

Charitable Leadership and Civility

by Jon Craighead

In C.S. Lewis's 1960 book titled The Four Loves, he identifies four basic types of human love: Affection, Friendship, Eros, and Charity. Charity he identified as the greatest of all the loves. Charity is defined as benevolent goodwill toward or love of humanity with lenient judgment of others. Our business leaders not only adeptly lead their respective organizations but their communities, states, and the country as well. By their very nature these influential leaders are some of the most caring and charitable people alive, giving benevolently of their time, talent, and treasure to the welfare of others.

We are extraordinarily fortunate to have inherited this great country we share. Yet we currently find ourselves more separated and divided as a nation than in former times. In his book Lewis compares charity to a garden. When attended to, it is a beauty to behold – left unattended it becomes an eyesore. What we are experiencing today is the eyesore. What is needed are gardeners to beautify our garden. There is no better group than our thoughtful, talented, and charitable business community to restart the gardening process.

What will be required is a dialogue, an interchange to listen and understand each other's points of view. This is best achieved in a suspended individualism, as much as possible, and a willingness to consider something new beyond the current business-as-usual for our collective wellbeing. For some of us this may be difficult; for others it will take patience. Nevertheless, such a successful outcome will empower ourselves to rise above the inertia of our current discord for the garden's fresh start. All this will be guided by a power bigger than ourselves separately or alone.

Such an endeavor will not survive finger pointing and name calling. This is akin to arguing how the fire started verses putting the fire out. Nor would any of us want the anger and discord which is currently present to continue regardless on which side of the debate you might find yourself. *It's not that either side is exclusively right or wrong.* It is simply that nothing will be accomplished by talking at each other rather than to each other. We are indeed fortunate to have a garden that is so rich with the soil necessary, waiting for us to begin this conversation. What our garden requires is new planting and caring attention. There is no prescription of certainty, no secret solution. This task will require new strategic formulations and an absolute all-inclusive partnership to bring us together to start new thinking and solutions.

It is unlikely this will be a quick or easy resolution; this task will require our best minds, ears, and hands. There is no secret sauce for this garden work to be done. The problems we're confronting today are not new and won't be our last. However, we have been unconscious of their existence while they have continued to grow and spread exponentially.

In fact, this is a natural disaster equal to blizzards, floods, wild fires, tornados, and snow storms, and of course world wars. In such historical events we became bigger than ourselves. We created actionable responses we were unaware existed and certainly unprepared for. The situation crept up on us; when we became aware of the circumstances we answered the call. With our unwavering fortitude and persistence, we met the challenges. Our current situation is another just cause: the preservation of this wonderful gift called the United States. We are unquestionably up to this challenge. We've done it before and we can do it again together. Let's begin!

"No institution can possibly survive if it needs geniuses or supermen to manage it. It must be organized in such a way as to be able to get along under a leadership composed of average human beings." -Peter Drucker