

# **TODAY’S CHALLENGE TO OUR COMMUNITIES: CREATING SPACE FOR HEALTHY POLITICAL DIALOGUE**

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## **ABSTRACT/INTRODUCTION**

This paper is written by a municipal administrator seeking to find the virtue, wisdom, creative energy and idealism necessary to meet the challenges facing today’s public servant and public arena. The author contends that we can understand a good deal about the struggles of contemporary public service and the difficulty of creating space for healthy political dialogue by analyzing the inherent challenges to the democratic republic outlined by the American Founders in *The Federalist Papers*. A review of four of the great challenges issued in that original debate are presented here as seen through the eyes of a local government administrator.

## **THE FIRST GREAT CHALLENGE**

### **OF THE AMERICAN FOUNDERS**

#### **Government by Reflection and choice or Accident and force**

Hamilton’s challenge in Federalist #1, “...*whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend for their political constitutions on accident and force.*” (Chadwick 1989, 1)

**TODAY'S CHALLENGE: Create a non-violent and reflective public arena where decisions can be made fairly and honestly based on good information and open dialogue.**

The following case study examines one local government Board's attempt to base a key decision on non-violence, reflection and open dialogue. The Town Board's approach is then compared to the Gandhian/Christian non-violent tradition taught by Martin Luther King.

#### **A. THE CASE OF THE NON-VIOLENT AND REFLECTIVE TOWN BOARD**

The TV trucks were lined up in the Town Hall parking lot with antennas raised high to insure good live transmission back to their studios. A press release from the Fire Department had bloodied the water for the media "sharks". As the 50 or so Volunteer Fire Department members walked over to the Town Hall from the adjacent Fire Building, all in dress uniforms, you could see the TV reporters and cameramen drool while collecting the powerful images they were going to present on the 10:00 o'clock news.

It doesn't get much juicier than this in local government politics. A Volunteer Fire Department threatening to walk off the job unless the Town Board does not reconsider a hiring decision and choose "the Department candidate" instead of going outside of the Department. A history of resentment, poor communication and mistrust has brought the Town Board to this night's reality: A closed door negotiation session with 60 people crammed into a steamy room that was built for 45.

The media isn't thrilled, but they have been relegated to the lobby, as Wisconsin closed session statutes allow closing the doors of public meetings for sensitive personnel discussions. Inside the meeting room the Town Board bristles as Fire Dept. officers read their list of demands.

The Town Chairman and one other Board member are former Fire Dept. members and not strong supporters of the current situation in the Department, or their candidate for the new full-time position. Interestingly both of these, the Department's harshest critics, are out of the country on vacation. The 3 remaining Board members make up a quorum that must deal with the demands of the Firemen. The sense that this walk-out plan may have been hatched while two of the Department's harshest critics are on vacation, in order to gain an easier Board capitulation, only further poisons the proceedings.

It seems the remaining three members of the Board are leaning toward disbanding the Volunteer Department. They feel the Department is being unreasonable in their demands, unfair in their accusations, and using blackmail to try and get what they want. The atmosphere is primed for a quick angry decision to show the Fire Department who is in charge.

The Board has thoroughly researched their options. The acting Town Chairman has met with the County Sheriff and Fire Chiefs from surrounding communities to ensure that fire and emergency response coverage will be handled should the Town Board decide not to negotiate. At least two of the Board members consider themselves strong financial conservatives, question the need for additional Town Fire truck purchases, and have discussed the regionalization of fire service based on the recent findings of a blue-ribbon panel. These emergency discussions with area departments have only strengthened some Board members sense that the Town could get along just fine, perhaps even better financially, if the Volunteer Department was dissolved and service provided by a neighboring municipality.

After several heated exchanges and more demands by the Fire Department the Town Board retires to an interior office with the Town Attorney and Town Administrator to prepare a response to the demands that have been made. Initial energy is focused on some angry "beating of chests".

The Board members “want blood”. They want to show the Fire Department, the Town and the entire metropolitan area of over a quarter of a million people that they cannot be blackmailed. The Town Board is in control here not the Fire Department.

Gradually a different opinion begins to emerge. One Board member speaks eloquently about the tremendous investment and sacrifices that most of the Fire Dept. members have made in the community over the last years. He attempts to understand their insecurities, tensions and fears and what has brought them to this point. Another Board member sees clearly that if we respond in kind we are likely to increase the cleavage in our broken community. He says we need to be willing to sacrifice our current position in the interest of mutuality with the conviction that a stronger and better relationship and community can be forged in the future. Some financial savings will be of little significance compared with the loss of volunteer service and loyalty of 50 community members.

With these thoughts in mind the Town Board decides to negotiate with the Fire Department. When the Board members return to the meeting room they clearly explain their deep concerns about how the Fire Dept. has handled this situation, yet they express their willingness to hire the department’s candidate for the full-time position with several conditions.

The Town Board was willing to look weak in the present with the hopes of creating a strong and prosperous long-term relationship with the Department. In fact, their decision has paid off handsomely. Our community, fifteen years after the proposed walk-out, has one of the best and most active Volunteer Fire Departments in the State. The Town benefits tremendously, not only from their contribution to the Fire Service and First Responders but to all the community events that they organize and are involved in.

