

CITIZEN DIPLOMACY

BY RAMA J. VERNON

*Who's who -
Daniel Messers
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In past years, the psychological interplay between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. led to growing tension within the world, and the convergence of a new kind of Citizen, a Citizen, who, at a time when the leaders were not speaking, decided that the People must speak, a Citizen who had the courage to cross the borders of their personal, political and ideological beliefs to embrace the oneness of humanity. This Citizen is known as a Citizen Diplomat.

Citizen Diplomats over the years, have become a bridge between the grass roots and the bureaucracy. They span the gaps of separation between People and Nations through their ability to listen, to understand, and accept a perspective so different from their own.

Citizen Diplomacy is not a business. It is not even a profession. It is a privilege. It is a sacred gift given to us all to give to the world. It comes through us and not from us. A Citizen Diplomat is a World Citizen, a builder between Nations; a bridge between what IS and what CAN BE. It is a bridge from today into tomorrow.

A Citizen Diplomat is one who is self empowered to know that he or she can make a difference. It is one who takes responsibility for his or her own thoughts knowing that they are the architects of their own destiny.

Citizen Diplomacy is the art of self development. It is the development of hearing one's own inner voice and following that guidance regardless of the seemingly "impossible" obstacles that may present themselves along the chosen path.

When we embark upon the path of Citizen Diplomacy, we become a spiritual warrior venturing onto the "front lines" of life armed only with the weapons of compassion, understanding and Love. A Citizen Diplomat is one who is able to hold the androgynous balance of two or more points of view simultaneously.. It is one who can listen and understand the views of another without denying his or her own values.

To empathize with the perspective of another requires a certain amount of individual security, a well-developed sense of personal identity and high self-esteem. When these qualities are present, we are not threatened by the perspective of another, no matter how foreign to our own. We are secure in the knowledge of our own beliefs without fear of being swayed, conditioned or absorbed by the belief system of others. This security gives us a source of inner strength, and an intuitive sense of knowing when to yield and when to be firm, when to be silent and when to speak out.

In Citizen Diplomacy one favors discrimination before judgement. In discrimination one sees differences, in judgement one compares the differences. "Comparison" is a form of measurement which creates distance between two or more points leading to separation rather than unification. The comparison or separation will usually reveal itself in the form of critical evaluation of self and others. It sets the "yardstick" of measurement and those who do not live up to it's expectations are condemned through our thoughts, words and sometimes, deeds.

My own personal experience that led to me to experience Citizen Diplomacy in action began in 1984, during the height of the "Cold War Era". I was invited to travel behind the "Iron Curtain" to see the enemy for myself. The first day in Red Square, in front of Lenin's Tomb, in front of the Kremlin wall, I gazed at the giant Red Star on the Kremlin spires, as the soldiers hoisted the Communist banners onto the Kremlin walls and Gums Department Store... I watched battalions of Soviet soldiers marching with the "goose steps" of Hitler's Army as Russian tanks noisily rolled in over the cobblestone pavement of Red Square. I trembled with the realization that I was standing in "The Center" of what Pres. Reagan had coined as "The Evil Empire". That day I came face to face with my own conditioned response to the Soviets as "the enemy".

What frightened me most was that I was not alone. Millions of other Americans shared those same fears and stereotypes, either consciously or subconsciously. I had been taught since a small child that "our thoughts are more powerful than bombs" and that we draw to us, like a magnet, the things most predominant in our minds. If enough of us continued on in our stereotypical thinking of the Soviets as the "enemy", then we would create the very thing we feared most..... We could, as a Nation, reach a "critical mass" of thought that could bring about not positive...but disastrous results.

But how could we change it? That day, as the Red Army soldiers marched around me, I thought, To change the world, we must first change our own attitude. To do this, we must face the enemy and look directly into it's face. Fear is a tremendous barrier of self protection. As long as we resist it it continues to influence us as individuals and as a Nation. But, fear has no power over us when we face it directly

We must, I thought, bypass the stereotypes and National conditioning to see and experience the truth for ourselves. We can no longer rely on the Governments and Media to filter the experience for us but we must experience it for ourselves.. In order to do this I set out to see the 'enemy' for myself

I travelled throughout Republics of the USSR praying in the churches with the Babushkas (grandmothers), who cried for God. I sang "We shall overcome in schools with Soviet Children", drank Vodka with the Military and laughed with Officials, and empathized with Refusniks, Dissidents and the Soviets who had lost their Social standing and had to live entirely on Charity.. Wherever and whenever, I gazed into the face of "the enemy", I found only the face of the friend.

