

Top Sideways Bottom

[compare & contrast three socioeconomic patterns]

Top Down:

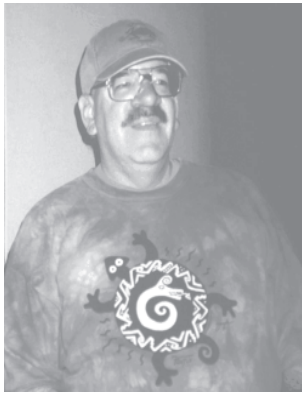
The First Nations Aboriginal writer Thomas Perry describes a kind of pattern of life that instructs us about the world we live in. Or paints a compelling picture in this regard. This paraphrase has appeared in one or two of my previous *Street Feat* writings, so it may not be much of a surprise.

Perry writes in his book *Death Benefits* that rich people all know each other. They attend the same 200 private schools, and the same prep schools. They matriculate at the same 25 colleges and universities. They ultimately work at the same insurance firms, law firms, banks and brokerage houses. And they take vacations--more of them than any other people do--in the same 75 spots on the earth, where they stay at the same 75 hotels. "I'll bet it's sometimes hard for them to believe that the world contains six or seven billion people, because they spend their whole lives bumping into the same six or seven thousand. They won't talk to anybody but each other."

Sideways:

Compare and contrast these other experiences regarding presentday socio-economic organization. Engineers and bakers, for example. I explored the interview with documentary film-maestro Michael Moore at the web site www.democracynow.org and I also had a chance to scrape together a bunch of pennies so I could see his latest *Capitalism: A Love Story* at the Halifax Park Lane theater, when he referenced these two examples of democracy in the work place. In some of these instances the workers rejected the notion of profit sharing through stock options, etc. because they realized this alternative was a load of bs. They also dismissed the idea of the boss giving the workers a nice Christmas card at the end of the year with a small "Thank you" cheque enclosed.

Well, wouldn't you know, the workers simply wanted some real folding money, the kind you can put into your jeans, the kind that truly reflects profit sharing. According to mathematical models that look as basic as $2+2=4$. You know, the simple kind of arithmetic that demonstrates true equal dividing of the pie. So in the real world there are also other things afoot, beyond the rich peoples' realms, like this radical idea. The *Isthmus Engineering Company* of Wisconsin probably



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was a tiny hotbed of George Bush supporters through previous USA presidential elections. At the very least, probably hardcore Republican supporters, Moore speculates. This is a small business according to the gods of economics somewhere, yet it is very successful. It provides goods and services in the commercial marketplace that are very much in demand, and so this merry bunch of engineers splits up the relatively hefty chunk of 15 million dollars per year, on average every year. So this firm of roughly a handful of engineers receive a Christmas card every year with a very large dollar amount enclosed. Gazillions of dollars! Let's move on to the bakery now.

The *Alvarado Street Bakery* in California has a lot of lowly "joe jobs" and higher up the food chain kinds of jobs but no matter. Every single employee gets the same equal cut of the profits. It amounts to an average of 63 thousand dollars per year, in each person's pocket. And, oh my God! These are a bunch of Obama Democrats! Go figure?! Right wing, left wing, doesn't matter what wing you fly. You are either being given equal status and/or cash or you're not. Something to think about. Maybe some time something to bring up during a conversation with your employer? When the moment is right? What do you think?

Bottom Up:

From Thomas Perry to Michael Moore, to Dr. Muhammad Unus and Judy Rebick. Power and socioeconomic structure from the bottom up. A new paradigm emerging all over the planet, happening mostly, firstly in South America. In places like Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Venezuela, etc. Yet among the poorest on the planet it looks like this.

