

**Seventh Annual Regional Sustainable Development Forum:  
Being a Part of the Climate Change Solution:  
Individual Action for Collective Impact**

**January 25, 2008, MIT Sloan School of Management**

**Afternoon Plenary: *Backyard Forward; Moving from Parts to Wholes***

Speakers:

**Peter Forbes**, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Center for Whole Communities

**William Shutkin**, Author and Environmentalist

Moderator:

**Anthony Flint**, Director of Public Affairs, Lincoln Institute of Land Policy

Peter Forbes:

Returns to the morning's conversation of how issues need to be personal, intimate and show the human face of the problem. This can be done through the use of "story."

There is a need to create a new narrative that can be used to describe a *whole* community and how to get there. According to Dana Meadows, "you solve a problem by seeing it whole." Problems are seen as whole through a relationship story that is shaped by place. For example, several different ecosystems (along with the related dreams, memories and resources) tell Forbes' story. Even in the advanced age of 2008, our existence is still all about relationship with the land.

The term "querencia" is a mestizo word that comes from the mixture of cultures in the US SW/northern Mexico. It embodies the tendency of humans to return to their home, affection, responsibility, the place where we feel most secure, place of one's memories, tendency to love and be loved.

Culture has conflicted the relationship with story – they are either told to little kids or in a folk context and stories are also created through advertising. Modern life is filled with stories of advertising. However, 99% of human history is told through another type of story – how we explain our relationships, who we are and the way that we'd like the world to be. Example: Ben Okere (Nigerian author) quote – "Nations and people are largely the stories they feed themselves." Example: MLK Jr. didn't say "I have a plan" - knew how to make change and reach people but spoke of his values, told stories of how he'd like the world to be – ex: quote, told truth and knew they could handle it, spoke to community interest. We therefore need to look at work passionately and honestly and rediscover prophetic voice and to find the stories that guide us.

The Story of Classy Parker: Met her in the late 90s, after Guiliani decided to sell "vacant" lots for gardening. She was gardening in a 10,000 sq ft parcel of land that had been turned into an urban oasis after 5 years of work to make her parents proud and to create a

quiet spot in the neighborhood. She wanted to be called a “city farmer” not an “environmentalist.” To her it was about loving people and plants and working with the earth. There was something in the garden for everyone, people were free to be themselves there, tell their life stories there, in a place where color and gender don't matter. “Don't you think that my dad's your dad?” Forbes felt that it was the highest aspiration that 2 very different people could have that type of exchange on that land, as normally wouldn't have realized each others' humanity on the side of the street. There is a soul of the land - how to translate into soul of the country?

How is it that we have become divided from each other (those of us that care about the land)? Why is it harder and harder to talk to each other? “Fragmentation is the hidden source of the social, political and environmental crisis facing the world.” (David Bohm). There is a divide between nature and people; rich and poor – graph showing rich preferring hybrids, fair trade; poor people focusing more on asthma, Katrina and food security; Nature poor (air pollution, water, land ownership, urban green space; and Rich nature (polar bears, climate change, acid rain, rainforests)

There needs to be a connection with all – shared vision, grammar, narrative, whole community. Need to come to terms with race, power and privilege, health of food and children. Need to convene groups – next generation, leaders under the age of 30, 51% will be non-white by 2060. Need to think more holistically. “We're the ones we've been waiting for.”

#### Bill Shutkin:

Need to synthesize what has gone on today as well as to observe a cumulative conversation over the years on this issue, as we have observed a sea change in a fairly short period of time, evolution of excitement, interest, participation and engagement. Need to look between story and technocratic policy discussion, provoke audience with discussion in regards to the brain.

An Onion headline 2-3 years ago stated that “95% Americans support public transportation for everyone else” - the 5<sup>th</sup> Estate striking viscerally.

If you show people a vision of the future, they are more likely to make better decisions.

We are cognitively wired not to be open with each other, to consider connections, to think about the future, yet when faced with uncertainty we are inclined to shrivel up and not consider best data and best policy.

What's underlying these problems of climate change boils down to what is going on in our own heads. As such, behavioral and cognitive scientists are the most insightful planners and policy experts. For example, cognitive scientists have found that when people are confronted with uncertain, hard to grasp problems, that part of the brain sends out signals in response to ambiguity.

Example of wind power at Mad River Glen in Vermont being good for “everyone else”

brings up the problem of scale. When facing a collective action problem/prisoners dilemma, how are they thinking about their own backyard? How to scale up zone of concern?

Language signals something deeper. There has been an evolution in cognition in terms of consciousness, what it means to contemplate intergenerational impacts, the “other.” These shifts in how we talk are representative of cognitive shifts.