## **B. PUBLIC DECISION-MAKING AND MARTIN LUTHER KING'S PRINCIPLES OF NON-VIOLENT RESISTANCE**

Some readers may recognize my paraphrased language used to describe the Town Board's discussion about how to respond to the Fire Department from Martin Luther King's *Stride Towards Freedom*. One could argue that the Board was using non-violent resistance to what they saw as the "violent" walk-out proposal of the Fire Department. King's basic principles for non-violent resistance are worth summarizing (King 1964, 83-88):

1. It is important to differentiate between a non-violent resistance to perceived evil and a do-nothing pacifism. A non-violent resister is not physically aggressive but his or her mind and emotions are always active seeking to persuade the opponent that he or she is wrong. The Town Board in the above example did not just "cave" to the Fire Dept.'s demands. They established a list of requirements to help improve the long-term relationship with the Dept. (i.e. quarterly meetings to maintain communication, official study of the Fire Dept. to ascertain needs, new chain of command, etc.).
2. A non-violent resister does not seek to humiliate or defeat an opponent but win friendship and understanding. The hoped-for end is redemption and reconciliation. The Town Board could have easily "destroyed" the Fire Department, yet they overcame this initial desire for quick revenge, which is so attractive to us when we get into an argument or confrontation.
3. Attacks are pointed at perceived evil actions not the people who are doing evil.
4. There is a willingness to accept suffering without striking back. Unearned suffering is redemptive. At the center is the principle of love.
5. The non-violent resister avoids external violence and internal violence of spirit. In our democratic form of government in the U.S. we are lucky that external or life-threatening

violence is not that frequent. Much more frequent is the internal, what I would define as violence of the spirit, when political opponents seek to destroy each other with deception and half-truths or public practitioners respond with little care, respect or compassion for citizens.

6. Non-violent resistance is based on the conviction and faith that the universe is on the side of justice. Those who believe this can have great faith in the future and are able to accept suffering without retaliation. They have faith that the struggle for justice has cosmic companionship. Of course, those who have read King's *Stride Towards Freedom* know that his non-violence emerges from the Christian and Gandhian tradition. The love expressed to an oppressor or opponent is not necessarily an affectionate love. It is agape love, or God's love within the human heart seeking redemptive good will. He describes it as overflowing love, purely spontaneous, groundless and creative. It is not set in motion by any quality in the object or hope for something to be gained.

King says, since the white man's personality has been greatly distorted by segregation his soul is scarred, and he needs the agape love of the black man to remove tensions, insecurities and fears. Agape is not weak or passive love but love in action that seeks to preserve community.

For King, the death of Jesus on the cross was the eternal expression of the length God will go to preserve broken community and Jesus' resurrection the symbol of God's triumph over all forces seeking to block community. Agape means recognition that all life is interrelated and all men are brothers. It is this great faith in agape that allows the non-violent resister able to accept suffering without retaliation.

A public service practitioner may not see any application for King's non-violent principles in daily activities, or may disagree with his conclusions about the existence of agape love, but it is

hard to argue with the practical results of the civil rights movement in America that was guided by this philosophy. Its success deserves further study by public servants who are seeking strategies to deal with communities in the midst of conflict.

My concern is not to bring church and state together but to broaden, enrich and deepen the reservoir of love, faith, optimism and energy that is available to public servants as they face the increasing demands of their jobs. I say more power to the public servant who is able to add King's non-violent principles to his or her toolbox for improving management in the public sector.

We are in a privileged position among democracies to be able to discuss non-violent resistance to internal violence of the spirit. In many democracies around the world the simple opportunities that we take for granted, like public campaigning for office, putting up election posters, or voting, become life or death activities.

If we are to build real, non-violent self-government we must re-examine our attitudes toward each other, employees, citizens and politics. We have the opportunity to go beyond the duty of codes, professionalism and job descriptions to seek the heart of public service. We have the ability each day to choose how we will respond to circumstances, whether violently out of anger, pride and selfish ambition, or non-violently out of hope, patience, faith and love.

## **THE SECOND GREAT CHALLENGE OF THE AMERICAN FOUNDERS**

### **A Democratic republic not a Pure democracy**

Madison hoped in Federalist #10 that a democratic republic would, *“refine and enlarge the public views by passing them through the medium of a chosen body of citizens, whose wisdom may best discern the true interest of their country.”* (Chadwick 1989, 50)

**TODAY’S CHALLENGE: Maintain the integrity of a representative democracy by making decisions to support the common good, while at the same time keeping the majority of the citizens happy with public performance, through education and involvement. Work with citizens to create agreed upon indicators of public service success.**

Clearly, the Founders were hesitant about allowing too much citizen participation in their new government. Madison #49: “The danger of disturbing the public tranquility by interesting too strongly the public passions, is a still more serious objection against a frequent reference of constitutional questions to the decision of the whole.” (Chadwick 1989, 274)

#### **A. THE NEW PUBLIC SERVICE: ADDING A DIMENSION TO THE FOUNDERS DEMOCRATIC EQUATION**

Proponents of the New Public Service (NPS) like (Denhardt 2003) raise the bar of citizen participation, erected by the Founders, and seek a greater role for the citizen in government decision-making and greater appreciation for that role by the public servant. They hope in their preface “...to initiate conversations about the nobility and calling of public service and to help public servants rediscover the soul and meaning of what they do and why they do it.” (Denhardt 2003, xiii) They attempt to put us in touch with some of that original virtue and wisdom expressed by the Founders who emphasized that public officials needed to be servants of the people. Major themes include:

- Serve citizens not customers,
- Seek the public interest,
- Value citizenship over entrepreneurship,
- Think strategically and act democratically,

- Recognize that accountability is not simple,
- Serve rather than steer,
- Value people not just productivity.

