

Note: These two chapters from Vote Like a Grownup: How We Might Reunite as We the People have been abridged (shortened, with each extraction replaced with “[...]”) by the author to facilitate the author’s use within in broader-context material.

Chapter 13: Doing the Grownup Things

We have already identified the various classes of “fog machines” our ruling class use to deceive, and the mechanisms that power those fog machines: lies, omissions, spin, obscurity, ambiguity, distraction, camouflage, cover-up, etc. - all amounting to some form of *manipulation* (which is a form of abuse). Nobody likes to be manipulated, especially to the tune of erosion of reciprocity, relationships, and, literally, trillions of our hard-earned dollars.

In my experience with being the victim (the manipulated) in such relationships - that is to say, living within a fog of manipulation - I have come to realize that extricating myself from such manipulation involves two insights, which are simultaneous and interdependent, meaning, one happens only with the other, because the manipulation is part of the nature of the *relationship*:

1. recognize the nature of the manipulation (“where is that fog coming from?”), and
2. recognize that within me that enables it (“why have I been accepting that fog as normal?”).

This may represent the most serious implication we have encountered so far, which is: maturing as a voter may involve personal change. Having said that, I am going to suggest that it is less a matter of change than it is of increasing our clarity around who we are - in other words, not changing who we are individually, but identifying and clearing from our thoughts and emotions those deceptions that have so heavily shaped our perception of government and politics - and each other as participants therein.

Going forward, then, requires synchronicity between the outer journey (“where is that fog coming from?”) and the inner journey (“why have I been accepting that fog as normal?”).

And, to put a slight twist (well, two twists, really) on a favorite meme: “Nobody simply walks out of Fogdor.” Except perhaps under conditions of crises, individuals do not transform - i.e., grow up - overnight. It is a drawn-out process, and, it seems, the more thoughtful, the better.

The need to de-identify

Deciding to drop and replace an identity can occur in a relative “instant”; actually morphing out of the old into the new identity, however, takes time and effort - it needs to be managed, as emotion and loss are involved; but what makes the loss tolerable, and what I hope I have successfully argued for throughout this book, is the potential gain of unity, clarity, and empowerment as a constituency.

Recognizing the fear of change

If our initially adopted political identity has been an important element of our family and social relationships; and if we are to “drop” that identity in favor of a more accommodating one based on reciprocity; then it stands to reason that that transformation will bring with it some relationship upheaval, to a degree consistent with how anchored we are to that existing political identity.

That upheaval will emotionally manifest as, among other things, fear: fear of loss of what we have now, or indeed what we “are” now; and fear of the unknown, of treading into new waters in order to test new claims and ideas that challenge our political identities.

Using language and reason to develop reciprocity and achieve common goals

Both the inner journey (identifying and managing our own fears, hypocrisies, closed-mindedness, etc.) and the outer journey (interacting with others, including and perhaps especially those with differing experiences and views) demand rigorous language to describe where we are at, where we want to be, how we get there, how we measure our success, etc.

This suggests the necessity of a shift from a rigid, passionately proclaimed, for example “We must raise the minimum wage because everybody deserves a living wage!” to a *process* of inquiry designed to yield a feasible implementation. (This is not to say that an impassioned argument for a living wage is not a good thing, it’s just that it is not *enough* of a basis for policy implementation.)

Now imagine a workshop, or charrette, or even a casual conversation between friends, focused on formulating new or revised policy around, for example, a minimum wage. In the US we have some history and experience with minimum wage laws and their pros and cons, so certain participants in such a charrette might go into it with a mindset of “I know” and even perhaps hope to persuade other participants to a preconceived outcome. If multiple participants enter with the same mindset, but different goals for the outcome, conflict may arise. One way to accommodate those differences while at the same time achieving broad coverage of the above bullets is to start with *questions*, which for the topic of minimum wage policy might look like this (not an exhaustive list by any means):

- Current state:
 - What is the minimum wage now, when was it established or the last time it was raised, what was its administrative scope (city, state, etc.)?
 - ...
- Proposed state:

- What is the new proposed minimum wage? Why that amount? What is the percentage increase represented by the proposed wage?
- How will it be introduced? One-time change? Phased? What are the pros and cons of each? What is the proposed timeline for implementation?
- Who are the intended beneficiaries? How many are there? How will we measure that they actually benefit?
- Who else besides the employees benefit (e.g., increased tax revenues, ...)
- Which sectors are being considered? Why those and not others?
- How might the increase impact the prices of products and services from the targeted sectors / businesses?
- How willing are the impacted businesses to adopt such a change?
- What cost-saving options do impacted businesses have to offset wage increases while remaining competitive?
- ...
- Planning and execution:
 - What government resources (people, money, time) are required to enact the policy?
 - What changes and compliance actions must businesses take?
 - How will ongoing measurement activities be resourced?
 - What system changes are required to support measurement, reporting, and compliance efforts?
 - ...
- Historical perspective:
 - Where and when have minimum wage policies been enacted elsewhere?
 - How well planned were they? How well measured were the results?
 - How many employees benefited?
 - Have those employees moved into other income brackets?
 - How many businesses were required to comply?
 - How did those businesses adjust? What were the financial conditions of those businesses prior to enactment of the policy? After enactment? Are they still in business? Has any sector impacted by the policy grown?
 - ...
- etc.

