

PEACE OUTSIDE THE BOX: TOWARD A PARADIGM OF CHANGE

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INTRODUCTION

When I was a young man struggling with a rather minor family crisis, an elderly gentleman attempted to expand my thinking. He told me about how he, at the age of five or six, had taken his father's handsaw and cut off a two or three inch triangular piece from a corner of the family's beautiful mahogany dining room table. After reprimanding his son, the boy's father, being somewhat talented as a carpenter, took the same saw and carefully sawed off the other three corners. The father then applied his woodworking skill to refinish each of the four corners.

On Monday, September 22, 1862, in the midst of the War Between The States, shortly after the battle of Antietam, President Abraham Lincoln issued to his cabinet the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. On January 1, 1863, the proclamation became law. In the ensuing months very few slaves were actually emancipated. The Proclamation only purported to free slaves who at that time were residing in states or regions of states that were in rebellion against The United States of America. Since no

one in authority in the rebellious states or regions would ever recognize any pronouncement made by Lincoln, the Proclamation was largely ignored.

Yet, in a strange way, the Emancipation Proclamation changed not only the moral focus of the war between the states but also the ultimate purpose, the *raison d'être* for the war. Lincoln had indeed taken a huge gamble. He risked the loyalty of his generals and the consequent loyalty of the enlisted ranks. He risked defeat in the 1864 presidential election by encouraging the moral outrage of legions of loyal Unionists who were not abolitionists. Perhaps the greatest risk was the possible loss of the border states, especially Missouri, Kentucky, and Maryland.

By this action Lincoln managed to end the immediate danger of either England or France recognizing the Confederacy as a sovereign nation and thus becoming a belligerent against the United States. Lincoln knew full well that England had abolished the slave trade within its Empire in 1807, and in 1833 had abolished the practice of slavery entirely, an act finally accomplished by 1838.¹ France was also anti-slavery and would likely not come to the aide of the Confederacy unless England did. Now, for the first time, Lincoln was free to prosecute the war without the threat of England or France coming into the fray on the side of the Confederacy..

Abraham Lincoln had gone *out of the box* in his thinking. He had defied the assumptions of ordinary logic and taken an action that changed the moral purpose and ultimate direction of the war. Until that time England and France had seen the American Civil War as being about the right of secession, not of the right to possess slaves in a

¹ Franklin, John Hope; *The Emancipation Proclamation*. Wheeling, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, Inc. 1963. Chapter One, "The Precedents and the Pressures".

servile relationship. For this reason neither England nor France could become a supportive ally of the Confederacy.

Almost one hundred years after Lincoln released the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation to his cabinet, President John F. Kennedy faced a perilous situation we now refer to as the Cuban Missile Crisis. The date was October 14th, 1962. Kennedy had received a cable from Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev offering terms for the withdrawal of missiles from Cuba. Kennedy and his advisors chose not to respond to this cable, evidently thinking it was not in the best interests of the United States. In the meantime Khrushchev had his own troubles with the Kremlin and was apparently maneuvered into sending a second cable to President Kennedy. The second message was somewhat more stringent and significantly less attractive in its terms and in its tone than the first message. When Kennedy and his advisors read this second missive they realized that the first cable from Khrushchev was a far more sensible and attractive proposal for solution of the crisis than was Khrushchev's second message.

President Kennedy decided to ignore the second cable and simply reply to the first, more favorable proposal. Kennedy's response to the first cable had the effect of nullifying the very existence of the second cable which forever after remained unanswered. Kennedy's endorsement and acceptance of the key terms of the first message led to the resolution of the crisis. In doing so Kennedy made a decision *outside the box*. He ignored the prescribed boundaries and parameters of decision making by simply choosing to respond only to the first Khrushchev message and thus the world was spared a very possible nuclear holocaust.