Some may claim NPS supporters are naïve, but I see possibilities despite understanding the profound challenges of our political environment.

NPS hopes for a new kind of relationship between government and its citizens, utilizing attitudes like those described by O.C. McSwite: “The alternative is to listen, to become hollowed out and to receive the other as oneself. This... is not so much the end of reason as its transformation....by making people and their lives an object in its contemplations, reason separates us from one another, when the reality of the human condition is, I am you.” (Denhardt 2003, 42)

McSwite’s comment points out that the dream of system-wide authentic, sincere and public interested dialogue between citizens and public servants can only take place when participating individuals are authentic, sincere and interested in the public good. Our individual moral foundation for public service should support the cultivation of these attributes if we hope for success at the community level and beyond. The expectation for this transformation must first take place at the individual level. How do I initiate, support and strengthen such thought that I am you?

It has been my intense experience at the local government level that allows me to see the opportunities expressed by the NPS. Due to the amount of community dialogue within our Town, and innovative projects that have come from such dialogue, I am hopeful. Yet the challenges presented to individual public practitioners by the NPS are much greater than those presented by Osborne and Gaebler’s call to entrepreneurial government. Consider this daunting, yet only partial list:

-“The New Public Service is a call for not only, a redefinition of how we see the citizens we serve, but also a change in how we see ourselves and our responsibilities-how we treat each other, how we define our purposes and goals, how we evaluate ourselves and others...” (Denhardt 2003, 171)

-“It (NPS) refocuses our attention on the ideals of democracy and the public interest, of citizenship and human dignity, of service and commitment as the foundation of everything we do.” (Denhardt 2003, 171)

-Quoting Gawthorp, “To labor in the service of democracy is to recognize that all of us are called in varying degrees of responsibility, to be watchmen, sentinels or prophets for others-any others-as well as for one another, in attempting to attain the common good.” (Denhardt 2003, 173)

- “Through this process of self-reflection, we can begin to rediscover our desire to serve our fellow citizens and to think about our public service work in a way that celebrates its “soul” and meaning.” (Denhardt 2003, 171)

**1. Local Government and the Opportunity to Apply the New Public Service: A personal observation.** In my experience, local government especially at the Town level allows a good opportunity to practice the precepts of NPS. Towns in America have a unique tradition of citizen participation which gives legitimate representative powers to elected officials, yet also allows for citizen involvement and input that goes beyond most incorporated municipalities and Counties.

My laboratory, an urban Town of close to 12,000 people in Wisconsin, all 36 sq. miles of it, is one of the most interesting animals for political observation. It offers a mix of: Urban vs. rural-(my Town is 50% urbanized, 50% farmland). It encompasses an airport, 7 industrial parks, and an urbanized residential population as well as thousands of acres of farmland,

wetlands and rural subdivisions. Old vs. New- The Town includes thousands of residents that have moved here within the last ten years into mostly urbanized neighborhoods as well as the ancestors of farm families that have lived on the same land for over one hundred and fifty years. Limited government vs. Full-service government- The tradition of Town government is to limit investment in personnel and services in order to keep the taxes low. This philosophy is being challenged as our Town grows. Currently we have no police force, except what is provided by the County, and are served by a Volunteer Fire Department.

It is within this context of intense growth-related issues over the last seventeen years, in hundreds of meetings at our Community Center often filled with disgruntled citizens, that my attitudes and approaches to public service have been tested, re-tested and solidified. How does a Town Board respond to a Volunteer Fire Department that threatens to walk off the job if their choice for full-time Fire position is not accepted? How does the Town Board respond to a room full of angry citizens living in a rural subdivision, served by wells and septic systems, who are convinced that the proposed urbanized subdivision (served by water and sewer) going in next door is ill-advised and will be a blight on the area, even though it has been planned for many years?

As a public servant in the local government environment I have found myself in need of the following tools in my management toolbox: tremendous energy, patience, perseverance, wisdom and compassion. I not only need those tools but they must be applied appropriately, competently, and consistently in a job setting that requires face-to-face decision making, involving diverse interests, that is sustainable, focused on long-term benefits, flexible, reasoned and not based on anger.

At the local government level, I believe it is still possible to create environments of idealism and innovation. These environments are made possible when there is trust between citizens and local officials. Honesty, authenticity in relationship, sincerity, cooperation and fairness are the key factors that must be exhibited by individuals in order for a community-wide environment to be created.

At the local level a genuine concern for the well-being of the community typically outweighs the individual ego or party factions which are not as active as they might be at the state and national levels. I contend that our democratic form of government will survive as long as there exists this ability to create such public environments closest to the citizen. If we fail in local government it is likely anarchy will prevail.

The advent of the reinventing government movement in the early 1990's, and its entrepreneurial approach, has helped to professionalize the field of local government administration. In Wisconsin, for example, from 1990-2017 the number of municipal administrators running local governments has almost tripled.

There has been in this period of time, a strong sense that just as a business needs professional managers to govern their businesses so too local government needs professional managers to oversee its activities. I would assert this has been a good thing for our communities and that municipal work is getting done in a much more efficient and effective manner than in the past.

However, the NPS will challenge the local government manager and his or her entrepreneurial, professional approach to public service. The definition of public service to the community will now be viewed more broadly, and require a slightly different attitude. It will ask the administrator to let go of control somewhat in order to open up the process for citizen

involvement. Seeking the balance point between openness and control will be the trick for administrators and citizens alike.