Oneday while in the Market Place in Leningrad (St. Petersburg) A Russian woman with eyes that looked as if she had seen the suffering of many wars came up to me. "Italiano?", she asked. "No Americantsy", I answered referring to myself. "Americantsy....Americantsy" she cried falling to her knees and imploring with her hands held in a prayer position, "Mir...Mir".. (Peace...Peace). I lifted her to her feet and we hugged as the tears spilled from both our eyes onto one anothers shoulders. It was then that I realized, that their fears and their desire for Peace between our peoples was as great as mine. As I stepped over the line onto "the other side", I found that there were no sides, we were all part of the same Humanity

Haunted by this realization and believing that we are ALL the architects of our own destiny, I returned to the United States and after several sleepless nights, wrote a proposal. The proposal called for a new format, a new way of meeting that would allow for the "ordinary" grass roots American Citizen to meet face to face with Soviet officials. The Soviet Citizens were not free at that time to travel across their borders so, I thought, we must bring thousands of Americans to the USSR...to the "heart of the Evil Empire" ...to see for themselves.

At that time in 1984, our Governments were not speaking. What can we, the people do, I thought. I am only an ordinary person, no political background,

no Russian Language skills, no funding. I didn't even know where Russia was on the geographical maps. How could I do anything. All I knew was that I had to try. Every night I would listen to the fears of my children that they would not have a world to grow up in because of an impending Nuclear Holocaust .,

If our governments were not speaking, I felt that WE the People must speak..Not OUT against governments but TO Governments to explore possible solutions to our common problems. The proposal, much to my surprise, was enthusiastically accepted. and I began to embark upon a journey that would change not only the course of my life. but hundreds of thousands of lives in the process. Until that time, they said they were usually accustomed to Americans coming to the USSR to criticize them for their policies on "human rights", Afghanistan, their political system, work habits, dirty buildings and unsmiling faces.

When Americans came here, said one Soviet official, we put on our boxing gloves. They would begin....What about Afghanistan. We would defend, What about Vietnam. What about Human Rights? we would shout and they would shout louder...What about your Black situation." They said you are one of the few Americans who has ever come to us saying , "Let's create something together. You didn't tell us we were wrong and criticize us for it....you simply showed us another way".

Of course, our U.S. Government tried at the time to discourage my traveling to the Soviet Union saying that I was a "naive dupe of the Communist system" and that anyone going to the USSR was thought of as being "Pinko" Since most of our Government officials had never been to the Soviet Union, at that time, I realized that the tenants of Citizen Diplomacy must also be applied to them as well.

However, Citizen Diplomacy is not JUST applied to Governments or their representatives, It is applied to People from all stratus of society from taxi drivers to Presidents. It is the ability to treat everyone with equal respect and dignity...not to differentiate due to levels of "importance" but to penetrate the veils of professional facades, titles, and outer forms to see into the "heart of human oneness" not to compare differences in cultures but to equally value each for it's contribution to the World Society

In applying Citizen Diplomacy to the Soviet Union, I began seeing patterns to what might be called the "Bi-Polar Global Mind". The Soviet-Union, usually considered to be a High Context culture and the United States, a Low Context or high content oriented society needed to come into alignment.

A high Context culture is where the setting in which the communication occurs is considered far more important than the content or the words that are being conveyed.

A low context Society is where the communication or message that is being conveyed is considered more important than the context in which it is taking place.

When confronted with a complex problem, Americans tended to break down the problem into its component parts wanting immediate solutions and initiatives. When confronted with a complex problem, instead of breaking it down sequentially, the Soviets demonstrated patience. They expanded their thinking to the broader perspective contextually surveying the origin of the problem rather than looking for immediate solutions. This obviously can be frustrating for both Soviets and Americans attempting to come to agreement.

Hypothetically, I have speculated that the polarities of Context and Content oriented societies can be compared to the right and left hemispheres of the human brain. The right hemisphere is equated with the function of spatial or intuitive awareness where knowledge is grasped as a whole without dividing it into components. The left hemisphere functions in an intellectual sequential way, logically breaking down complex concepts into their component parts.