FIRST ORDER CHANGE

One of the key components of systems theory is the recognition of two types of change.² The first, simply called first order change, is any change that essentially is *more of the same*. It is change *within* the system but not change *of* the system. The hallmark of first order change is that it prescribes and endorses a change or series of changes that are simply an escalation of the present order and circumstances. The system itself remains unchanged. “First order change involves using the same problem-solving techniques over and over again.”³

As an example of first order change, consider any typical family in which one of the youngsters has transcended the bounds of behavior. The parents may prescribe a week-end of grounding. If this fails to work the parents may prescribe two or three week-ends of grounding. If this fails to elicit the desired change in behavior the parents may withdraw certain privileges. If this fails the parents may resort to even more drastic measures, all to no avail. Actually, this same scenario may transpire with a three year old or four year old, or any child who defies parental authority. One spanking leads to two. Two leads to three. Three leads to isolation. After the isolation fails there is the withdrawal of privilege and when withdrawal of privilege fails there is little left but threats and more threats, and the increased likelihood of disobedience and hostile maneuvering.

² Watzlawick, Paul, Weakland, John, and Fisch, Richard; *Change*; New York: W. W. Norton; 1974; Chapter One: “The Theoretical Perspective”.

³ Weeks, Gerald, and L’Abate, Luciano; *Paradoxical Psychotherapy*; New York: Brunner/Mazell, 1982 Pg. Pg. 19.

The key ingredient of first order change is the increasing amounts of *more of the same* with escalating edicts and responses to such a point that neither the parents nor their offspring can ever win. Winning is impossible because of the increasingly hostile dynamic. The sad ending is usually what family therapists call an *emotional cut-off* whereby the young person becomes so alienated from the adult, regardless of who is primarily at fault, that reconciliation is extremely difficult and sometimes virtually impossible.⁴

SECOND ORDER CHANGE

Second order change is *not* more of the same. Second order change is not changing dynamics and procedures *within* the system or within the chain of events. Second order change is change *of* the system itself. Second order change is interference with the usual direction of escalating events. It is a transcending of the usual rules. It is going outside the lines of the box and attempting to arrive at a solution that is never in accordance with so-called box rules.⁵ “The system is transformed structurally and/or communicationally...it represents a quantum jump in the system to a different level of functioning.”⁶

Most of us over the age of sixty can remember learning to drive the family car by pushing in the clutch to shift gears. When the car was in first gear we would press our foot on the accelerator and the car would go a little faster and give us an abundance of

⁴ Bowen, Murray; *Family Therapy In Clinical Practice*; New York: Jason Aronson, 1978; Chapter 16, “Theory In The Practice of Psychotherapy”.

⁵ Thinking outside the box derives from unknown sources. The box consists of three horizontal rows of dots, each row containing three dots. The object is to connect all nine dots with four straight lines without lifting the pencil off the paper. There is also a sixteen dot version. In order to solve the problem one must transcend the plane containing the nine or sixteen dots. It is this act of transcending the plane that gives rise to the concept known as thinking outside the box.

power, but it quickly reached a point where there was no more speed to be had and the extra power was wasted. Then we would shift the gear into second and once again we could feel the increase in speed and a reduction in power. When we finally shifted into third or “high” we had plenty of speed and a corresponding reduction in power. We did not know it at the time but what was really happening when we shifted gears was a transition to a different level of functioning. “In each gear the car has a certain range of behaviors.”⁷ As long as we remained in first gear the engine could only give us more of the same. But when we pressed down the clutch and shifted the gear into second and then on into third we were making a change in the system itself. We were participating in second order change. “Second order change is thus *change of change*.”⁸

This is what the father did after his little son cut off the corner of the dining room table. This is what Abraham Lincoln did by issuing the Emancipation Proclamation. This is what John F. Kennedy did to end the Cuban missile crisis. We could also say it is what Richard Nixon did in his historic trip to China in February of 1972. Second order change is not more of the same because more of the same has proven to be either a dead end or a pretext for escalation of hostile action. Second order change demands change in the system itself, in the dynamics of interaction and in the parameters of measurement and judgement.

THE SOLUTION BECOMES THE PROBLEM

⁶ Op. Cit. Weeks and L’Abate

⁷ Watzlawick, Paul, Weakland, John, and Fisch, Richard; *Change: Principles of Problem Formation and Problem Resolution*; New York: W. W. Norton, 1974, Pg. 9..

⁸ Ibid; Pg 11.

One of the most frequently observed phenomena in first order change is the fact that the attempted solution frequently exacerbates the problem or becomes the new problem. Examples of this are legion.