Where in the past an administrator may have been rewarded for more entrepreneurial activities like finding new revenues, limiting tax increases, or cutting wage and benefit packages for employees, there will now be an added set of expectations emphasizing openness, flexibility, humility and responsiveness. A new skill set may be needed by managers who find themselves in a different world.

## **THE THIRD GREAT CHALLENGE OF THE AMERICAN FOUNDERS**

### **The need for Virtuous and Wise leaders**

#### **balanced by Structures and Precautions to bind them**

Madison in Federalist #5: *“The aim of every political constitution is, or ought to be, first to obtain for rulers men who possess most wisdom to discern, and most virtue to pursue the common good of the society; and in the next place, to take the most effectual precautions for keeping them virtuous whilst they continue to hold their public trust.”* (Chadwick 1987, 309)

**TODAY’S CHALLENGE: Focus on finding virtue, wisdom and discernment in ourselves, our employees and citizens so that everyone can contribute in an educated manner to the building of a good community. Avoid creating a public environment centered on bureaucratic regulation, punishment and mistrust.**

Most of the Federalist Papers focus on the structural precautions that must be implemented by the new U.S. Constitution to help control elected and appointed representatives. There is little mention of any process to develop virtue, wisdom and discernment in the public leadership or

citizenry. We, too, can be guilty of focusing on the creation of laws, policies and structures to inhibit wrong-doing in our citizens and employees without adequately allowing their virtue, wisdom and knowledge to be expressed in the public decision-making process.

Following Madison's recommendation, I would like to suggest some sources of wisdom and virtue that I have found helpful in the process of trying to improve the quality of self-government in my small public arena and stretching towards the idealism expressed by the New Public Service. A set of ideas that allows me to stay focused on creating a public environment centered on faith and hope rather than cynicism and mistrust. These will include: The New Science, Confucius, the Asian Martial Arts Tradition, and the Wisdom Tradition of the New Testament.

#### **A. THE STORY OF THE NEW SCIENCE: FAITH IN AN ORDERLY UNIVERSE**

Margaret Wheatley's profound book *Leadership and the New Science: Learning About Organization from an Orderly Universe*, suggests that scientific discoveries related to quantum physics, chaos and evolutionary theory should provide new ways of viewing organizational problems. Just as the enlightenment ideas of Hobbes, Newton and Darwin supported the creation of organizational structures seeking control, order and fragmentation, so new science ideas of self-reference, dissipative structures and interdependence should foster organizations that are constantly changing and evolving every day.

Dennard in *The New Paradigm in Science and Administration*, inspired by the work of Wheatley and others, who are applying the new paradigms in science to public administration, agrees that these emerging ideas can allow us to ask different questions about government. Public managers who once viewed their mission as controlling chaos and creating coherence out of complexity should begin to understand the value of a little chaos as an organization struggles to

find its identity. The implications of the new science concepts are valuable to consider as practitioners go about their everyday tasks. Dennard reviews several key scientific principles worth exploring to determine practical management applications (1996, 496-499):

**1. Interdependence-** Where the ontological assumptions of Darwin and Newton led to a view of cooperation as merely a way to maximize value and defeat other forces, the new science paradigm emphasizing the interconnectedness of all matter can lead to a sense of responsible human interdependence.

**2. Self-organization and co-evolution-** “Living systems are constantly changing while maintaining a stable integrity and recognizable structure They co-create environments and relationships that sustain and accommodate everything within that environment (Jantsch, 1979).” (497) Dennard asks, does this science justify an administrator’s faith in the citizen’s ability to co-create goals, plans and outcomes that can be sustained by them and their communities?

**3. The Paradigm of Paradox-** Newton believed that chaos signaled the decline of a system. Historically a public administrator’s greatest act of responsibility has been keeping the organization in equilibrium. Dennard asks, Can the new physics lessen the fear of chaos and reframe the nature of responsibility for the administrator to assist in creative evolutionary chaos? This attitude is so difficult for public service practitioners who are often hired in a political setting by elected officials seeking to eliminate any hint of their government being out of control or chaotic. Many work in a cultural setting where any sense of chaos or conflict is seized upon by the media as ‘breaking news’ and usually reported as failure or unhealthy as opposed to successful and productive.

**4. The Paradox of Identity-** Following the lead of living systems our interdependence does not imply a loss of identity. The community and individual are simply different aspects of

the same entity. Dennard explains that the new paradigm inverts the usual responsibility of the public manager to provide controlled outcomes and reinforce conformity. It asks the manager to maintain relationships so that self-organization can occur. Goals and outcomes are secondary to those relationships that make it possible to achieve the goals. The public administrator must be self-aware and grounded in a sense of responsibility and the common good that goes beyond mediating conflict or efficient, expert problem solving. (499)

## **B. CONFUCIUS, THE VIRTUE OF BENEVOLENCE AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING**

The study of Confucius is applicable here for several reasons, despite the fact that he was born in China over 2500 years ago. He lived (551-479 B.C) in an era of feudal lords, who sought advice on the affairs of state from a professional class of stewards or administrators, to which Confucius belonged.

In light of the Founders request for virtue and wisdom in our public servants it is helpful to research the teachings of Confucius. He taught politics as an extension of individual morals and that a wise and benevolent leader would help insure that a government pursued the common good.

