

BIG BETS FOR THE NEXT CENTURY

Presented by Kelly Ryan, CEO, Incourage Community Foundation, at Rockefeller Foundation's Centennial Celebration of American Philanthropy, Washington D.C., October 30, 2013

<http://centennial.rockefellerfoundation.org/events/entry/celebration-of-american-philanthropy-livestream>



Good Afternoon. On behalf of the 45,000 residents of south Wood County located in Central Wisconsin, I'd like to extend our gratitude and appreciation to the Rockefeller Foundation for inviting us to share our story at your centennial celebration.

THE PROBLEM

Our community is rich with natural resources – water and timber fueled the growth of the local economy for over a century: we are the largest production area of cranberries in the world, and, paper, pictured here, is the region's dominant industry –



Life was good in south Wood County for a very long time. We were proud to say we were the smallest city in the United States that was home to the headquarters of a Fortune 500 Company.

But economic security and life as we knew it changed in the year 2000 with the sale of Consolidated Papers to a multi-national firm. Local control was eliminated as the headquarters moved to Finland and a leadership vacuum was created. By 2005, we lost nearly 40% of our total employment base, or 5,000 good paying manufacturing jobs.

The problem and cry heard repeatedly was JOBS. We need more JOBS. Same call we hear today in Wisconsin and across the nation.



But, was the problem jobs?

We began to understand that our real work was not job creation.

In fact, lack of jobs was a symptom of a larger issue that needed to be addressed to foster any kind of sustainable change: COMMUNITY CULTURE.



Though there were many benefits to having a stable industry build an economy over a century - the unintended consequences were insidious and deeply entrenched.

A dependent, paternal, entitled and insular culture was the norm in central WI. It was certainly not an environment that would foster the kind of new thinking, creativity and inclusion necessary to recreate an economy for the future.

WHY – after much reflection, deliberation and some dissention, our organization decided to step outside our traditional work of fund development and grant-making to engage in the unknown territory of helping people shape a new future.

At some level felt a Moral Imperative to act – a clarion call. If we were amassing endowed funds and there was not a community to support 25 years from now, what difference would it make?

We not only had a complex problem with no immediate solution; we were also in the midst of large-scale system breakdowns and significant shifts. Including, not only the economy, but also social structures such as leadership, engagement, networks of power and control, and workforce development systems. We had to act.

A new vision was needed – however, before a new vision could be articulated, people needed to be able to see with new eyes.

We needed to clarify what was important to us as a community – inventory our assets and articulate our shared values.

Each of us living in south Wood County had self-interest for our children, our families and our individual future ... as well as common interest in the form of recreating a thriving economy. It was at this intersection of self and common interest that Incourage Community Foundation placed its BIG BET.

THE BIG BET

We bet on the people who live in south Wood County. We bet on their ability to adapt to change. To not only adapt to change, but to thrive and grow and to lead change. Our hosts today at Rockefeller might call this resiliency. We talk about creating an adaptive community.

This meant equipping people with new skills and language: not the technical training we were so comfortable with as a community. We focused on creating a shared vision of holding the community and each other in trust. We posed questions: What does it mean to be in relationship as residents of the same place? How could we practice and demonstrate civility in the midst of great change? What would it mean to have deliberate and respectful dialogue about the future that encouraged risk and tolerated failure?



Ultimately, we were committed to helping residents find and recreate the threads that weave together community.

We bet we'd be able to do this by Changing Hearts and Minds.

We bet we'd be able to do this by engaging residents in creating a shared vision of the future And, we bet we'd be able to do this by adopting, modeling and helping others understand the importance of equity, inclusion and shared opportunity to guide future growth.

This is not easy work - There were definitely RISKS and CHOICES in this bet ... and there still are.

1. We mitigated one risk by choosing to do something. We understood that we were operating in a completely new and emerging future. One that is complex, and ambiguous. We chose to understand that by doing the same thing we'd always done we'd get the same results....
2. The risk of doing this work in an environment of deep, palpable loss was very real. The Native American quote *"It's hard to see the future with tears in your eyes"* reflected our community's emotional state.



We saw fear and this sense of loss play out in several forms: misdirected anger, uncivil behavior and turf wars; instead of opening up to collaboration and new partnerships, many ‘hunkered down’ and protected their piece of the shrinking pie.

3. We risked our own capacity to do this work. We were – and still are – building this plane as we fly it.
4. Our shared vision, participatory culture and principles of equity & inclusion ran counter culture to the established norms. Everyone’s role was changing, including the traditional power brokers and leaders. Many of them had supported the community foundation. Some were on our board. We did alienate some donors.
5. Risk to be viewed as disingenuous. Model values we were advocating and what did that mean to policies and practice? Authentic ownership of values.