Just the simple mental act of shifting from “I know”, to the *question* - the use of Who, What, When, Where, Why, How, and What If - *changes the state of the brain* and can put people into a shared space of inquiry, regarding how things were, how they are now, and how they might be. Within informal interactions, a question-based approach creates a safer space especially for those who are working on shifting their political identities as described earlier. It moves our consideration from “me” to “we.”

Within more formal settings, such as, say, a community charrette, refining a policy discussion to such a level of detail could yield real-world workable implementation plans.

Such informal and formal discussions are naturally appropriate for locally considered policies. As an added benefit, especially with more formally managed discussions such as

the charrette, local representatives and administrators who participate will be much better positioned to implement policies consistent with the views of their constituents.

What if?

But why should that relationship between the constituents and representatives be only a local phenomenon?

Why should we send our representatives to City Hall, the Sheriff's Office, State House, or to Washington DC without such detailed plans in their hands?

What would be more beneficial to We the People: Sending our representatives and our money to office where *they* develop the plans, subject to all manner of undesirable, hidden influence (sound familiar)? or, sending them to office with plans in hand, that they helped develop and agreed to?

Are there professional organizations that specialize in applying experience, iterative elaboration, cost/benefit and risk analysis, resource management and planning/scheduling techniques to turn an idea into a feasible implementation - in other words, to implement changes?

Isn't legislation fundamentally an activity in which a constant flow of changes is identified?

What if we as a culture developed the ability to conduct *virtual* charrettes, so that discussions around state or national level policies could be inclusive of participants irrespective of location?

What if the concept of charrettes, the "start with questions" approach, and iterative elaboration and planning skills were part of a robust education program, especially with high schoolers?

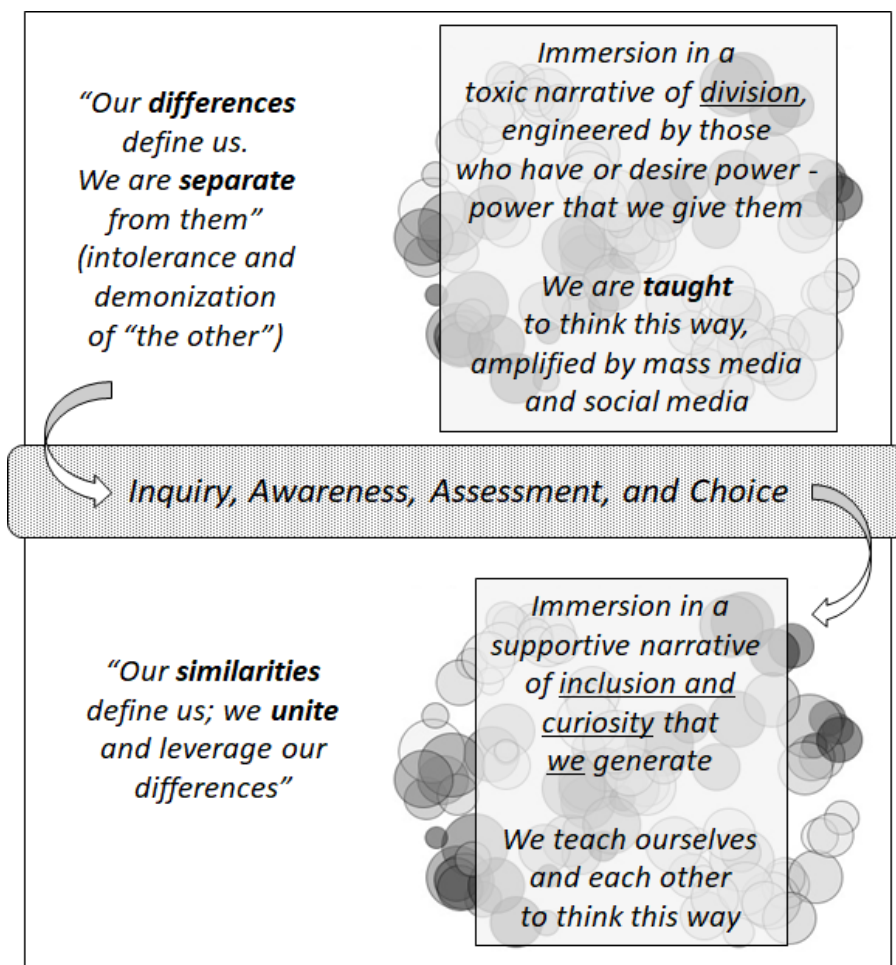
Are there any communities of people who, because of their general personality traits and capabilities, would excel at detailed planning *in a politically non-biased manner*? – people whose personality types innately strive for facts and reality?