Confucius' capstone virtue was benevolence: "There are five things and whoever is capable of putting them into practice in the Empire is certainly "benevolent". They are respectfulness, tolerance, trustworthiness in word, quickness and generosity. If a man is respectful he will not be treated with insolence. If he is tolerant he will win the multitude. If he is trustworthy in word his fellow men will entrust him with responsibility. If he is quick he will achieve results. If he is generous he will be good enough to be put in a position over his fellow men." (Lau 1979, 144)

Above all, Confucius saw his greatest strength as being a constant learner. He said, "In a hamlet of ten households there are bound to be those who are my equal in doing their best for

others and in being trustworthy in what they say, but they are unlikely to be as eager to learn as I am.” (Lau 1979, 80) When questioning a student about serving as a steward in a neighboring province he asks, “Have you made any discoveries there?” (Lau 1979, 83)

He was a strong supporter of being open and vulnerable to the criticisms of others. ” I am a fortunate man. Whenever I make a mistake, other people are sure to notice.” (Lau 1979, 90) “If one learns from others but does not think, one will be bewildered. If, on the other hand, one thinks but does not learn from others, one will be in peril.” (Lau 1979, 65)

Our willingness to learn to be criticized and to take ourselves to task are key components of improving our ability to serve. We need to constantly renew and nourish our motivation, sometimes through self-discovery and at other times by utilizing the ideas of others. It is this process of discovery over time that will allow us to understand better who we are, why we serve and what skills we can offer. Our democratic republic benefits as public servant’s experience, grow and mature and expand their own abilities and depth of understanding.

History has given us a great abundance of wisdom, like from Confucius, about how best to serve that can be inherited, learned from and applied. “Every day I examine myself on three counts. In what I have undertaken on another’s behalf, have I failed to do my best? In my dealings with my friends have I failed to be trustworthy in what I say? Have I passed on to others anything that I have not tried myself?” (Lau 1979, 59)

This learning process, contemplated by Confucius, should not take place only at the individual level, but the community, national and international levels as well, if we are to continually improve our abilities to govern ourselves wisely.

## **C. BECOME A MASTER IN THE WAY OF PUBLIC SERVICE: LEARNING FROM THE ASIAN MARTIAL ARTS TRADITION**

As a martial artist holding a 2<sup>nd</sup> degree black belt I have gained a unique understanding of the Asian religions, many which serve as the philosophical foundation for the most recognized martial arts systems. Their insights into virtue and wisdom seem appropriate for the practitioner interested in a long and prosperous career in the public service. Several key lessons can be learned from the practice and history of the martial arts tradition.

**1. The need to be serious about our practice.** The necessity for seriousness in the American public service has seemed to multiply greatly over the last few years. Between environmental disasters, terrorist attacks, growing privatization of public contracts and constant media attention, many public practitioners have had to ask themselves if they are ready for the commitment and sacrifice of today's public service. No longer is it feasible to view ourselves as just professionals working in the public sector. To survive we need the commitment of a public servant practicing professionally.

The seriousness of those who practice the Asian martial arts, or self-defense, is worth exploring and possibly emulating. Their commitment is revealed by a disciplined adherence to a system of rules and traditions that allow them to learn and perfect unique skills. For example, to perfect the skill of sword fighting in Japan the art of ken-do or Way of the Sword was developed. A student by learning from a Master may develop the agreed upon skills to advance in his or her art. Other martial arts or self-defense systems: Kyu-do the Way of the Bow, Ju-do the Way of Flexibility, and Aiki-do the Way of Divine Harmony were also created in Japan.

Founders of these various disciplines wanted to go beyond sword fighting, archery and throwing and punching techniques to create a systematic, internal philosophy that gave tremendous

value to the simplest of actions. In Karate, which was invented in Okinawa, simple punching and kicking movements are connected together in an exercise called a kata. “At base kata is religious ritual. Kata creates the possibility of attaining a spiritual goal through continual practice. The goal is the overcoming of the self. In kata there are only imagined opponents and thus the performer is playing only against him or herself in the search for perfection.” (Reid 1995, 212)

Perhaps we need to do a better job of developing a Way of Public Service for our students and young professionals to follow. A discipline that stresses the seriousness of the public course. A commitment to public service that transcends the use of skills of the trade, and values most highly the selfless sacrifice for community and country.

**2. Physical and Mental Preparation for Quality and Sustainable Public Service.** The alleged founder of Zen Buddhism, the monk Bodhidharma, is said to have traveled from India to China in the 6<sup>th</sup> cent AD bringing with him the root ideas and practices for many of the martial arts traditions now existing in China and Japan.

For Bodhidharma, the exercises, stretching and breathing techniques he taught the Buddhist monks of China were meant to alleviate physical and mental discomfort from long hours of meditation and study. Legends say that he spoke of helping his fellow monks connect with their life force or “chi”.

The ethical core of this teaching was wu-te or martial virtue. Martial arts were not to be used for fighting but to enhance spiritual development and health, as well as encourage the qualities of discipline, restraint, humility and respect for human life.

The teachings of Bodhidharma and this ancient Buddhist tradition, emphasizing the concept of physical and spiritual preparation, can give us insight as we consider the contemporary demands on the public service practitioner.

**a. Preparation of the Physical Body for Public Service.** It is very difficult to have the energy to serve our communities if our bodies are sick or unhealthy. Our focus, naturally, tends to go inward to heal rather than outward to serve. Thus, it is very important for us to engage in practices that will maintain personal health to insure high quality public service. Long hours, in mentally grueling meetings, in front of a computer screen, or in stressful situations, demand a physical release or exercise. If we are to find our unique “chi” and breathe life into our organizations we need a certain level of physical health. Like our public projects and plans, we want our personal efforts to be sustainable and long-lasting.

