

Overcoming Separateness within Dominator Culture via Coalition Building

Contributed by Derek Tennant
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Editor's note: I had the good fortune of meeting Dave and Allison Ewoldt and attending their workshop. The many elements to it go deep and range across our cultural reality. With degrees in psychology, education and mechanical engineering, the Ewoldts cover all the bases. Here is a report from a workshop participant, Derek Tennant:

As activists, often our greatest challenge is overcoming the feeling of separation that our society implants in us from birth.

We have moments of clarity, when we see separation in the foundations of our own perspective, but we usually operate as one individual, alone, and at odds with the rest of the world. We see this paradigm reflected in our group consciousness as well.

This point of view makes coalition building difficult. It is hard to identify the unconscious assumptions that feed our needs and wants. We speak and react from this embattled, separate position, and thus push others away who might be able to help us. We all fall into place along a spectrum of ideas and needs, and while we may draw energy and support from those near us in a particular belief system, it is still exceedingly easy to get caught in judging someone else as wrong or misguided, and end any attempt to work side by side with them towards a greater good.

Thankfully, there are a myriad of tools available that help us overcome these problems. The "Building Critical Mass For Critical Change" workshop introduces us to many of them. Conceived and presented by Allison and Dave Ewoldt, this 4-hour presentation offers tools and experiences that work for groups of all sizes; from big-tent, ecosystem-wide network-building coalitions right down to a small, volunteer work party bent on picking up litter from within a local watershed.

We learn about natural system principles, legal and conceptual frameworks that encourage sustainability, relational models that support project management and building consensus, practices that enable effective communication, and guides that help us manage complex change. Small group exercises allow us to practice some of these techniques.

Personally, I enjoyed a chance to connect with my local activist community, meeting representatives of many groups that I had not known about before. My fellow participants bring a wealth of experiences, and differences, to the workshop. Yet it is refreshing to see that we also share a common dream: engineering a future that rests on shared values of respect for all life, social and economic justice, and nonviolence.

This workshop is only an overview to a subject that could easily become a week-long offering. There is so much richness already available for those of us who are called to lead the change that will build a better world, that it is impossible to delve deeply into many of the practices in such a short presentation. I found it very exciting to see there are so many tools available that can help me spark a change that will ignite the evolution of my local community. I encourage you to attend this workshop if it is presented in your area. [contact via email: dave (at) reststop (dot) net.]

Here is the Building Critical Mass For Critical Change Workshop flow:

Introductions, both presenters and participants

An overview of the presentation

Why build coalitions?

Why build critical mass?

What are some ways to approach coalition building?

Use natural systems principles to mirror nature

Meet people where they are

Change our cultural story

There are alternatives

How can we increase our resiliency?

How do we manage complex change?

What have we experienced in previous attempts to build coalitions? What does history tell us? What worked and what didn't?

Tools

Earth Charter

Green Party's 10 Values

Non-hierarchical tools

Acorn/8 Shields Model

Open Space

Synergistic Convergence

Effective communications, and deep listening techniques

Consensus building

3-state Sustainability

Closing with a group share, and small group interactions to help develop the local networks that can help all organizations thrive in coming months

Allison and Dave Ewoldt, the workshop presenters, founded Coalition of Mutual Endeavor (COME). COME's guiding axiom is that true justice cannot exist without sustainability, and without justice there will be no peace. Corollaries are:

No food chain, no food.

Neither democracy nor an economy can exist on a dead planet.

Alleviating root causes will free up time and resources currently dedicated to slapping band-aids on single issue symptoms (the wounds of empire).

There is a pragmatic, scientifically validated, spiritually meaningful alternative to business as usual, and it can improve

quality of life.

Participating organizations:

Santa Cruz County Community Coalition to Overcome Racism (SCCCCOR)

Pachamama Alliance

Transition Santa Cruz

City of Santa Cruz

MoveOn

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

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New Earth Exchange

Thrive 95033

Andrew Harvey Sacred Activism

Jon Young Naturalist, Storyteller

Resource Center for Nonviolence (RCNV)

Culture Change

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Derek Tennant has written several books. His website is derekjoetennant.net. He works with the Pachamama Alliance, whose mission is bridging the indigenous and modern worlds.

Allison and Dave Ewoldt founded Sustainable Bellingham before moving to Tucson where they are based. Dave Ewoldt's Natural Systems Solutions work on sustainable lifestyles, organizations, and communities can be seen online:

attractionretreat.org

naturalsystems.blogspot.com

Dave's article on Culture Change is Living now, naturally and sustainably via relocalizing

The workshop was organized by Transition Santa Cruz and was held on June 9, 2011 at the new Live Oak Family Resource Center in Santa Cruz County's community of Live Oak.