Theoretically, we could relate the hemispheres of the human brain to the East/West hemispheres of the planet, the Soviet Union (East) which would be contextually right brain oriented while the United States (West) relates to the content orientation of left brain activity. Citizen Diplomats ironically enough can be compared to the Corpus Collosum which forms a synoptic bridge between these diametric opposites. If the psycho-physiological ideal of the body is to maintain a healthy balance between the two hemispheres of the human brain, the corresponding societal ideal would be to create healthy alignment between the two hemispheres of the global brain thus bringing the entire planetary nervous system into co-creative alignment.

Since 1984, my life has been dedicated to establishing bi-lateral relations between Citizens of the US and USSR that have led to policy changes between our Governments. But, for me, this work has not been about trying to change the OUTER world. It is simply the expression of my own inner evolutionary journey.. It is the expression of the inner peace that precedes the outer peace. It is the release of judgement and criticism that bind body, mind and spirit in rigid and habitual patterns that create separation not only between Nations but between People and those people who are usually closest to us.

When we start working for peace, it seems to bring up everything unlike itself. For many of us, in the beginning, it would have been easier to revert back to old structures rather than stepping forth into the unknown. It is the stepping forth that distinguishes the Citizen Diplomat as the Spiritual Warrior, who is not without fear, but has the courage to face their fears as they walk for the first time on uncharted paths

We are told our work in Citizen Diplomacy, over the last several years, has made major changes and a significant contribution to the ending of the cold war. But for me, it was only the development of my own "spiritual path in learning to follow inner guidance and to surrender personal wants and desires in order to serve God through humanity

And through this journey, I have learned so much. I have learned that there are no boundaries and borders between the souls of people. I have learned that when one child suffers, my own and children everywhere suffer. I have learned that there is no separation between Nations, States and People and that the hunger that exists within the world is not just physical but spiritual hunger as well. I have learned that the sanctity and security of the world as we once knew it is painfully dissolving into the light of the New being born and that old structures must crumble for the new to come forth.

Now as we enter the decade approaching the new Millenium, the advent of change is accelerating, not only in our own country but throughout the world. As a result, we are now being invited to expand the success of our work into the areas of crisis in the Middle East, Ethiopia, Vietnam, Central America and Ireland. .CSAID is being asked to develop Teams of Citizen Diplomats to facilitate in World areas of Regional Conflicts in developing "Non-Official Dialogues" with both official and non-official citizens of those countries. Countries of the Middle East are interested in forming Citizen Diplomacy groups as a way to transform their fears into action..by creating "Dialogue" as a way of finding peaceful solutions.

Citizen Diplomacy is becoming a new form of Community. In the past we have heard, "before we can heal the planet, we have to heal ourselves". However, we also believe that IN THE PROCESS of healing the world we DO heal ourselves and the relationships among and between us. Since Citizen Diplomacy has grown out of this consciousness, those who come into this work begin seeing their own judgements, criticisms in a new light bringing new understandings to their Personal, National and International relationships.

We have found that the WORK is not about what is being done in the outer world but what is being done within ourselves. Citizen Diplomacy applied at National and International levels speeds up ones own inner evolutionary journey. The outer events are only the catalysts that bring to the surface that which we thought had long been resolved reinforcing concepts of the microcosm being a reflection of the macrocosm.

It is a time for Citizen everywhere to know that with every thought, word and action, they can and DO make a difference.. As we apply the elements of Citizen Diplomacy in our own lives we begin to reflect and model "the change we would like to see within the world"..

YOU CAN PRACTICE Citizen Diplomacy in your own life by:

- (1) Applying principals of non-violence in Thoughts and words by reducing "critical evaluation of others"
- (2) Crossing borders within your own consciousness and your own lives to model "that" which you would like to see within the World.
- (3) Becoming a beacon of patience, understanding and Love to all those a attempting to do the same.
- (4) Embracing the planet as the parent would embrace his or her own child.
- (5) Honoring and celebrating one anothers differences as well a similarities.
- (6) Harmoniously aligning the differences of and with others to create and build together
- (7) Continually refining elements of "non-judgement" in order to hold "Two points of View Simultaneously"
- (8) Holding the field of "Unconditional Love" for ALL PEOPLE everywhere so TOGETHER we can recognize our Common Humanity