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Michael Jacoby Brown
training & coaching

*Helping organizations achieve their goals
through recruiting and motivating others*

Organizer's Edge ▶

Avoiding the "Avoidance of Contact"

Valerie Batts, PhD, one of the founders of Visions-Inc.org makes a distinction between old fashioned racism and "modern racism." One of the elements of modern racism is "avoidance of contact." That means that most white people and people of color have little meaningful contact with each other. As the leader of a white suburban congregation said to me once, "The only contact most of our members have with an immigrant is when they put a check on the kitchen table for the cleaning lady."



"Avoidance of contact" is non-judgmental. It describes the facts. Most white people live and work among people like them and don't think about it. This lack of contact and lack of understanding of what lives are like for people of a different race allows problems like police brutality, racial profiling, etc to continue.

When I describe incidents of racial profiling to a Black person, they are angry and/or sad but not surprised. When I describe the same incident to a white person they are in shocked disbelief. How could that happen? They ask. This varied reaction results from avoidance of contact. The goal of having people "judged by their character not by the color of their

skin' (to quote Martin Luther King, Jr) will come about more quickly when we create more meaningful contact between people of different races and backgrounds.

This will not happen by itself. It will take intentional creation of contact by individuals and institutions. Just as the old fashioned racism of racial segregation was institutionalized by laws and public policy, the modern racism of avoidance of contact is the legacy of discrimination in housing, schools,, mortgage lending, hiring, and other policies and practices. It is not personally intentional. It is the world we inherited.

It requires expert facilitation to deal with the legacy of avoidance of contact, the deletion of a "[single story](#)" about who the "other" is and an ability to understand, respect and appreciate differences across race, class, gender, religion, sexual orientation, age, formal education, veteran status and other differences. Such contact will have to confront honestly the legacy of the relative advantages/ disadvantages different people were born into and experienced during their life-times.

This will not lend itself to quick, easy fixes or one-time "dialogues," but on-going commitments to avoid the "avoidance of contact," and make efforts to intentionally make contact, to listen, respect and understand those differences. It will take traveling to different neighborhoods: from leafy suburbs to tree-less urban streets. It will take moving from the airy, light-filled suburban schools with acres of ball fields to 100 year old brick school with parking lots for playgrounds. It will take seeing and smelling the different environments that children face every day. So what's your plan?

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.....

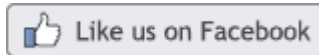
We are just starting, but so far you can expect to hear what the following people are thinking:

- 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 the Interaction Institute for Social Justice,
- Diana Bell** of Community and Labor United,
- David Hernandez** of the California Education Assn,
- Attica Scott**, State Rep Louisville, Kentucky
- Bob Van Meter** with the Local Initiative Support Corporation in Boston,
- 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

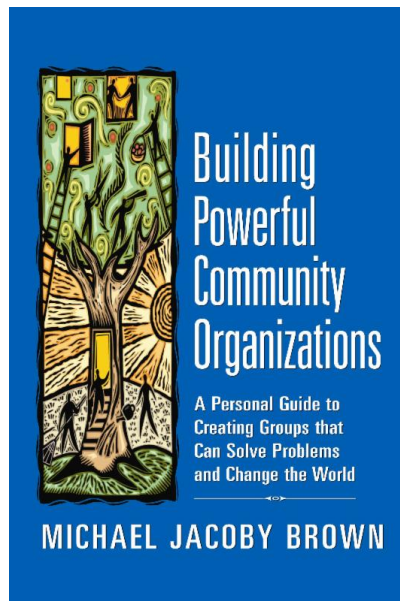
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<http://michaeljacobybrown.com/Road Map Consulting Visions-Inc>

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