

“Politics, Science and Collaboration”

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“Politics, science and collaboration.”

If that is the answer on the popular television game show “Jeopardy,” then what is the question?

The question is “Name a man-made disaster; a dangerous set of myths; and a figment of Peter Adler’s imagination.

It is also our reality. Disasters ... myths ... figments.

And it is that mix of politics, science, and a strong desire for collaboration that brings us together for a workshop on Joint Fact Finding. Everyone in this room is dedicated to weaving together the challenges of politics, the opportunities of scientific method, and the context of a collaborative process to improving the quality of our decision making.

And the work for all us gets more interesting all the time.

One of the most critical realities of our contemporary existence is the virtual mountain of information that confronts us every time we look.

There is a powerful online film entitled, "Did You Know?" that you can find on youtube.com; it illustrates in statistical form our new world, including these compelling numbers:

There are 31 billion Google searches every month. 31 billion requests of the Internet to provide us with answers.

It is estimated that four exabytes (4×10^{19}) of unique information will be generated this year, which is greater than all the unique information created in the last 4,000 years.

The amount of new technical information doubles every year.

And so on.

It is not just the volume that we are up against.

The second challenge is around the quality of information online, which varies dramatically. What passes as a "fact" is quite often, not.

I was raised on the generally accepted resources of Encyclopedia Britannica, the World Book, and the Oxford Dictionary. The equivalent for our children today is Wikipedia.

And when you turn to any article in Wikipedia, right there in the upper right side is a tab entitled, "Edit."

"Edit?" "Edit???"

Click on it and in essence it allows me--a particularly scary thought when it comes to me--to edit history, to alter the "facts" as presented in the so-called

reference piece. I don't know about you, but I have had personal experience with entries that are 180° away from the "truth." Not slightly off, but totally wrong. The only thing that could make the sentence accurate is to put a "NOT" in it. A third great challenge is the increasing tendency to dismiss all science as essentially political in nature when it runs against the outcome that people's emotions want to be the case.

I recently spoke with a young person who was deeply distressed by how many of her contemporaries were, on one hand, appalled by those who continue to deny the science of climate change and then, on the other hand, quick to dismiss all science in the quest for non-GMO "tainted" food.

In other words, science is good when it supports us, a tool of the ruling elite when it does not. Arguably it is really not a question of "emotional" argument, it is more accurately that the role of science falls into that category of issues relating significantly to power.

When science challenges the status quo, as it did in the case of climate change, then it has an inherent rightness or believability. When science defends the status quo and its large institutions, as it is felt to do in the case of GMOs, then it is inherently false.

And yet, the scientists may even be the same scientists, universities (many of whom are represented here tonight) are most certainly the same; the dividing line is where the science lands in the larger power equations of a world that is increasingly cynical and distrustful of those in power.

As we head into our discussions for the next two days, I would ask that we keep three thoughts in mind:

First, that we approach our work with great humility.

In the course of human interaction, there have turned out to be no magic formulas for getting people to work together well and productively.

I was very pleased at the deliberate use by the conference organizers of the word “a” rather than the word “THE” in describing the place of Joint Fact Finding as among the pantheon of valuable collaborative processes.

It has been said that the way you tell a new physician from an experienced one is that the young one will say, “This is what’s wrong with you and this is what we’re going to do to fix it,” while the experienced one (I did not say “old”) says, “This is what you appear to have and we’re going to try this first to get at it.”

Or in our case, “This process has worked well in similar situations so let’s give it a try here.”

I know I am preaching to the choir here but will do so anyway. We cannot oversell this process and we need to let the results do the bragging, not us. As I was once admonished by an elder: “Under promise and over deliver.”

A second thought to keep in mind is that there is great value in the process itself, regardless of the outcome.

If you can get the key antagonists in a room and keep them there, without murder or mayhem for a period of time, you have likely altered the dispute equation *no matter what*. It may not be a huge change, and it may not show up immediately,

but any time human beings are in a room working together and the auspices of a skilled leader (that's everyone here), they cannot help but come out of it changed.

Whether or not accepted, we at least get to see where we each "come from" with our views.

And it is harder to demonize the person we have sat with than it is to do with a complete stranger.

We can be deliberate about making each process meaningful ... regardless of the outcome. On the island of Kauai, Council Member JoAnn Yukimura is working with Peter Adler on the possibility of a Joint Fact Finding process on the highly emotional subject of GMOs. In describing it to me, JoAnn said her dream was to have every side represented by people in their twenties. She then wanted to challenge them to remember that they would all be living together for the next 50 or 80 years, so they needed to behave accordingly.

And the third point is best illustrated with a story.

Many years ago, after extensive research, a group was able to create a replica of the canoes that brought the Hawaiians from Tahiti to Hawaii. They were aided by one of the few living open ocean native Pacific navigators, Mau Pialug, who came to Hawaii to help train the crew. The first voyage of the Hōkūle'a made it to Tahiti and was celebrated throughout the Pacific. It also was pivotal in the resurgence of Hawaiian cultural practices and language.

Later there was a second voyage, which was a disaster. There was no escort boat, there was not enough attention paid to what might happen if things go wrong, and they set off in poor weather. The canoe capsized while still in the Hawaiian

Island chain. The canoe was eventually found, though not before famed Hawaiian waterman Eddie Aikau lost his life trying to paddle to the nearest island to get help. The entire experience demoralized everyone involved and took a third voyage off the table.

An elder in the Native Hawaiian community finally gathered the voyagers and told them that it simply was unacceptable for the Native Hawaiian community to have the story of the voyages end in failure.

The group agreed to another voyage, got Mau Pialug back to train the crew, and began again. The lead navigator Nainoa Thompson worked with Mau extensively. After a while, Mau took Nainoa to a place called “Lana’i Lookout” in East Honolulu and asked him, “Can you see Tahiti?” Nainoa said “No” and they left. This happened at least ten times until Nainoa said in some frustration, “Mau, on a good day I can see Lana’i (hence the name) but I will never be able to see Tahiti. However, I can see it in my mind.” Mau looked at him, smiled, and said, “Now we can go.”

Which leads to a third point. It is critical that leaders have an image, a vision of where they want to take the group. In this case, I would suggest we look to the Hawaiian word, and image of “Kipuka.”

Kipuka refers to an island of green growth surrounded by the newer flows of lava that came afterwards and burned all the land around it. It is a refuge -- a safe place -- a symbol of continued life and vitality -- and its strength speaks for itself. I have a picture of one for each of you to keep.

This conference, thanks to our convenors Masashiro Matsuura and Peter Adler, is a gathering of great minds to explore and further elevate the practice and craft of Joint Fact Finding. The Collaborative Leaders Network is very pleased to support your important work.

Mahalo.