



Be a Solution Finder, Not a Problem Finder

Description

Some see a solution to every problem. And some see a problem with every solution. I posted this quote on my LinkedIn account some time back, and it received many views.

Over the past several months, I have had the great opportunity to travel extensively. These travels are a combination of being in communities wanting to thrive by adapting the ideas from my book *Building a Vibrant Community* and meeting with health systems to discuss methods to best provide care to the caregivers. Communities and health systems have some similarities. For example, both are full of passionate people who want to make life better for others.

There are differences too. One major difference is the ease of getting things accomplished. In a health system, it is easier to move forward. The CEO can get people on the same page and moving in the same direction. In communities, this can be much more difficult. My experience is that some individuals get energy from stopping things versus moving things forward. It takes a special group of people in a community to move things forward. In *Building a Vibrant Community*, there is a section called “Consent Versus Consensus.” This means those individuals who don’t get their way still support the ultimate decision. There is rarely a perfect solution. The question is, will a change be better, or, at minimum, is it worth the try?

Health systems focus on the issues at hand and try to address those challenges with urgency. For example, how do we provide care for fatigued caregivers? How can we attract people to healthcare as a profession, as well as to management? (Being in a management role in any industry is a challenge. Today this is truer than ever.) How can we reduce the burnout being experienced by physicians and all healthcare workers?

A person does not have to go far to find a problem. The key is to find solutions. Ironically, tough times can produce solutions. In healthcare, the use of telehealth has increased due to the pandemic. Other positive changes are the recognition that seeking help in the area of mental health is not a sign of weakness...that addressing burnout is not an option but a necessity...that people need to move from checking boxes on tactics like rounding to using them as methods for focusing on building relationships of trust. Another realization that has come out of the pandemic is that healthcare is less about

competition and more about collaboration among providers.

Solutions are rarely easy. It does make a difference when everyone is in the same boat, rowing in the same direction, without an anchor holding the boat in place or slowing it down.

My experience with communities is skewed in a good way. I find that the communities that reach out to me have already found a solution or at least want some guidance in finding solutions.

For example, Stillwater, Oklahoma, has completed a Quality of Life survey. They have an energized group called Vibrant Stillwater, which is a coalition of citizens and local leaders looking to revitalize the community. One project that's moving forward involves a vacant piece of property in downtown Stillwater that has sat idle for a long time. Is everyone happy? Probably not. However, they are moving forward. The question to answer would be, "Is this better than empty land?" I encourage you to visit the website <https://www.vibrantstillwater.com/> to learn more.

In Lafayette Parish, Louisiana, One Acadiana has also completed a Quality of Life survey. A group of people who lead 20,000 employees gathered to implement a system to communicate to each workplace on the many positive things that are taking place and to rally around a key downtown project. Not surprisingly, the closer the project gets to starting, the more desperate the stoppers become. Visit <https://www.oneacadiana.org/> to learn more.

Putnam County, Florida, has a similar story. After reviewing their Quality of Life survey, the community members got together to outline next steps and to move forward with a full-time downtown program coordinator. Visit <https://palatkayp.com/quality-of-life-survey/> to learn more.

The point is that all three of these communities moved to solutions.

I have also seen organizations and communities *not* move forward even after the solution was agreed upon by the majority of people based on objective data and input. There are some common barriers that block progress. Here are some of the most frequent ones:

1. The quest to find "something better" that might be out there. The great majority of the time, not only is there nothing better, but what comes next is worse. Years ago, I put my house up for sale by owner. I put a sign up, and within hours, I had an offer. It was a good one. I thought, *The place has been on the market for only a few hours, so something even better may come.* I did not want to jump at the first offer. Six months later, after failing to sell it by owner, a real estate firm sold it for me. It was not their fault, but that first offer I rejected was better than the one I ended up accepting.
2. Focusing too much on what is wrong. There is often no perfect solution. The key is this: Will what happens be better than what the current state is?
3. Letting the stoppers have too much oxygen. Yes, at times, stopping things is good. Racism is one example. Many times the stoppers don't have a solution; they just love the notoriety of stopping something. In 2005, in Pensacola, Florida, I was involved in a project to take land that was not easy to use and to place a multi-use stadium on it. The data showed that when done, it would also increase private investment in downtown.

Two individuals led an effort to stop the project. Some people wanted it to stay just empty land. One person was upset there was not going to be more buildings on it. The key was to stop it.

After years of delays and millions of dollars of lost opportunity, the park is a reality. Downtown is thriving, and hundreds of thousands enjoy it.

It is so much better to be a solution finder. Here are a few tips:

1. Hold up the mirror. My cousin Al asks people who are against doing something a few questions. One is, "How is that working for you?" Another is, "Is it better than what you have?"
2. Listen to others who've been successful in the past...and use data. The communities mentioned above are using data to find solutions.
3. Be willing to support a project even if it's not exactly what you want. I love sports. When a coach draws out a play, the key is that everyone sets out to execute the play to the best of their ability. The left tackle on the offensive line does not let a player get by them because they did not like the play. And then when the play doesn't work, they don't say, "See, I didn't think it would work." Be a team player.
4. Never give up the search for solutions. They are out there. Some organization, some part of the organization, or some other community has found solutions to problems similar to yours. Don't be terminally unique. Adjust if needed; however, implement what is working elsewhere.

Solution finders make things happen. They improve things for those around them. Besides, being a part of something that makes organizations and communities stronger, healthier, and better just feels good. Striving to make a positive impact on the world is incredibly rewarding...it's the best way I can think of to live life.

Date Created

January 25, 2022

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