In terms of disciplinary violence visited upon children, spanking almost always leads to increased levels of violence. I am reminded of an empirical study by Sears, Maccoby, and Levin that concluded with the warning that spanking of children, while sometimes effective for short term intervention, was absolutely counter-productive as a long term teaching device. The finding of this study showed that spanking oftentimes reinforced and increased the undesirable behavior it was intended to eradicate.⁹

A major area of concern wherein the solution frequently becomes the problem is in the area of international politics, international sanctions, and warfare. Many politicians claim that sanctions work while many more insist they make matters worse. The traditional childlike game of a tit-for-tat sequence of retribution has become so commonplace that it is virtually impossible to determine how the chain of retaliation was triggered in the first place. The scenario of Israel and Palestine serves as a prime example of the utter futility of first order change. The strike-back and get-even mentality has led to ever increasing degrees of violence and despair. The solution has become the problem ad infinitum. The situation in Northern Ireland also serves to remind us that when the solution becomes the problem the succeeding generations lose touch with the original problem altogether.

America's attempt to rid the world of terrorism has certainly created greater problems, if not greater threats and manifestations of terror. If ever there was a need for

⁹ Sears, R. R., Maccoby, E. E., & Levin, H.; *Patterns Of Child Rearing*: Evanston, Ill. Row, Peterson, 1957.

attempts at second order change it was immediately after the hijacking bombings of 9/11. It is a matter of record that the administration reacted time and again according to a first order change sequence that could not help but exacerbate the original problem. Since that time almost every official United States pronouncement and every policy decision has contributed to a worsening of the geopolitical situation. Many politicians hold fast to the claim that Americans are now safer than prior to 9/11. Others point out that the long range effect of American policy, especially the policy of pre-emptive warfare, has alienated America from its former allies to such an extent that safety is illusory and true international peace is an impossibility. At almost every turn the solution has exacerbated the problem to such a point that the United States now commands little global respect.

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

All too often first order thinking leads directly to warfare as the ultimate solution. The end result is not peace and justice but further alienation, bloodshed, and loss of life. Many politicians, who prefer to justify warfare as the best means to allay the fear of terrorism, are quick to label second order change as cowardly, liberal, and smacking of shameless appeasement ala Neville Chamberlain in 1939. In truth, many of the political right stand in the shadow of the famous Nazi Reichmarshall Hermann Goering. Goering is reputed to have said during an interview at the Nuremberg War Trials:

...the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders.

That is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger.

*It works the same way in every country.*¹⁰

The essence of second order change is learning to think outside the box. Thinking outside the box entails a rigorous assessment of many various facets of any given situation. It requires a highly disciplined analysis of facts and logic free of the rigid thinking associated with the thought processes of ideologues.

The two world wars are examples of the use of force under a paradigm of first order change. In those particular situations an enemy was clearly defined and the implicit rules were a fight to the finish with no holds barred. However, as is widely known by now, the present state of geopolitical politics and conflict does **not** lend itself to a second order type of approach. First order escalation has colored the tone of the rhetoric coming out of official Washington to such a point that second order change is becoming increasingly impossible.

On every level and in every discipline thinking outside the box requires a committed effort at brainstorming the issue wherein all kinds of possible solutions are placed on the table without rationale or criticism. When the first stage of the brainstorming process is completed the various suggestions and ideas are then discussed, criticized, and the process itself is then driven by the logic and rationale of the various possibilities. However, brainstorming and free exchange of ideas is anathema to ideologues. According to former Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neil, "thinking (things) through is the last thing an ideologue wants to do."¹¹

WHAT DOES THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX LOOK LIKE?

¹⁰ Gilbert, Gustav, *Nuremberg Diary*;

¹¹ Suskind, Ron; *The Price of Loyalty*; New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004; Pg. 126-127

Let us now consider the question, What does thinking outside the box look like? We will begin with the example from the family. Recall the case of parents who are being driven up the wall by the behavior of their teen-age son or daughter. The parents will now attempt to go outside the box. The parents will declare openly to all members of the family that the youngster had defeated them and therefore they would all have to live with this failure. The parents announce that since all past attempts to change the behavior of the son or daughter have failed there will be a week of grounding whereby the *entire family* will submit to a communal grounding banning all ordinary non-essential activity. The entire family will be grounded. By doing this everyone in the family will be joined with the offending youngster and the entire family will feel the pain and the limitations of a circumscribed life style.

