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BUILDING CONFLICT RESILIENCE: IT'S NOT *JUST* ABOUT PROBLEM-SOLVING

Robert C. Bordone*

I. INTRODUCTION

Political polarization in the United States and internationally has increased enormously in the past decade, resulting in legislative impasse in some countries, political instability and partisan re-alignment in others, and decreased levels of communication, trust, and cooperation across partisan lines in schools, communities, and across the nation.[1] Americans are more likely to marry someone of a different faith than of a different political party, a statistic that would have been unheard of a generation ago.[2] In the United States, political polarization has made effective governance nearly impossible, resulting in an inability of political leaders to communicate constructively with each other even on some of the nation's most pressing problems, such as healthcare and immigration.[3] Virtually every issue in American politics is framed in zero-sum, winner-takes-all terms.[4]

Many factors have brought us to this moment of political polarization after several decades of broad national consensus in the U.S following World War II.[5] Among the factors contributing to polarization are highly partisan cable news networks;[6] social media such as Facebook and Twitter, which creates political echo chambers and allow users to curate whom and what they read and pay attention to;[7] and the rise of anonymous blogs that stifle in-person conversations for fear that

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1. *See, e.g.*, Hanno Sauer, *Can't We All Disagree More Constructively? Moral Foundations, Moral Reasoning, and Political Disagreement*, 8 NEUROETHICS 153, 153 (2015).

2. *Inter-Faith Marriage: Across the Aisles—A Welcome Sign of Tolerance, or Dangerous Dilution?*, THE ECONOMIST (Apr. 10, 2013), https://www.economist.com/blogs/democracyinamerica/2013/04/inter-faith-marriage (last visited Sept. 5, 2017).

3. *See* Sarah Binder, *How Political Polarization Creates Stalemate and Undermines Lawmaking*, WASH. POST (Jan. 13, 2014), https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/01/13/how-political-polarization-creates-stalemate-and-undermines-lawmaking/?utm_term=.260bf8e69393 (stating that legislative deadlock increases as party polarization and partisanship does); *see also* Michael Barber & Nolan McCarty, *Causes and Consequences of Polarization*, *in* NEGOTIATING AGREEMENT IN POLITICS, 19, 39-41 (Jane Mansbridge & Cathie Jo Martin eds., 2013) (using immigration as a case study in legislative gridlock caused by political polarization).

4. Barber & McCarty, *supra* note 3, at 45.

5. Godfrey Hodgson, *Revisiting the Liberal Consensus*, *in* THE LIBERAL CONSENSUS RECONSIDERED: AMERICAN POLITICS AND SOCIETY IN THE POSTWAR ERA 12-16 (Robert Mason & Iwan Morgan eds., 2017).

6. Carl M. Cannon, *Comment*, *in* RED AND BLUE NATION?: CHARACTERISTICS AND CAUSES OF AMERICA'S POLARIZED POLITICS 163, 166-67 (Pietro S. Nivola & David W. Brady, eds. 2006).

7. *Id.*

what they say may be taken out-of-context and posted publicly by others anony-mously.[8] In the United States, the role of money in political campaigns and the impact of election gerrymandering have compounded the problem of polarization whereby ideologically-motivated individuals and strong partisans on both sides have an outsized impact on policy-making, governance, and the national conversa-tion while ordinary citizens disengage and often feel disgusted by the decreasing civility of political elites.[9] The situation has become so dire that the Stavros Niar-chos Foundation recently made a $150 million gift to Johns Hopkins University in an effort to identify and study ways to stem the deterioration of civic engagement and restore civil civic discourse.[10]

II. THE TROUBLING DECLINE OF POLITICAL DIALOGUE IN LAW SCHOOL CLASSROOMS AND BEYOND

As partisan polarization has increased, I have observed several perceptible changes in the way law school students engage each other around political differ-ences and conflict in the classroom.   From conversations with my colleagues, I am not alone in observing these trends.

