folks believing that you have hidden agendas underlying what you are doing.

In many ways, the creditability of the Business Council is tied to the collective credibility of those who serve on it. Whenever an issue comes up where you have an interest that is beyond that of the normal member of the council, you should disclose the interest. Or if you feel you cannot disclose it, you should excuse yourself from the discussion and decision making entirely.

Sometimes disclosure of the conflict is enough to allow you to participate. At other times, you are so personally intertwined in the issue that the only wise thing to do is avoid being involved in any aspect of the decision making process.

This is not to say that there is anything wrong with pursuing self-interest. This country, in many ways, was built on people pursuing self-interest. It just means that it should not be pursued under the guise of community stewardship. It takes a long time to build a solid foundation of trust and it can be destroyed so quickly when undisclosed conflicts become apparent. In order to advance the agenda of the Business Council, trust is a resource we cannot afford to fritter away on hidden agendas.

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