

On My Mind  
10/27/00

"What the world needs now" - I can't remember how that song goes, but what I think the world needs now - or at least this part of it - is help in learning how to negotiate in a non-confrontational way. There are, it's true, many books out there, and no doubt any number of seminars and work-shops, on getting to win-win situations, resolving conflict, avoiding confrontation, and the like. But actually applying such techniques to real-life situations doesn't come all that easy.

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I've read a number of those books, and I still have difficulty expressing differences of opinion in a calm, orderly, and logical fashion. I put off voicing my disagreement, and when it becomes necessary to confront someone, manage to do so only with great effort - taking a deep breath, giving myself a stern talking-to, pushing away all distractions.....

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For younger generations, speaking one's mind doesn't seem quite such a problem. Confrontation seems to come as naturally as breathing. For me, direct, head-to-head, in-person confrontation is a major ordeal. I think if there were workshops I could go to, where one could act out the strategies and techniques, I could learn how to do so, but without them, it remains a real issue.

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The need for such workshops and seminars - to teach an older generation the ways of the younger - is especially needed here, and throughout Micronesia, where the custom and tradition of respect for one's elders is still quite strong. Respect for the wisdom, for the experience, for the knowledge of their history that the older generation possesses should not change - it is a crucial link to cultural survival.

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But with so much in society changing so rapidly in the islands, an absolute deference to elders when it comes to dealing with the present-day economy, technology, does warrant change. There should be room for new ideas, new approaches, for input by a younger generation that has been educated off-island, that has acquired a wider perspective, that has experienced and seen new ways of doing things.

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There need to be - for the elders and for the younger generation - workshops on how to relate to each other, how to listen and how to learn, how to respect the new as well as the old, how to voice differences, how to communicate through the differences to mutual advantage.

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It is a very touchy, delicate subject - how to maintain respect for the elderly while allowing the younger generation a greater voice in decision and policy-making. With some training in how to do so, it might be easier for all concerned.

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Next week's open primary is another area where education would be helpful. I don't know how widespread the idea of open primaries is - here it's become a quite remarkable game of

“double-think.” Members of the party whose primary it is not are encouraged to cast a vote anyway - but for the weaker candidate - so that when the “real” vote occurs, their candidate will have a better chance of winning. There doesn’t seem much room for education in that area - except to abolish the idea of open primaries altogether.

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Where education would have some value is in the casting of the ballot in the voting booth. What people need is to learn to have faith in the privacy of the voting booth - that no one - except themselves - will know how they voted, for whom they cast their vote. What they also need is to learn to recognize that loyalty to an elder, or to a family member, or to someone whose favors they’ve accepted is not the best criterion for voting for a particular candidate. They need to learn to believe in the importance of their own point of view - that what is right or good is a far better criterion for voting for a particular candidate.

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That, in turn, calls for learning to think in terms of the broader community instead of just in terms of one’s own interest. A candidate may promise all sorts of personal goodies - everything from a job to tents for novenas, to the paving of one’s driveway - in exchange for a person’s vote.

But that doesn’t help one’s neighbor, it doesn’t help the community at large. That kind of “goodie” doesn’t pave the roads, or provide more pay for teachers, or protect the reefs, or cut the budget, or simplify the tax laws, or do any of the myriad other things that help the community as a whole.

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From whom should such education come? From the churches, from the schools, from those running for office who are ethical enough to put the needs and priorities of the community above their concern for their own personal benefit, from one’s own conscience.

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Education consists of, in large part, acquiring information. Even on these small islands, there are significant quantities of information that somehow never reach the general public - or not a very large portion thereof.

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For example: No where is it mentioned that the traffic light system in use on Saipan is apparently very sophisticated. The lights seem to stay green until there are (sufficient) cars waiting to enter from the cross-road. And once that cross-road traffic has cleared, the green lights go back on. The lights do not seem set, in other words, for an artificial number of minutes for green or red, but for the actual presence of traffic - in real-time. Of course, in order to work, the traffic must hit the “hot spot” where its presence is sensed by the traffic light mechanism.

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Just goes to prove that engineering - if properly executed - can be pretty impressive. Pity more of Saipan’s road engineering isn’t as good.

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Another example: There was an earthquake on Saipan last Sunday - a sharp bump, immediately followed by a rolling wave - at around 8:05 a.m. It measured 4.4. Except for EMO, doesn’t seem anyone noticed.....

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Example: Among the reasons for the long delay in releasing the results of the health survey given Tanapag residents: the cholera-like near-epidemic that consumed CHC medical staff attention for a period in mid-summer. A good reason - why hasn't anyone 'fessed up?

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Exmple: More than 20,000 feral goats populate the islands of Anatahan, Alamagen, Pagan and Agrigan; more than 6,000 feral pigs can be found on Alamagan, Pagan and Agrigan. In addition there are uncounted cattle, and feral cats on the same northern islands. Their impact on the islands' ecosystem is close to catastrophic. And the animals continue to multiply.....

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Is all of this known on the coconut telegraph? Is any of this covered on radio news shows, MTV? I'm not very tuned in to those avenues and I'm not a cable subscriber. But I can say with some certainty that they have not been covered in the print media. Which goes to prove that one can't rely on just one medium to get one's message across.

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Unless it means that no one else has the same consuming curiosity?

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And speaking of things curious, isn't it interesting that Senate Executive Appointments and Government Investigations Chair Joaquin G. Atalig would support an "outsider" as head of the Office of the Public Auditor, but not for the position of Superior Court judge?

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Curious also is the sign newly appended to that "information booth" outside the Garapan Joeten store: "Shooting Gallery booth." When I asked, I was told "we have a shooting gallery in Garapan." Well, at least it's not a shooting resort - yet.

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On a cheerier note: The Arts Council has a new show open to the public - with a number of new works on display, including four more of Kuniyoshi Ukita's colorful, charming, fanciful, interweavings of island lore and natural beauty. I particularly liked "Butterfly fishing" and Shell Kite." They're not for sale, more's the pity. Though I'm sure I wouldn't be able to afford them if he did put a price tag on them. I just wish he'd sell prints!

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There's also some new talent on display: bright floral acrylics by Jeanne Rayphand; a variety of media by John Davis - I particularly liked "The light" - though I also liked his "Dragon." And some wonderful ribbon mobiles made by prison inmates.

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The present exhibit, to be augmented by additional Christmas items for sale beginning November 20, is open 8-4 weekdays, 9-1 on Saturdays.