What if, when exploring policy options and implementation plans, we applied a formally defined "operational language" that guided us toward results that were comprehensive, clear and objective, unbiased, and reasonable? (e.g., perhaps something that would dovetail with Robert's Rules of Order, which helps us facilitate *how* to get to a result but not the quality of that result)

What if representatives conducted charrettes in a similar way, in public view?

[...]

Chapter 14: Leaps of Faith



I cannot overemphasize the significance and value of shifting our mindsets from “me” to “we”, from “I know” to “what if”, from the need to “win against our political / racial / economic / etc. opponents” to the value of embracing and working with each other toward our shared goal. I think there are two leaps of faith involved, as shown above.

While viewing the above graphic, consider that a “narrative” is not just an abstract reference to a connected series of story lines, but rather, it has a very concrete form:

- the claims about how something is or ought to be
- the beliefs we build around those claims, because those beliefs require physical, physiological, and emotional resources to sustain
- the thoughts we have around those beliefs and around how to fit inputs from our inner selves and the world around us into those beliefs, again requiring effort and resources to generate, sort through, and sustain
- the claims, thoughts, and beliefs that *others* have
- the mediums through which others express their own claims, beliefs, and thoughts
- the vocabularies - the specific words, phrases, and yes, memes - that are expressed across and throughout those mediums

The *external* narrative in its entirety, manifested through those mediums, represents the set of all of those possible claims, beliefs, thoughts, memes, and vocabularies, and we choose which subset of the narrative to internalize, based on our current political identity, which is our *filter* into that narrative universe - we put our political identity filter on, stick our noggins into the narrative universe, and “only see what we want to see.” This explains the increase of attention in our culture on confirmation bias, to a degree consistent with the degree to which the chasms between our political identity groups have grown.

One does not choose directly which parts of the narrative are allowed in; rather, one’s selection of a political identity, plus the emotional protections around that identity, are what “choose” which parts of the narrative are allowed in; with a loose definition of the word “choose”, as I think the “choice” is more automatic than not given its emotional, i.e. reactive, element.

Let’s consider the nature of those leaps of faith.

Leap of Faith #1

Perhaps this is more of a step than a leap, as it represents the intellectual act of simply (!) *asking* the question - stepping into the state of inquiry and *skepticism* (which is different than *doubt*): What is the nature of my own political identity? Do I contribute to the narrative of division? If I have feelings toward other groups that approach disdain or hatred, why do I have them? What if at least some aspects of *their* point of view are valid? Do I need to learn how to listen better? etc.

One very useful aspect of this “leap”, especially from a social cost point of view, is that it can be done *internally*, allowing one to experiment with different approaches to stepping into the space of inquiry and analysis; to test a wide variety of “what if” questions; and to further develop, if needed, the internal senses (think “fear detection”) that tell one (a) how important one’s political identity is emotionally, and (b) what one’s emotional reaction is to testing a particular question, that is, a particular threat to that political identity.

Leap of Faith #2

Now, this *is* a leap, as it represents a *commitment* to disengage from toxic divisive narrative, and the underlying political identity at the source of that narrative, and start to

engage differently to find common ground, to increase ownership of the process and the result that would bring us closer to our shared goal of unity within a civil society.

This “leap” brings with it several extremely useful attributes:

1. There is no single leap; “leaping” into the healthy narrative can actually be done incrementally - perhaps with respect to an issue here and an issue there; or a candidate here or a candidate there; or perhaps from one point (political identity) to another within the multidimensional space of political concepts. This ties back to what I suggested earlier, which is that honing one’s internal sensors and detecting the fear of change and loss allows one to intelligently plan and manage the transition before acting on it.
2. Leap #1 can be viewed as a staging phase of sorts for planned incremental leaps of the #2 variety (implying that #1 leaps can also be incremental).
3. Perhaps most importantly: If you know people who are already “there”, your #2 leaps can be viewed as trust falls. There may be cases where relationships that had become politically stressed over the last 10 or 20 years can be turned into safety lines of sorts, given a touch of nurturing and revitalization.