There has been a noticeable decline in robust exchange around in-class discus-sion of politically controversial topics such a gender, violence, or rape, for exam-ple.[11]   A dominant political orthodoxy—often left-leaning—rules in many law school classrooms such that conservative perspectives and more arguably extreme views on the far left often do not get voiced.[12] This observation would matter less if there were evidence that there were no students in law school classrooms who held such views. Unfortunately, this does not seem to be the case.[13] There is ample evidence to suggest that students with conservative or with far-left views are well-

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8. Maria Konnikova, *The Psychology of Online Comments*, THE NEW YORKER (Oct. 23, 2013), https://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/the-psychology-of-online-comments.

9. JENNIFER L. LAWLESS & RICHARD L. FOX, RUNNING FROM OFFICE: WHY YOUNG AMERICANS ARE TURNED OFF TO POLITICS 7-16 (2015); Lawrence Lessig, *In Washington, Money Talks Louder than Ordinary Americans—and We Do Nothing*, NEWSTATESMAN (June 4, 2015), https://www.newstates-man.com/2015/05/washington-money-talks-louder-ordinary-americans; Russell Berman, *What's the Answer to Political Polarization in the U.S.?*, THE ATLANTIC (Mar. 8, 2016), https://www.theatlan-tic.com/politics/archive/2016/03/whats-the-answer-to-political-polarization/470163/.

10. *Johns Hopkins Gets $150M for Interdisciplinary Effort to Foster Discussion of Divisive Issues*, JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY HUB (June 22, 2017), https://hub.jhu.edu/2017/06/22/agora-institute-150-million-grant-stavros-niarchos-foundation/.

11. Jeannie Suk Gerson, *The Trouble with Teaching Rape Law*, THE NEW YORKER (Dec. 15, 2014), https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/trouble-teaching-rape-law; *See also* Jamie R. Abrams, *Experiential Learning and Assessment in the Era of Donald Trump*, 55 DUQ. L. REV. 75, 87 (2017) (not-ing that law students and faculty can isolate themselves into "political bubbles" and "ideologically ho-mogeneous environments").

12. *See, e.g.*, James C. Phillips, *Why are There so few Conservatives and Libertarians in Legal Aca-demia? An Empirical Exploration of Three Hypotheses,* 39 HARV. J.L. & PUB. POL'Y 153, 159 (2015) (noting that the large majority of legal academics are liberal in orientation).

13. Oliver Roeder, *The Most Conservative and Most Liberal Elite Law Schools*, FIVETHIRTYEIGHT (Dec. 5, 2014, 6:00 AM), https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/the-most-conservative-and-most-liberal-elite-law-schools/ (demonstrating a high number of both liberal and conservative law clerks and thereby, implicitly suggesting that student bodies are comprised of both liberal and conservative students); Steven C. Bahls, *Political Correctness and the American Law School*, 69 WASH. U. L. Q. 1041, 1043-48 (1991) (citing to responses from an ABA survey of law students, over half of whom do not feel free to express disagreement with the political perspectives of their professors).

represented on law school campuses.[14] Instead, several phenomena—perhaps most notably the worry that a misunderstood, unpopular, or inartfully worded comment or idea might get posted on a Facebook wall or an anonymous blog in a way that mischaracterizes or labels the speaker—has encouraged many to remain safe by remaining silent. The risk that a poorly phrased statement or unpopular political view could be easily mischaracterized and suddenly posted on a range of public sites thereby casting the speaker in an unfavorable (and perhaps wholly unfair) light to the broader community is simply too high for many.[15]

With political dialogue so charged, students and faculty opt to remain quiet and share their views outside the classroom only with those who are known to be politically like-minded and sympathetic.[16] This trend is troubling in any context, but it is particularly worrisome in an academic environment where expression of a wide range of views and political opinions should be most protected, encouraged, and permissible. As admissions offices work tirelessly to recruit diverse student bodies for the purpose of promoting a wide range of world views and opinions both in and outside the classroom, powerful forces in the society simultaneously raise the cost of genuine face-to-face political exchange with those who have views different from one's own or from the prevailing orthodoxy of a particular community.