WHAT WE LEARNED

Courageous Leadership is vital from board and staff – like Helen Jungwirth our board chair and retired newspaper publisher – in the audience today.



Not afraid to challenge the status quo – in our organization, the practice of governance and the field of philanthropy. I remember a decade ago at a national conference, Helen commenting that she had heard enough from people comparing asset size as an indicator of the effectiveness of their work – to last a lifetime. She asked if this field talked about what impact they were having and not what assets were under management.

We learned, individually, that we needed to be the change we wished to see. In a small town, we are the foundation – in our own personal networks, social clubs, youth sports organizations and the local grocery store. This required equipping our own board and staff with training, skills and tools.

We live by the principle of reflective action and are not afraid to make course corrections as we go. This includes examining entrenched beliefs to surface barriers to growth and change.

A quote from our friend Parker Palmer

“Authentic leadership will risk failure by making the space for others to act.”

PARKER PALMER

We have come to understand that we must be very mindful of not perpetuating dependency, transferring dependency on the paper company and founding family to Incourage.

This prompted a much deeper and ongoing examination of our institutional power and privilege as we worked to create the kind of space and fertile environment for others to experiment, to take risks and to fail. To source the wisdom of the community – to foster new networks and connections – and to surface individual passion has become the core of our work.

We know from survey and research that RESIDENTS want to ENGAGE – HOWEVER, what we have learned is that it is not adequate to convene residents under the auspices of ‘everyone has a voice’.

When a participatory culture is not the norm, people need to be equipped with the skills, tools, information and opportunities to build self-confidence and find their passion.

After a century of embedded norms that supported a hierarchy of leadership - baby steps – hand holding – love and compassion are needed to foster changed behavior.

HOW DO WE KNOW?

We know by the people in our community who are stepping up, choosing hope, embracing change and modeling behavior for others.

Gus Mancuso

For over 40 years principal of largest high school. Football coach, Italian heritage – traditional leadership style of command and control. Gus was part of the second cohort trained in adaptive skills. He then became part of a ‘train the trainer’ program to deliver adaptive training himself. After retirement, we coaxed Gus into the role of Incourage’s community coach. He now speaks regularly, publicly and passionately about trust, relationships and love for each other & community. And people love and connect with this “new” Gus.



Gus Mancuso

Meet Kristi Anderson.

Kristi deferred Grad school to come home and organize her community around a resident-led development opportunity in the center of our downtown. Incourage purchased the historic former Gannett newspaper building. We're asking community members to determine its end use. This is the first highly visible example of resident-led and resident-centered processes to support deliberative decision-making and increase participation in civic life. Residents are looking at our assets, including our river, with new eyes.



Kristi Anderson

Mayor Zach Vruwink – here with me today as my guest.

At 25, the youngest Mayor elected in Wisconsin Rapids with a 2/3 majority vote.

Of significance:

Ernst & Young Youth Entrepreneur for the Nation at the age of 16

Atlantic Magazine named him one of the top 100 Mayors to watch

White House named him one of the Top 100 Entrepreneurs under the age of 30

Mayor Vruwink was elected on a platform of CHANGE and CIVIC ENGAGEMENT



Mayor Zach Vruwink

Photo by Wisconsin State Journal

Kirk Willard is the award-winning plant manager and executive committee member for Ocean Spray Cranberries. He has also been instrumental in our communities' success as the first rural site to participate in the National Fund for Workforce Solutions – five years of investment reimagining and changing the way that manufacturing workforce training occurs in our region. Kirk and I have had the opportunity to speak together nationally about this change in the workforce system, most recently at MIT's Sloan School of Business.



Kirk Willard

I LOVE seeing perceptions shattered when Kirk talks convincingly – with data – about raising the level of emotional intelligence of his workforce as a key driver of business success. He also champions the ability of like-minded businesses to raise the overall emotional intelligence of a community through training and human talent investments.

I close with a favorite quote by Maya Angelou

“You did then what you knew how to do, and when you knew better ... you did better.” MAYA ANGELOU

I also used this to close the chapter in a new book about the second century of opportunity for community foundations, titled “Here For Good”. Community Foundations also celebrate their centennial in 2014.

We – Encourage – believe that Community is the Answer. The Capacity of the Human Spirit and ability to CARE, be COMPASSIONATE and CONNECT are the Driving Forces of Positive Change.

After a decade of work, we believe we “know better” and we will continue striving to do better ... we also know there is always more to learn if we want to remain agile and adaptive.

Thank You.

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