

Organizer's Edge ▶

Greetings!

Election Reflections: “Surrender the Agenda. Slow Down and Listen”

Editors Note: *“Community organizers,” I was reminded by Idit Klein, of [Keshet](#), “stay in the conversation.” (with those they have differences with...) ” Horace Small, of [Black Ballot Power](#), often reminds us that white people need to organize among white people, including before, during and after election campaigns. This reflection adds to this direction.*



By Judy Gearhart

Over the past three months, volunteering with [Pennsylvania Stands Up](#), I learned there is a better way to overcome our country's political polarization by using a [deep canvassing](#) approach to build connections with people. The idea is simple. Don't talk *at* people. Instead ask them what they are thinking. Listen, engage, find common ground. The young people who run the organization and lead the phone banks are among the brightest lights coming out of this murky election.

As a native Pennsylvanian who grew up in the 'red' counties but long ago migrated to the cities, I wanted to reconnect and really try to understand what people are living right now. Not only did their votes matter to Joe Biden, but their views mattered to me. Deep canvassing requires you to engage personally. It's deeply emotional. It's also a way to build bridges and hopefully heal this country. As we still wait for final election results, I reflected on what I learned — from people who did and didn't share my views.

I hope this resonates with others and more will join the movement.
We need a more civil, humane approach to how we talk to each other if
we are going to move forward together as a country.
The lack of trust among us leaves me devastated.

With [Pennsylvania Stands Up](#)

I called, I recruited. I nudged, begged, and encouraged.
But mostly I listened. I followed the advice of a young woman. She
said:

“Surrender the agenda, slow down and listen.”



It felt good to call with a deeper purpose beyond just getting votes —
to listen, seek a conversation, a connection even.
To hear people’s stories. Be inspired by youth
who are taking the lead, forging a kinder path
To talk about family lost to opioids, knowing full well how different we
are
And yet the same.
Pennsylvanians can talk. From the opinionated to the lonely to the
openhearted people I met.
I am grateful. We need to continue the conversation.

One guy says “I’m not racist, but these black people are trashing my
city.
I was gonna vote Biden, but now I don’t know.”

How do we stop talking this way? Snarky mocking on MSNBC. Angry
sputtering on Fox.
If we surrender the agenda, will we surrender our power?
Maybe that is the only way
to gain power -- finding common ground by building a connection
among equals.
I don’t know better than you. Your views matter too.
Can we find a way – forward?

For now, I’m in still a muddle.
Whether ‘my side’ wins or not, there is healing to do.
Deep changes are needed.
I’m trying to find Patience, but she’s often shoved in a corner by Anger.
Hope has gone off...but promised to return
bringing Resilience and Resistance with her.

Judy Gearhart is a visiting scholar at the [Accountability Research](#)

[Center](#) at American University and an adjunct professor at Columbia University. Previously she served nine years as the executive director at the International Labor Rights Forum and twelve as the programs director at Social Accountability International. She has worked for the UN and grassroots NGOs in Mexico and Honduras on trade, labor rights, and democratic participation.

Feedback Welcome

We want to hear from you, your reactions, ideas, what is at the edge YOUR "envelope." Just go to...

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Who else you will hear from.....

We are just starting, but so far you can expect to hear what the following people are thinking:

Jessica Tang: Boston Teachers Union, AFT

George Luse of the Mass Teachers Assn,

Scott Reed with the PICO Network, ,

Cathy Howell, in Oregon and El Salvador, formerly with the AFL-CIO,

Caesar McDowell of MIT,

Diana Bell of Community and Labor United,

David Hernandez of the California Education Assn,

Attica Scott, State Rep Louisville, Kentucky

Walter Davis, of the Tennessee, Health Care Coalition.

Debra Askenase, of Community Organizing 2.0,

Deb Fastino, of the Coalition for Social Justice in New Bedford, MA,

Rebecca Gutman, with SEIU-1199,

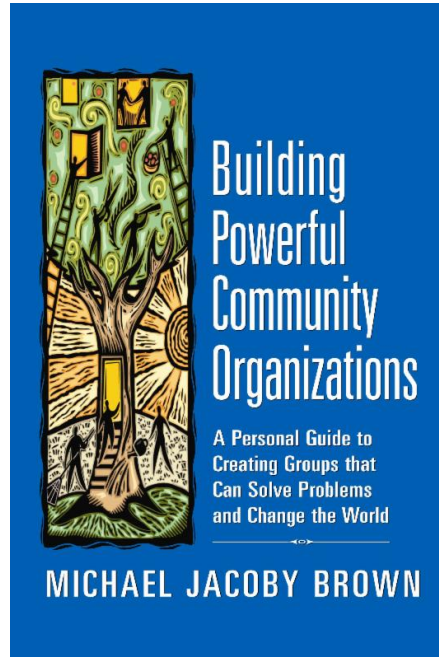
Tim Dean, of SEIU-1199,

Mary Ochs, long time organizer in Los Angeles
and others, hopefully, including YOU

Other Useful Links
[http://michaeljacobybrown.com/
Visions-Inc](http://michaeljacobybrown.com/Visions-Inc)



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