These observable trends in the law school classroom reflect the growing polarization in communities, churches, civic organizations, and even families.[17] Holiday get-togethers with family members, fraught with the possibility of political clashes, are frequently managed with an unspoken détente, a tacit agreement to avoid politics all-together as the family eats the turkey and stuffing.[18] These strategies of full-on political clash or nearly complete avoidance should be deeply troubling to those of us who teach, practice, and write about conflict management. Fight or flight are

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14. Jonas Blank, *All the Right's Moves*, HARVARD LAW TODAY (Apr. 24, 2003), https://today.law.harvard.edu/feature/rights-moves/; *Yale Federalist Society: Lawyering Up Right*, YALE LAW SCHOOL (Apr. 8, 2015), https://law.yale.edu/admissions/profiles-statistics/student-perspectives/yale-federalist-society-lawyering-right.

15. ANN SOUTHWORTH, LAWYERS OF THE RIGHT: PROFESSIONALIZING THE CONSERVATIVE COALITION 116 (2008) (describing the experiences of conservative lawyers who said that their professional identities had been affected through hostile conflicts with liberal and radical professors and classmates); Avrahm Berkowitz, *The Day Free Speech Died at Harvard Law School*, OBSERVER (Apr. 3, 2016, 8:30 AM), http://observer.com/2016/04/the-day-free-speech-died-at-harvard-law-school/; Lisa Marie Passarella & David S. Jonas, *Political Disequilibrium on Law School Campuses*, ABA: BEFORE THE BAR (Jan. 12, 2017), http://abaforlawstudents.com/2017/01/12/political-disequilibrium-law-school-campuses/; Kelly Wilz, *The Myth of the Liberal Campus*, HUFFINGTON POST (Feb. 27, 2017) http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/the-myth-of-the-liberal-campus_us_58b1bc00e4b02f3f81e44812 (arguing that on many campuses liberal faculty feel silenced and unable to express views that might in any way be seen as political).

16. Kelly Wilz, *supra* note 15.

17. Robert D. Putnam, BOWLING ALONE: THE COLLAPSE AND REVIVAL OF AMERICAN COMMUNITY 277-84, 340-41 (2001); Richard H. Pildes, *Why the Center Does Not Hold: The Causes of Hyperpolarized Democracy in America*, 99 CALIF. L. REV. 273, 275-81 (2011); Jonathan Haidt & Sam Abrams, *The Top 10 Reasons American Politics are so Broken,* WASH. POST (Jan. 7, 2015), https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/01/07/the-top-10-reasons-american-politics-are-worse-than-ever/?utm_term=.a26665c91a72.

18. Rosa Inocencio Smith, *Will Trump Voters and Clinton Voters Ever Relate?,* (Nov. 30, 2016, 12:58 PM), THE ATLANTIC, https://www.theatlantic.com/notes/2016/11/thanksgiving-politics/509165/.

two of the most commonly used but ineffective long-term approaches to handling and resolving conflict.[19]

III. CREATING SPACES FOR POLITICAL DIALOGUE: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Over the past few years my colleagues and I at the Harvard Negotiation & Mediation Clinical Program ("HNMCP") have attempted to address the challenge of political polarization and complicit silencing in the classroom (and other spaces) by working with students to design and host dozens of facilitated political dialogue sessions.[20] In these sessions, trained facilitators invite those who hold different or opposing political views to participate in conversations on polarizing topics.

The primary purpose of these facilitated sessions has been to create a low-risk space where those with opposing views could simply feel comfortable enough to express their own views, have those views acknowledged by the others present in the group, and then be ready to listen to the views and reasoning of peers who might hold different or opposing views. Problem-solving, identifying common ground, writing a joint press release, or other "next steps" were not part of these sessions.

