

This Work Takes Time

Being a gapper isn't easy. Some people will accuse you of wasting time on building community. Others will think that you have some ulterior motive. Others will see a threat.



Sometimes I think about that old fable, the Scorpion and the Frog, because sometimes it seems that institutions – governments, schools, universities, businesses, agencies– are all about self-preservation. They're all about doing what they have to do. This is just the way it is.

They met on the bank of a stream and the scorpion asked the frog, "Could I get a ride across the stream on your back?" And the frog said, "Well, how do I know that you won't sting me?" And the scorpion said, "You know that if I do that, I'll die, too. We both will sink to the bottom of the river." And the frog says, "Well, yeah, that makes sense." And so they go across the river and they get about mid-way across the stream and Bam! the scorpion stings the frog. As the frog feels the onset of his paralysis and knows they're going to drown together, he says, "Just tell me one thing, why?" And the scorpion says, "Well, it's my nature."

The work inside of an organization takes time and there will be opponents. Some will be like the scorpion and think they just can't give up their top-down behaviors. Sometimes you've got to wait for people to retire, move to other jobs, or get forced out, before some parts of the organization will try leading by stepping back. But I believe that you have to work with whatever you have around you.

When my scope for action was limited, I just used whatever little control that I had to influence where I could, even when it was as few as one or two other people. This means it will take time for the work to grow, but once a few people on the inside feel valued and begin to see results they will develop a sense of ownership. Once you have a core of people trained, experienced and committed, then you can push the envelope. You have to continue to invest more in people, and it has to be known that it's okay to make mistakes as long as they just keep listening and keep supporting citizens.

–Henry Moore