**b. Preparation for Wise Decision-making in the Body Politic: Hosting Democracy.** The public service practitioner often stands as the designated host and gardener of democracy.

We help prepare:

The ground and soil of our democratic republic for seeds of ideas, projects and plans to germinate and grow in;

The information necessary for others to analyze and make wise decisions;

The emotional content of issues, how they are framed and readied for public action;

The external environment to which citizens are invited to so that they can participate in the democratic meeting process.

Plato recognized the tremendous generosity inherent in the preparation process, in our case the ceaseless practice for the inevitable public performance at the democratic meeting. The democratic stage can become like community theater as we rehearse our lines and place ourselves in the audience, preparing with the imagined self-interested other, in order to discover where our performance, plans or analysis, may be lacking or non-persuasive.

**c. Preparation for Wise Decision making: The importance of the Guest.** The host may throw a wild democratic party but if the guests don't arrive it will be a flop. Just as attendance at an important social gathering should require new clothes, cleanliness and an openness to the host's environment, citizens attending the democratic meeting need to be prepared. Many of our democratic environments are spoiled, not due to poor preparation by the hosting public entity, but by poor citizen preparation. They often come to the party with only a selfish, narrow, uneducated and emotional viewpoint, which is their right, yet such an attitude makes good citizen dialogue and wise decision-making for the sake of the common good almost impossible.

**d. Preparation and the 5 I's: Innovation through Intelligent Immersion and Investment in the Issues.** Without a deep investment and immersion in public issues there can be no real understanding on how best to proceed. There may be chatter, or superficial political discussion, but unless someone takes ownership and really digs into a problem there will be no innovation or true solutions. Without committed preparation there can be no leadership that can take the community to a new level of understanding and action.

Unfortunately, today, at almost every level of government, decisions have been made to contract out large chunks of this preparation process because of the sense that there is not enough time or money to do it in house. Private consultants prepare public plans; private engineers design public projects; private lawyers review public contracts, private soldiers even fight public wars, etc. In order for this system to work we as public service practitioners need to ensure that the public preparation work is being done with the level of ownership and commitment that the public interest deserves and not just as one of many contracts to be fulfilled.

**3. The Paradox of the Martial Arts and Civic Engagement.** While martial arts systems are usually created to teach fighting or weapon techniques for self-defense, many have a profoundly non-violent side that is not always recognized. For example, the Japanese discipline of judo encourages partners to work together and cooperate when sparring. To grapple, probe, and explore the weaknesses and strengths of opponents. Master Doshin So developed Shorinji Kenpo and encourages that students practice in pairs with a prayer-like attitude. (Reid 1995, 172) Almost all martial arts create a sacred practice environment, hall or dojo, within which clear guidelines are followed and any confrontation between opponents is initiated and ended with a bow of respect.

What about that violent blood sport we call civic engagement? If physical violence can be practiced in an environment of respect and cooperation why not political engagement? Is it possible to be involved in political probing, grappling, exploring for strengths and weaknesses on the issues that would push each participant to a higher level of understanding and clarity instead of anger and resentment? Can we transform political discussions so that participants are able to bow with respect before and after, willing to accept the opponent's efforts and viewpoint? Idealistic but possible!

**4.Veneration of Ancestors /Veneration of Public Service:** There is a strong tradition of honoring ancestors in the Asian culture and martial arts tradition. I believe our public service tradition can learn from such veneration of the need to honor the commitment, energy and contribution of our great public servants.

Perhaps we need more of a structured attempt within our public service professions, and society in general, to pass on the important traditions that we hope to see continue in the next generations. This quote, from the current Master of a 500-year-old martial arts school outside of Tokyo, reflects his seriousness about transmitting the core values of his institution. "To perfect it,

to build on the techniques for whose improvement men died in the past, is the aim of the school....to share a unique and historical knowledge that must be sustained and passed on to future generations.” (Reid 1995, 118)

**5. Leave your ego at the door:** It was Buddhism that played the strongest role in the development of the hard-martial arts systems in China like kung fu, but it was Taoism and the writings of Lao Tzu (300 B.C), that served as the foundation for the creation of the softer arts such as T'ai Chi and Pa-kua. The Taoist thinking, reflecting its roots in ancient Chinese philosophy, looks to the natural world for answers to life's questions.

Lao-Tzu's quote from the Tao Te Ching resonates deeply with my experience as a local government administrator. “Thirty spokes unite in one nave, and because of the part where nothing exists we have the use of the carriage wheel. Clay is molded into vessels, and because of the space where nothing exists we are able to use them as vessels. Doors and windows are cut in the walls of a house and because they are empty we are able to use them. Therefore, on the one hand we have the benefit of existence, and on the other we make use of non-existence.” (Reid 1995, 200)

I have observed, and often experienced, that it is the “non-existent” or “empty” public service practitioner, acting without ego or selfish interest, and for the benefit of the whole purpose who can allow government at the local level to run smoothly.

As a municipal administrator, much like Lao-Tzu's empty center of the carriage wheel, I have felt at the center of a wheel of communication. By serving as a central clearing house of information and decision-making for the Public Works Department, Parks Dept., Sanitary District, Office Staff, Police Department, Fire Department etc., not interested in getting credit or being recognized, I can allow the wheel of government to roll forward, well-informed and effective.