Only after hosting dozens of dialogues since 2013 was I able to observe—and then offer a name for—two other related (but perhaps even more troubling) dynamics that seem to be contributing to the political polarization of the moment:

(1) There exists a seeming lack of appreciation or respect for the value of simply sitting in the presence of openly-expressed differences and conflict, especially in situations where "problem-solving"—or some other joint "coming together" or "moving forward" activity—is not part of the agenda;

(2) Second, quite apart from the lack of appreciation for the value of "sitting with" conflict was the surprisingly low level of interpersonal skill and the dearth of practical tools that many individuals had for engaging others constructively around our political differences in face-to-face exchange. Indeed, observing the way in which highly talented, thoughtful, and passionate participants engaged so clumsily around a conversation about their political beliefs helped explain at least part of the reason why avoidance seems so attractive.

It is in addressing these two particular challenges—awareness of the value of 'sitting with' conflict and ability/skill to actually 'sit with' conflict skillfully—that I believe conflict management practitioners and scholars may find their greatest opportunity to make a difference at this moment of political polarization.

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19. *Understanding the Stress Response*, HARVARD HEALTH PUBLISHING (Mar. 18, 2016), https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/understanding-the-stress-response (identifying the fight-or-flight stress response).

20. *See, e.g.*, *Harvard Community Dialogues*, HARVARD NEGOTIATION & MEDIATION CLINICAL PROGRAM (Apr. 21, 2017), http://hnmcp.law.harvard.edu/newsletters/harvard-community-dialogues/.

A. Promoting the Idea of Dialogue Disconnected from Problem-Solving: Building Conflict Resilience

First, with respect to low appreciation among fellow citizens of the value of being in the presence of conflict around political differences detached from problem-solving: When my colleagues and I first began organizing political dialogue sessions, we often received questions from potential participants that asked us what action plan, joint project, takeaway, or "next steps" would emerge from the conversation. When I suggested that the dialogue was neither intended to persuade anyone nor to identify joint work or next steps but simply for the purpose of learning other's perspectives beyond one's own, asking curious questions, and sharing one's own perspective, participants frequently seemed confused and even disappointed.

At times, I was asked, "What would be the point of such a session?" In at least a few instances, individuals who had signed up to participate cancelled after learning that the session was not intended to be a "debate" or to improve their "oral advocacy skills" or to result in an "action plan" but merely for the purpose of learning and dialogue.

On the one hand, I am sympathetic to those who are skeptical about the idea of spending precious time in a room with others with whom they disagree and where the desired end-product is nothing more than the possibility of increased understanding (perhaps, if things go well!) and a sense that your own opinion has been registered with someone on the other side of the political fence. What value could there be in sitting in a room with those who have strongly-held and opposing political views from one's own when there is no intention to identify a solution or a way-forward? In a world where we rarely have enough time to be with the people we want to be with, what value could there be to sit awkwardly and uncomfortably with people who, at best, might make us uncomfortable and, at worst, might hold views that, if enacted as public policy, would inflict genuine damage on us or on those whom we love?

During the past two decades, law schools—as well as other professional schools—have re-oriented their curricula around the relentless and single-minded goal of "problem-solving."[21] As I read about current efforts even by those of us in the conflict management field to bring people with varying viewpoints together for dialogue, so many of these efforts seem focused on problem-solving as a main or primary goal.[22] To be clear, I am an advocate of problem-solving; indeed, much of

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21. Joseph William Singer & Todd D. Rakoff, *Problem Solving for First-Year Law Students*, 7 ELON L. REV. 413 (2015); Katherine R. Kruse, Bobbi McAdoo & Sharon Press, *Client Problem Solving: Where ADR and Lawyering Skills Meet*, 7 Elon L. Rev. 225 (2015); Bobbi McAdoo, Sharon Press & Chelsea Griffin, *It's Time to Get It Right: Problem-Solving in the First-Year Curriculum*, 39 WASH. U. J.L. & POL'Y 39 (2012); John Lande & Jean R. Sternlight, *The Potential Contribution of ADR to an Integrated Curriculum: Preparing Law Students for Real World Lawyering*, 25 OHIO ST. J. ON DISP. RESOL. 247 (2010).

