

April 16, 2007

Community Values of the Fresno Region

In 2000, the FBC endorsed the ten community values developed by the Collaborative Regional Initiative. We review a value at each board meeting. Last week, Mike Wilhelm (McCormick Barstow) prepared his remarks in writing. They are so eloquent and timely; we decided to send them out as a bulletin to our network.

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."

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 come better solutions leading to more effective 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.

Boundary 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 reach. Collaboration is the idea of working **with** those that you have crossed the various boundaries 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 5 walls that must be torn down to truly be able to reach people: *Ignorance, Poverty, Violence, Addiction & Disease*.

Just as this is true in 3rd world missionary work, it also is something that has a bearing on our efforts in Fresno. I was struck by how much of his list was applicable our community. As we cross boundaries 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 effect me and mine in real and significant ways.

Boundary 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 reaching a point where real sustainable progress is made.

Boundary crossing and collaboration will give us the opportunity to move forward as one community.

