

Let's Schmooze

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The Power in Listening

There's a disturbing trend afoot on our planet. As internet and media services become increasingly widespread around the globe, traditionally closed societies are coming face-to-face with a technology that they never dreamed that they'd have to cope with.

This can be alarming to folks rooted in the past. For many societies in the olden days, ways-of-thinking remained unchanged from generation to generation, and from century to century.

Suddenly, for these closed societies, their entire populations are now enjoying ongoing electronic access to all the innumerable crazy babbles and chats going on in many other countries. Fresh ideas of personal freedom and open opportunities are now constantly wafting thru their ears and minds. The old is looking passe, and the new is enticing. Changes in traditional ways of thinking are afoot.

This doesn't necessarily sit well with the old political establishments. So, we shouldn't be surprised to see renewed attempts to stifle free thought and free speech as a sort of "push-back" from these repressive regimes. Old, traditional societies, accustomed to tight control over their populations, feel threatened by the free discourse that is occasioned by the wide-open internet and media access that is now available to their citizens.

Their citizens start thinking new thoughts, start having new expectations, and start making new demands. The old guards responsible for their societies can have trouble with that. So, they instinctively and unthinkingly choke the internet and muzzle the press.

In America ~ championed as a land of the free ~ we must be ever vigilant that our rights to free thought and free expression are never trampled upon by anyone ~ even in the interests of national security. What would America be without free and wide-ranging discourse? It wouldn't be the America that we know!

After all, it is simply wise ~ especially from a security perspective ~ to listen openly to people ~ if it's just to know what they are thinking. Right! How can a person stay on top of a situation if one doesn't know what the people involved in the situation are "really" thinking in their heads?

Think about it. Knowledge has long been said to be the key to power. And, knowledge comes from quietly listening. That means listening carefully to what the other person has to say, and trying to understand why they are thinking in a particular fashion. Today's partisan politicians and polarized followers could take a clue here.

About 2,500 years ago, the legendary Chinese general Sun Tzu, discussing military strategy in *The Art of War*, emphasized the importance of "knowing your enemy." What better way is there to know your enemy than to listen to your enemy, and to understand why they are thinking the way that they are thinking at the moment of interest?

That's why ~ amongst humans ~ surreptitious eavesdropping is ever so popular. We shouldn't be surprised when we run across it. Everyone wants to know what the other person is saying, and thinking ~ especially if it's on the sly.

It would be much better if governments just kept expression "open." Then, everyone is empowered. Trying to stifle expression just drives it underground, where it can fester and cause unnecessary problems.

If expression is truly open, then there is no need for surreptitious eavesdropping. Everything becomes clear and above board, and everyone gets a chance to speak for themselves. That happens to be democratic empowerment at the most fundamental level.

Unless, of course, "fake news" becomes an issue. That messes everything up, and that's a subject for another article.

~ 'til we meet again ~