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Michael Jacoby Brown
training & coaching

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

Organizer's Edge ▶

All Politics is Local...and Tribal

When I was a kid, growing up in New York, I gained some understanding of tribalism and electoral politics. A "balanced ticket" meant electing a team with three names like "Chicarelli, O'Neil and Cohen." Everyone knew that people voted in ethnic/tribal blocks. The Italians, the Irish and the Jews were all important voting blocs at the time. We all knew those ethnic identities (although we did not call them anything fancy like "identities,") were strong motivators in voting. People wanted someone from their tribe representing them.



Later, Blacks and Puerto Ricans gained their names on a balanced ticket. The power of racial and ethnic identity was never ignored. We never pretended it did not exist.

So it comes as little surprise to me that many white people were ready to listen to Donald Trump's fears of the "others." Some of us can pretend otherwise, or try to paper over the differences. They exist. And with the "modern racism" that includes "avoidance of contact," (see Valerie Batts, PhD and Visions-inc.org) it is easy to see how fears of other tribes and feelings (and realities) of economic loss and an uncertain economic future can easily translate into fear of the other tribes. Especially darker tribes - Mexicans, dark-skinned immigrants, Muslims.

Calling white people racists fails to recognize the power of tribal/ ethnic identity and does little to change the lack of understanding and fear that the avoidance of contact perpetuates. Fear is a powerful motivator.

To overcome the modern racism that avoidance of contact allows, we can start by initiating deliberate contact - especially in areas where avoidance of contact is the norm. When we know people face to face it is much tougher to see them as a faceless "other" and want to build a wall to keep them out or deport those live in our country. If changing the face of the "other" is going to come, it will come thru face to face contact.

One story about a Florida Evangelical Christian Church illustrates this. Many of its white members were conservative Republicans who thought little of Latino immigrants and wanted them deported. Then they started actually meeting them face to face, often in their own church, and that made a difference in their views of who the immigrants were and their opinions on immigration policy. Instead of seeing them as "people taking our jobs," they saw them as hard-working people trying to do the best for their families while dealing with a broken immigration system... The personal contact, along with their Christian faith, changed their minds.

[Click here to see article:](#)

All of us can initiate more face to face contact with others. We can start in our church, neighborhoods, work-places and barber shops and spend most of our time listening.

A couple weeks after the Presidential election I set out to listen to some of my neighbors. I introduced myself as a neighbor. The first door I knocked on an elderly white woman answered the door. I started by asking her about what she cared about in the neighborhood. There was a pothole in front of her house and a town-owned fence next to her house in need of repair. After a while she said she had voted for Trump. I just listened. When I asked her about his comments about assaulting women, she replied, "Oh a lot of women follow after celebrities." She told me that protestors had been paid to go to rallies against Trump. I asked her where she learned that. She said, from the TV and added, "Oh, I don't know what to believe these days."

I called the DPW and asked them to fill the pothole. A few days later her daughter, who lives with her, called me to tell me the Town had filled the pothole and fixed the fence. "We'll see how long the filled pot-hole lasts," her daughter said. I will be back to check on the pothole, on her and her daughter. We will see where it goes. One door at a time.

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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Michael Jacoby Brown Story

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, running for State Rep in in Louisville,

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

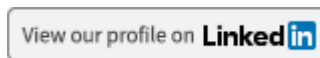
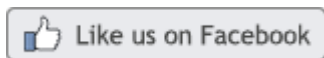
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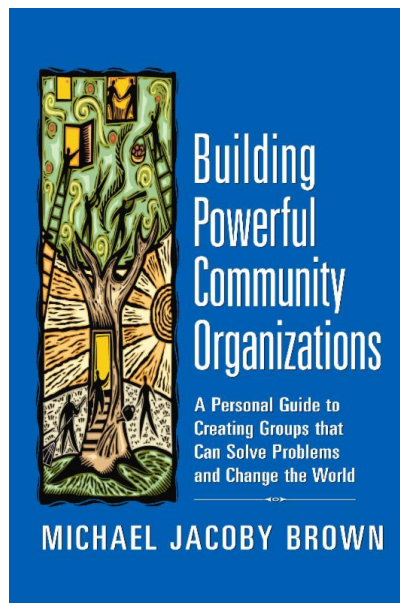
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