The following are offered as examples of thinking outside the box in terms of international and geopolitical issues. The examples are suggestive and illustrative. Some suggestions may be on the borderline of the box and some barely outside the box while still others are more reflective of total second order change.

1. **Personal missions of the President, Vice President, and each cabinet member to meet “off the record” with the heads of state of every member nation of the United Nations.** Confining America’s alternatives to the usual channels of international protocol keeps official Washington within the box. Winston Churchill was a great believer in personal diplomacy and he used this method throughout the war in his meetings with both Stalin and Roosevelt.
2. **Treasury officials need to meet simultaneously with the representatives of the banking industry of each member nation.** The primary agenda would

be to explore methods of starving out or freezing the financial reserves of entities known to be related to terrorist activity.

3. **In the United States, there is a strong need for the creation of a global energy policy.** The major premise states that the less the United States is dependent on mid-east oil the better. The United States must find a way to dispense truly significant individual reward for conservation. The profit driven corporations of the world will respond to the demand of the consumer *only* if the corporations see such compliance with these demands as being in their own (the Board of Directors and the stockholders) best interest. The challenge is to provide strong motivation for both the corporation and the consumer. In terms of automobiles, the tax benefits for purchasing high efficiency automobiles and hybrid design automobiles should be increased to the point where no individual taxpayer could afford *not* to purchase such equipment and no auto manufacturer could afford *not* to invest in increasing research and development.
4. **The leaders of the various agencies in the United States government need to model compassionate leadership.** Former Secretary of the Treasury, Paul O'Neil, proposed to the Bush administration the digging of huge numbers of water wells in Ghana. This was a second order change proposal. It would have demonstrated an American commitment to a humanitarian effort to assist several million Ghana citizens who lack safe drinking water. O'Neal's suggestions about wells and medications for AIDS/HIV rang of human compassion yet none of his recommendations were well received. Americans

would do well to ponder the positive results of the Marshall plan following World War II as well as the methods employed by the Americans in the post World War II governance of Japan. These were both changes occurring outside the box.

5. **A meaningful program of compliance with EPA goals and objectives must be at the forefront of national policy.** In terms of compliance there is need for generous tax benefits for all commercial and manufacturing entities that comply with environmental protection laws. Further, tax incentives are in order for those industries and corporations that commit themselves to increasing research and development of environmentally friendly policies and procedures. Second order change demands that the perfunctory payment of penalty fines should never be profitable to a corporation or industry.

CONCLUSION

If we are ever to have peace in this world, a measure of justice for all people, and basic human rights as set forth in Article 55 of the *United Nations Charter*, there are three fundamental axioms that must be held sacrosanct.¹²

I: World Peace and international justice will never come about as the result of first order change with its emphasis upon the increasing escalation of violence.

Violence will continue to beget violence. It always has and it always will. Where

¹² Article 55 states: “With a view to the creation of conditions of stability and well-being which are necessary for peaceful and friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, the United Nations shall promote: (a) higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development; (b) solutions of international economic, social, health, and related problems; and international cultural and educational cooperation, and (c) universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.”

violence is the choice of leaders and their followers peace will remain a virtual impossibility.

II: As long as party politics and unyielding allegiance to ideological principle trump the forces of logic and reasoned debate we can expect only more of the same from whatever administration is in power. More of the same will invariably lead to solutions that intensify the magnitude of the problem, be it terrorism, environmental pollution, energy supply and usage, or pandemic diseases and lack of food supplies.

III: Thinking outside the box in accord with the principle of second order change is absolutely essential for the creation of an international climate where nations learn to live with their differences while simultaneously creating avenues for cooperation. This requires statesman with vision rather than politicians who pander to the most basic fears and prejudices of their constituencies.

In summary, a paradigm shift, from first order change to second order change, remains the greatest hope the human race has for a better future devoid of terrorism and the madness of killing. Peace is possible outside the box but only with a firm commitment, especially by the United States and member nations of the United Nations Security Council, to a process of rational decision making wherein life and the quality of life are valued more than death, not just for the rich and powerful, but for the impoverished and disenfranchised of all nations.

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