Many of history's greatest teachers have also emphasized the value of this emptiness or loss of self that somehow will bring great value, true self and true life. Jesus said that those who seek to lose their life will gain it. Gandhi sought this emptiness. "I know that I have still before me a difficult path to traverse. I must reduce myself to zero."(Gandhi 1957, 504)

The riddle of death over life, emptiness over fullness, weak over strong is supported by Lao Tzu in this quote from the Tao Te Ching, "The weakest things in the world can overmatch the strongest things in the world. Nothing in the world can be compared to water for its weak and yielding nature; yet in attacking the hard and the strong nothing proves better than it. For there is no alternative to it. The weak can overcome the strong and the yielding can overcome the hard. This all the world knows but does not practice." (Reid 1995, 86)

In my opinion we need to find more and better ways to apply this ancient wisdom to our public service and institutional practices.

#### **D. THE WISDOM TRADITION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT**

Governments exist within cultures. Cultures are undoubtedly influenced by their religious heritage. The strongest religious heritage in American history has been Judeo-Christianity. Many public servants have grown up in religious families and are inevitably influenced by these traditions. There is no question that public servants bring their cultural and religious training with them as they strive to deal with the political issues of the day. It is with this understanding that the P.A. community has addressed such topics as workplace spirituality, the spiritual wisdom literature, global virtue theory and servant leadership. The teachings of the Old and New Testament provide a historical link for public servants who have grown up in a predominantly Judeo-Christian

culture to a beautiful tradition of love and service that can nourish, uplift, inspire and strengthen their public service.

Perhaps more than anything else Jesus and his early followers teach us what it takes to create loving, authentic and sustainable human relationships. If we are to successfully continue our democratic republic, which is so dependent on the development of trusting relationships between citizens, and with elected officials, we will need to learn how to substantiate the realistic language of love emanating from the New Testament.

For me, the wisdom tradition of the New Testament is not linked to any theology suggesting that I am saved by Jesus, or waiting for his imminent return. They are words of faith, intelligence and idealism that help me see hope despite operating in a political environment that may be cynical, partisan and self-interested. They are words that can be applied by faith and imagination to almost any goal in life. Being too literal will only lead to endless controversy, yet reading them as books of encouragement when feeling cynical and hopeless, can be rewarding no matter what your faith.

The New Testament also talks much about faith in an unseen world. Faith should be a much less challenging concept in government, although some would argue that high-quality public institutions and processes are becoming an almost unseen commodity. Despite cynicism and corruption, public faith in the ideals and positive potential of self-government must be supported and maintained. Those who grow up with the ideals of the New Testament may question their faith in God, but seldom question the rightness of the virtues of human conduct that it expresses.

Try to imagine a public service environment where individuals are attempting to put into practice some of the following advice expressed in the New Testament (New International 1985):

The message of James 1:12-To persevere. 1:19- To listen and be slow to speak.1:22-To be authentic. 2:1-Don't show favoritism. 2:14-Faith without action is dead.

Ephesians 4- Paul calls his friends to humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another in love, keeping the unity of spirit through the bond of peace.

Philippians 2 -Be like-minded-having the same love, being in one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look to your own interests but also the interests of others.

Philippians 4:8- Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things.

Colossians 3:12-Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive. And over all these virtues put on love which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Try to imagine a political environment where participants are hoping to live out the ideals expressed in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Those who receive God's blessing according the Sermon will be the meek, those who mourn for others, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the pure in heart, the merciful, the peacemakers, and those who are persecuted for righteousness sake. The Sermon asks followers to be the salt of the earth, the light of the world, and to love the enemy. This inspirational language can be applied to almost any occupation or endeavor.

Some of the most applicable parts of Jesus' teachings for public servants are sections emphasizing the organic nature of the universe we live in. Jesus was quite clear how he expected change to happen. The Kingdom of Heaven was something that grew like anything else: from a tiny seed to a Tree of life, like dough that had received yeast to help it rise. He was the gardener,

planting seeds that would one day grow to perfection unless they were improperly planted on a poorly prepared landscape or gobbled up by weeds.

As public service practitioners whose job it is to take the seeds of inspiration and ideas for community projects and guide them through the lengthy and dangerous political process to successful implementation we need all the support we can get. The fact that one of the greatest teachers in history chose to emphasize having faith in the slow, steady, organic nature of growth might give us a little more patience and perseverance when our “seeds” look like their wilting or are being eaten by some “weedy” opponents.

## **THE FOURTH GREAT CHALLENGE OF THE AMERICAN FOUNDERS**

### **Both Idealism and Realism**

*“The great achievement of the authors of the Federalist Papers is not merely that they replied in detail to specific dangers that critics saw in the Constitution and explained in detail how the new government should and could work, but that they did so without repudiating the past, without rejecting the basic ideology of the Revolution. Indeed, their ultimate accomplishment was to remove the Revolutionary ideology from what Hamilton called “halcyon scenes of the poetic or fabulous age” and place it squarely in the real world with all the “vicissitudes and calamities which have fallen to the lot of other nations”.” (Bailyn 2003, 112-13)*

**TODAY’S CHALLENGE: Cultivate ideals that will lead to the fair, efficient and effective provision of public services to the community. Transforming ideals into real public service is the essence of, and permeates, all of the above challenges.**