There is hope in what is going on - abetted by technology (Google Earth – stretches mind to think beyond own backyard, bottomline), we are scaling up (trajectory of climate change conversation) and are gaining an ability to contemplate something bigger.

5 disciplines of the mind – most important mental quality in this century is the synthetic mind, able to integrate and synthesize different data, stories, etc. into a coherent narrative, expanded mind as part of shift in cognitive capacity which is part of ability to cope with this.

Will teens and 20s have a change to contemplate a generational shift? Others are unable to do it because of frontal cortex/fight or flight – is giving way to a more creative ability – increases our ability to face this issue.

Q: Bill, if this process is occurring, how do you account for geographical and cultural difference in US in terms of recognizing climate change?

A: Over the long-term, it's easier to see a more general shift. Certain communities are more progressive in their thinking, as there are differences in communities. Vermont is not as progressive as most think – i.e. opposition to siting of a wind facility. Tendency to express some qualities more than others. Innovation network from community tries to provide infrastructure for social innovation and innovators to import and export good ideas. Every community will continue to struggle.

Q: How do you feel about the wind project? (Bill)

A: Bought a house that would overlook a wind farm but plan was defeated. Offered services to facilitate a forum to have a conversation on the issue but others found his articles in support of Cape Wind. Therefore couldn't support a neutral position but was interested in how to find consensus on the issue- interested in decision-making process. Nothing talks like money – if developers have cash to show community, the odds of it being accepted are far greater.

Q: Challenge to evolutionary perspective based on aboriginal view that the land owns us. More something that we have lost than what we need in a new idea (Euro-centric view). What do you have to say to that?

A: Different consciousness and mindset – his perspective addresses dominant western mindset but not to romanticize other perspectives. What you do with the good stuff and

how you manage the good stuff is what matters. Climate change says we've done too much with bad and not enough with good. Michael Pollan's book and studies with Australian aboriginals, reintroduced to aboriginal behaviors once weight gain in city – also about reclaiming lost knowledge.

Q: Local food – already consciousness on other issues? What is status?

A: Peter – Michael Pollan's success shows that it is important everywhere - justice and fairness, food, and children (3 major issues). Food is a powerful story of how we 3 times a day relate to the earth and each other. A huge opportunity – CSAs/farmers market growth shows progress unlike many other sectors.

Tony - Policy is lagging in MA for instance.

Bill – Connected to climate change – food is also a complex system, just like climate change. There is a desire of so many of us to know and understand feedback (ex: polar bears and ice caps, wind). Food is is about exposure and transparency – exposed unnecessarily to complex systems of commerce and culture of food. Technology helps us and our children to understand this and now we increasingly have to respond to an 8 year old about grass vs. corn fed, local or not.

Peter – Good storytellers reveal hidden relationships – ex. use of petroleum in food supply.

Peter – People of India say that “you can wake someone who is asleep but it's a lot harder to wake someone who is pretending to be asleep.” There are many reasons why people would pretend in the US – complex, nightmare but also face the demand to have 2 jobs, challenge to the American Dream. Only way to reach them is not through fear but through a picture of a better more joyful place where we can go. Not about evolution but all of us feel and respond to – ex MLK picture.

Q: Functional vs. dysfunctional – need to redefine. Look at aboriginal systems. Need to use technology properly, need to be functional, lost integrating factor.

A: Peter – Any society that has survived a long time deserves examination and respect – our experiment has been a lot shorter, based on a lot of hubris (American Dream) with some success, some not.

Wealthy people go beyond the boundaries – developers, evolution of building codes, regulation follows after they go beyond the – dynamic of our society.

Q: We are all some form of activists, each with a slogan. For investors, that slogan is “leave no dollar behind.” Where does capital and differences in business models factor into this discussion?

A: Bill – The Business Alliance for Local Living Economies works with entrepreneurs at key levels for social change – building blocks is community capital. Central question is what is the new role of capital in sustainable communities – a cadre of social entrepreneurs, creating a new business model. Examples: Andrew in NYC manages Michael Dell's real estate fund; the B-lab – evolving, creating a new model (the B Corp – beneficial corporation) and defining a shareholder in stakeholder terms. New models are arising that look at capital in a new way. Need to take the best of that and make a new framework. Take the best of what technology and capitalism can do for us.

Peter – We have thumbs – we are evolved. We have used venture capital for good things and how we redirect capital to new sources (energy) is a new story. The whole world looks to US ingenuity for that.

Q: Evolution of debate on climate change – where is it going? Most of it is in rich nature – what about the connection with social and environmental realms?

Peter – Food is also an example – as are children, Van Jones (green jobs). We don't have enough stories for this yet though, because there is a problem of being siloed the longer you are in it. The older generation has created some technical victories but has made it difficult to talk to each other and to be competitive. Need more new stories. The new generation can see these links instantly.