When he was here during the MicroCredit Summit Conference in November, 2006, Dr. Unus spoke quite passionately and also eloquently about the "microcredit" women of the world who were bringing community building to a reality, even in the most destitute of circumstances. Unfortunately, as Dr. Unus reported, and with a few exceptions, when dealing with men, they took care of themselves, first, last and foremost, within the experience of the microfinance institutions. With women, the pattern was and is quite the opposite. A woman spends what money she receives from her microbusiness on her kids first, her community second, and herself last and least. The idealized vision of community building was described by Dr. Unus as beginning to happen, slowly and surely. After progress was experienced in getting women on their feet and beginning to realize business success, Dr. Unus said their sights were usually set on larger goals. Cell phones for communications, acquiring clean drinking water, also rudimentary electricity generation, and constructing schools and clinics, as well. So this is socioeconomic structure from the bottom up from some of the poorest of the poor people on the planet.

Judy Rebick wrote in her latest work, the remarkably inspiring and instructive book *Transforming Power: from the personal to the political* about all the hard work in bringing bottom up leadership to reality. From the United Kingdom's disabled and also homeless people, in India among the untouchables, with the poorest in Africa, and among the landless peasants' movements in South America, she reported on a new energy to nurture the most impoverished and least educated members of various respective organizations

to begin to practice at taking over the reigns of power and decision making. By learning leadership skills, among other abilities.

Canadian Bottom Up:

As for us in Canada, I am convinced that with some effort and some experimental trial and error, we need to make bottom up leadership a reality here and now. Among mental health consumers, women and men fresh out of prison, the most destitute and woebegotten, found in homeless shelters and elsewhere on the streets, etc., among youth at risk, and also among addicts and alcoholics in recovery. We need a new vision of putting the business models and management models of providing care out in the trash. I'm *not* against utilizing intelligent and careful management and spending ideas. But I *am* against when the accounting ledger takes over and the beleaguered person is left to pound sand. No way.

Compromise may be a must at times, but not at the expense of lives. Yes, easier said than done, I realize. But I am convinced that the person who has "been there and done that" with respect to traveling on some of life's roughest roads the hard way might be in a better position than the professional who is sitting in the office spending time musing about retirement in cottage country, or engaging in fantasies of life on the beach at that Mexican beach house that's in the works for purchase?

Why have I taken such a tone?

I think back about all the times there was nothing but disconnect experienced, when speaking with professionals. For example, like the fellow who reported to me about nearly getting killed by bullies in a homeless shelter. Later while speaking with a community mental health nurse, he noticed that telltale bored look on her face, "Are we there yet? Can I call it a day and get to packing, and heading for the office yet?" He was outraged. All the nurse could muster was a vacant "Uh-huh. Okay, let's move on . . ." Grossly unfair but I have had too many experiences like this as well, and so have many others. Yes, I think I am being unfair here. Many professionals claim, quite rightly, that they are overworked and very much unappreciated. And under-budgeted. I believe it. So a real conundrum, then?

But I really think the mental health consumer, with proper training, and the specific addict and/or alcoholic in recovery, and the appropriate person on probation or parole, etc, might be more attuned to the little and large details of life that a given member of their organization might be up against. These bottom up leaders may be more sensitive to the crisis a day realities to be navigated or actually, in many cases, the crisis an hour horrors. I recall Rev. Gus Pendleton, when in Halifax years ago, remarking about how sometimes it is difficult for professional people to be fully aware and fully sensitive regarding of these crises.

Also the bottom up leader won't be distracted with thoughts of retirement life in the country or frolic in the ocean surf, because he or she is living a 24 hour per day existence, 7 days per week, with these issues, and not working a 9-5 job with a retirement package to contemplate. I'm sorry regarding these sentiments but I have spoken to too many people who are anxious about these matters and have vocalized their concerns to ignore them.

Well, what can be done? The politicians and professionals have to do more. For example, the road show regarding poverty hosted by the NDP earlier in the year was about, among other things, a child tax credit as a benefit for moms on welfare and/or families with a low income. I guess I have already mentioned tinkering and tokenism?

Anyhow, the well meaning politicians and well intentioned professionals have got to go further. Too many voices from the grunts in the trenches, in community centers and at various agencies have told me of this lament: adherence to the business model has

From Citadel Hill to Sable Island...
I'm here to help.

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