

Compromise never solves underlying problems

Lately, there's been a lot of complaining that our politicians in Washington (and Madison) are not "compromising" on issues. Legislative and executive approval ratings are dismal. But the expectation for compromise is flawed for at least two reasons.

First, when an election rolls around, we always flock to candidates who claim to be fighters. "I will fight for... the middle class, fiscal responsibility, change, family values, etc." Who ever voted for a candidate who pledged to be a compromiser? So, when they get into office, and don't compromise, why are we angry at them?

Second, and far more important, compromise is a terrible source of solutions. You see, compromise almost never solves the underlying problem, but only yields a temporary cease-fire in the conflict. When each side gives up something desired, only to settle a dispute, those wants still burn and resentment builds. Both sides continue to seek out an opportunity to press their original intent, but the plotting is driven underground and takes on a more sinister nature. Meanwhile, because the compromise doesn't satisfy the underlying values driving either side's ideas, it doesn't cure the original problem.

Do we really want compromise solutions on such critical issues as:

- » Rebuilding a growing and vibrant economy?
- » Getting control of our national debt?
- » Fixing our failed educational system?
- » Solving our deepening



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health care crisis?

» Building a strong defense against rising military threats?

» Securing our borders?

Compromise comes from "either-or" thinking. (The solution is my idea, your idea, or somewhere in the middle.) This perspective is one-dimensional and ignores the realm of true possibilities. What we really should be asking of our political leaders is not compromise, but *collaboration*. Collaboration requires a whole different way of thinking. It assumes that both my idea and yours are simply two points in a vast, multi-dimensional universe of ideas. Both ideas might be good or bad, but there are lots of other choices. However, to see that universe we need to let go of our investment in our own position and be open to exploring completely new ways of thinking about the issue.

Collaboration has a history of providing great results for humanity. Musical composition often benefits when two great artists (Lennon and McCartney, Rodgers and Hammerstein) come together and collaborate to create something far better than either could produce on their own. Or consider today's vast realm of open architecture software and wikis being produced by collaboration among many indi-

viduals with differing views. The Internet itself couldn't have been created without extensive collaborative efforts.

Business organizations often bust up divisional walls and form collaborative teams to accomplish extraordinary output. In 1943, at the height of World War II, the Lockheed Company was called upon to create a jet fighter to counter the threat of jet development in Germany. Lockheed formed what it called a "skunk works" of people drawn from various functions within the company, then sequestered them in the California desert with the objective of producing a jet fighter. Through intense collaboration this team produced a flying product, the XP-80, in a mere 143 days. (Compare that to the eight years required from concept to delivery of Boeing's new 787 Dreamliner.)

The big challenges facing our country (and our state) will require big solutions. Compromise is going to leave us mired in anemic agreements that just don't get the job done. Until we stop electing "fighters" to represent us, I'm afraid all we're going to get is fighting (and occasional compromise when backed into a corner). Collaboration doesn't get people fired-up, or generate the media coverage, like feisty conflict. But, maybe we should start thinking about electing people with a proven track record of collaboration if we expect good things from Washington or Madison.

Dan Linsen of Green Bay advocates for personal responsibility and thinking outside the box. His book "Who's to Blame?" is available at www.whostoblame.net and other online sources.