## **A. LINCOLN'S PRACTICAL IDEALISM: PRESERVE THE UNION/PRESERVE THE BALANCE**

“Preserve the Union” has been a rallying cry for American public servants and practitioners over the last 240 years. In the 1770’s and 80’s it was used in the Revolutionary War, and to convince voters that a federal government could unite the separate states into an even stronger one nation with a common identity, defense and commerce. The term was also used, obviously, during the Civil War in the 1860’s. Lincoln, who was renowned for educating citizens with stories and parables, constantly called for the preservation of the Union, that shared history of sacrifice and idealism called the United States of America. Probably Lincoln’s most concise and beautiful expression on this theme, the Gettysburg Address, is partially printed here so that the idealistic practitioner may consider it’s meaning to a current generation of public servants:

But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate—we cannot consecrate—we cannot hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here, have, thus far, so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they here gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that, government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth. (Goodwin 2005, 586)

Lincoln also called Americans to return to the founding ideals of the Declaration of Independence, especially the following section: “We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed...” (Miller

2002, 88) It is interesting that Lincoln was not overly concerned he was using the words of a slave owner who supported the institution of slavery as an argument against its future existence. He was in a sense re-creating and re-interpreting the founding ideals of America to match the direction in which he thought the country needed to go, balancing a national pendulum that had swung too far away from the highest human ideals. As a very practical idealist “he managed, while responsibly attending to the political complexities, and while dealing respectfully with those who disagreed, to state with great force, clarity and persistence the moral argument (against slavery) at the foundation of the new majority seeking political party.” (Miller 2002, 400)

All public service practitioners are indirectly connected in this web-like democratic republic and have our own “Unions” to preserve and balance. My Town “Union” is preserved by balancing interests representing; growth vs. no-growth, urban vs. rural, old residents vs. new residents, regulatory government vs. call for less red tape, more services vs. less services etc. Much of our American history has been about “balancing demands” in order to preserve the external Union, the United States of America.

Today, we collectively face a new major challenge to our Union. We accept the validity of our constitutional structures yet, in the face of extreme partisanship and perceived selfish ambitions of legislators, remain cynical about our abilities to make representative government work. It seems we need a bottom-up revolution connecting with the ideals of the Founders, emphasizing that self-government itself is neutral and relies on the best wisdom, virtue, unselfishness, discernment and participation of the people in order to achieve the common good and the true interests of the country.

## CONCLUSIONS

The American Founders hoped for public leaders who would: 1. Create governments based on reflection and choice rather than accident and force; 2. Possess the wisdom to discern the true interests of the country and virtue to pursue the common good of society; 3. Find ways to work cooperatively with citizens to make wise decisions; and 4. Provide fair, efficient and effective government on the foundation of their highest ideals.

To help the contemporary public servant think about these challenges I have discussed them in more detail with my own experience as a template. My unique, and by no means comprehensive, discussion has focused on key topics that have been very important to me in my life of public service including:

**The New Public Service-** Transformation of the entrepreneurial approach to government to one focused on citizen service. Transform attitudes of practitioners towards public work;

**Martin Luther King-** Principles of non-violence and agape love;

**Abraham Lincoln-** Practical non-violence, generosity, patience, preservation of the Union, The Gettysburg Address;

**Confucius-** Benevolence and life-long learning;

**The New Science/Quantum Physics-** Offering different paradigms to P.A. than the Old Science of Newton and Hobbes;

**The Wisdom of the New Testament-** Creating interpersonal relationships that reflect the highest human ideals, faith, hope and love;

**The Asian Martial Arts and underlying philosophies of Buddhism, Taoism-** The importance of preparation, egoless leadership and veneration of past public servants.

Upon reviewing this list, it seems I need to again ask myself a few questions:

1. Does the list meet the standards of the Founders and help me deal with today's challenges to self-government? Will it help me to wisely discern the true interests of the community and virtuously pursue the common good? Is it balanced, representative of broad viewpoints? Can it be realistically applied? Does it hold any practical interest for other public service practitioners?
2. Are these just nice words and stories, or am I struggling to make them real in my everyday public service?
3. Do other public servants, public institutions and governments put these virtuous and wise ideas into practice in their cultures and decision-making processes?
4. If not, how do we begin to transform our personal and institutional approaches to public service to bring them more in line with accepted virtue and wisdom?

The future direction of our self-government, like the physicist Zukav's concept of the universe, generates an endless profusion of possibilities waiting for perception. Our small democratic universe craves observer-participancy and co-creation just like John Archibald Wheeler's massive quantum world. (Wheatley 1994, 36)

Wheatley suggests that the rules governing how we change our world may be similar to the world of quantum physics. If so, "we need all of us out there, stating, clarifying, discussing, modeling, filling all of space with the messages we care about. If we do that, fields develop-and with them their wondrous capacity to bring energy into form." (1994, 56)

It seems there is great similarity between the important lessons that we can learn from both the scientific and spiritual wisdom available to us. We are co-creators, partnering with the universe, to form and invent possible futures. What will the future of our democratic republic look like? It is up to us.

Madison's challenge in the Federalist Paper #14 can be heard today: "They (Founders) accomplished a revolution which has no parallel in the annals of human society. They formed the design of a great Confederacy, which it is incumbent on their successors to improve and perpetuate." (Chadwick 1987, 73)

He also hinted that we might expect a partner in our efforts. "It is impossible for the man of pious reflection not to perceive in it a finger of the Almighty hand which has been so frequently and signally extended to our relief in the critical stages of our revolution." (Chadwick 1987, 193)

My sincere hope is that with renewed commitment we can fill those empty spaces of our public service organizations with messages of virtue and wisdom, so that positive energy may gradually transform what can be a cynical, self-interested and partisan political culture into something that our Founders could take pride in.

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