

Collaborative Innovation: A Personal Journey

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I have lived and worked in eight countries, and, if I take them in sequence, it's a sorry story. Born in England, my parents moved to Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) when I was thirteen, where I finished my schooling and served in the Kings African Rifles as a young army officer in the last vestiges of the British Empire in Nyasaland (Malawi) and Northern Rhodesia (Zambia).

Fast forward to today, living in the US, I am helping my friend, Peterson Moyo, from Malawi finish his PHD in mathematics at the University of New Mexico. He doesn't want to go back to Malawi because of the corruption and mismanagement of the politicians. His wife Ruth, a retired schoolteacher, is still trying to get her retirement pension from the Malawi Government without success, because they don't have the money.

In 2014 I visited Zambia. The country was being run by the Vice President due to the death of the President and everyone was gearing up for the elections. One of the issues was how to stop the Chinese having too much influence in the financial control of the country. Last year, Zambia ceded control to the Chinese of their state-owned Electric Utility, Radio Station and the two main airports.

I also visited Zimbabwe on the same trip where the people were anxious for the President, Robert Mugabwe, who was in his nineties, to step aside so there could be some reforms and bring back some financial stability that was ruining the lives of ordinary people, but not the politicians. He was finally ousted in a bloodless coup in 2018, but, the dire financial situation has only become worse.

After the army, I moved to South Africa, became a stockbroker, and met my future wife, Maggie, within one week of arrival. Being madly in love, I didn't pay

much attention to politics, only vaguely aware that there was racial tension in the air. We married in 1970 and after two years had the chance to go to Hong Kong, where we made many Chinese friends. I was there when President Nixon made his historic visit to China and most everyone was excited about the future. Today, I see the months and months of unrest that has now turned violent; with no end in sight.

After Hong Kong, we lived in London, UK, where we bought a business in the energy field. This was disrupted by the oil crisis following the “Yom Kippur” war. The Government dictated which three days you could open the business, there simply wasn't enough coal fired electricity to go around. The business went bankrupt, but somehow we survived, with our first child born in the midst of much disruption.

We started a pizza business and had great fun with our mobile food truck at rock concerts, being a big hit with the vegetarian hippies. I vaguely remember some changes in government from Conservative to Labour, but I was too preoccupied and too young to really know what was going on. I look now at the British Government's three-year odyssey of Brexit fulminations, and wonder how this can be; such a rent in the fabric of day-to-day governance that nothing gets done, while politicians squabble and shriek, putting self before country.

We finally made enough money to buy airfares back to South Africa where we had some property and money; money that we were unable to use overseas because of capital controls. It was now, having lived in other countries, that I began to have some perspective on the apartheid government and the realization that this surely must come to an end, but how? Would it take the low road of escalating violence or the high road of reconciliation? Fortunately, many years later, a man with forethought and courage, President De Klerk, let Nelson Mandela out of prison and started the process of one man one vote democracy that got fulfilled in 1994.

After a year and a half, I had my answer. When the Soweto riots broke out in 1976, we left for Canada the beautiful, now with two children, aged one and three. Because of capital controls, we carried a meager equivalent of four thousand five hundred Canadian Dollars. Pierre Trudeau was Prime Minister when we lived there and now his son is fighting for his political life due to scandal.

In 1984, a ski trip to New Mexico, "The Land of Enchantment" (sometimes called "The Land of Entrapment"), which called to me and we settled there, now with three sons. We still live there and are still happily married after 49 years.

So, the question asked of me is: *"At this extraordinary time of social, political and economic disintegration, with respect to "Collaborative Innovation", what is the most important question we can ask, and why?"* My answer is: *"Why are we not coming together as people, to solve these solvable problems?"* And the answer to that is: *"We think our political system will do it for us."* Wrong!

We look for a Knight (male or female) on a white horse to come riding in and take care of these very complex problems that require a holistic view. This is totally beyond the boundaries of a political aspirant who is required to dumb down their message (even if they had the solution, which they don't), to simple sound bites in order to be heard above the noise of every other media that drowns out reasonableness, not to mention decency.

The foregoing paragraphs about different countries are merely to show that we in the US are not alone in our quandary of quagmire. Every person I talk to wants to be able to go on with their life, with the opportunity for improvement. Yet they know we are butting our heads up against difficult issues that require serious thought from people that are not being pushed by political agenda. I don't have the answer, nor does anyone single person. But together, with good intention and reasonable discussion, we can come up with reasonable solutions that move us forward, instead of vitriol that takes us backwards.

I/we, the people, need to stand up for change. And I mean “Stand.” Consider if we stood, literally, for two minutes in silence at noon every Monday, wherever we are, to show that we want:

- A) A different system to the current rigged, ‘money takes all’ two-party system.
- B) Independent non-political councils for looking in depth into:
 - a) United States bankruptcy
 - b) Medicare survival
 - c) Social Security survival
 - d) A long-term holistic strategic philosophy that guides our policies going forward.

Bill Gates, Mr. Money on the Peer-to-Peer TV show, and Deepak Chopra, Mr. Spiritual on Amanpour, say if we don’t co-operate, we are doomed, but no one does anything. The real question is: *“Why do we put up with this tearing-us-apart political system. Why don’t we demand change?”*

The answer is: We don’t Rebel; because we pretend there is a refuge, but there is none.

Rob served as an army officer in the Kings African Rifles and SAS. He and his wife Maggie have lived in five countries and have three sons born on three different continents. As well as extensive corporate consulting experience he and Maggie have owned and operated four businesses in three different countries. He now concentrates on executive coaching and writing. From 1996 to 2000 Rob was a Vice President with Senn-Delaney Leadership Consulting Group.