22*. See, e.g.*, The Divided Community Project, *Key Considerations for Community Leaders Facing Civil Unrest: Effective Problem-Solving Strategies that have been used in Other Communities* 3, OHIO ST. UNIV. MORITZ COLLEGE OF LAW (Jan. 2016), http://moritzlaw.osu.edu/dividedcommunityproject/wp-content/uploads/sites/101/2016/05/Key-Considerations-January-2016.pdf (outlining an approach to dialogue that is linked to community problem-solving); *Civic Engagement Facilitation Training: Moving from Dialogue to Collaborative Action,* ESSENTIAL PARTNERS, https://www.whatisessential.org/news/civic-engagement-facilitator-training-moving-dialogue-collaborative-action (Sept. 6, 2017) (offering a training designed to use dialogue for the purpose of collaborative problem-solving).

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my teaching for the past two decades has been to help individuals and groups improve their individual and joint problem-solving skills.

At the same time, I worry that this relentless focus on "problem-solving" has diminished and obscured the independently worthy goal of simply building "conflict resilience," a skill that is essential in a pluralistic and diverse society where not every difference can be or will be resolved, but where we still need to find ways to coexist and work with each other peaceably and constructively in order to thrive and survive. I am not alone in this worry. Bernie Mayer has written extensively about the essential skill of engaging deeply with enduring conflict and the role that conflict specialists can and ought to play in helping individuals and organizations learn to sit with conflict.[23]

"Conflict resilience" is the ability to sit with and be fully present around those with whom we have fundamentally different views on critical issues.[24] Conflict resilience matters. When we sit in the presence of others with whom we may disagree strongly but with whom we can maintain civility and curiosity, we inevitably discover domains of shared interest and connection. And, even when we do not find these, we can often develop an appreciation for why our fellow citizens may hold the views they do. This "sitting with" does not solve an immediate problem; but it prevents the kind of demonization and othering that can escalate and cause new problems down the road while promoting humanization and connection. Sitting with conflict is not taming conflict or pretending it is not there. It is discussing it openly, acknowledging the tension and challenge it can create, but then refusing to let the different views become a corrosive force that blinds us to the reality of common humanity.

When I think about one of the most important and unique contributions that those of us in the conflict management field can offer at this moment of global political polarization—when technology is sorting us by political preference, income level, buying behavior, and consumer preferences—being a forceful voice for "conflict resilience," for the value of just sitting with and in the presence of those with whom we have strongly divergent views, may be among the most important contributions we can make. At times, this will mean cultivating patience in ourselves and opening ourselves up to some criticism from 'pragmatists' or 'problem-solvers' for being too "touchy-feely" or for not responding urgently enough to the exigency of the moment, or for not generating real "solutions" quickly enough.[25] Despite this, the conflict management field can stand as a witness to the value and the power of being present in the face of uncomfortable conflict and to the ways that this presence humanizes, decreases demonization, and identifies domains for cooperation even if it does not generate a "solution" to the presenting substantive conflict.

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23. *See generally* BERNARD MAYER, STAYING WITH CONFLICT: A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO ONGOING DISPUTES (2009).

24. DIANE MUSHO HAMILTON, EVERYTHING IS WORKABLE: A ZEN APPROACH TO CONFLICT RESOLUTION 5, 91-92 (2013); MAYER, *supra* note 23, at 207, 235.

25. *See, e.g.*, MAYER, *supra* note 23, at 247 (discussing the challenge of insisting on a 'settlement orientation' that can encourage a rights-based approach to the resolution of conflict); ROBERT A. BARUCH BUSH & JOSEPH P. FOLGER, THE PROMISE OF MEDIATION: THE TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH TO CONFLICT (2nd ed. 2004).

Technology has made it easier for us to escape our differences.[26] We live in curated worlds of interest through social media and we often find ourselves insulated from opposing viewpoints or those who make us feel unpleasant or uncomfortable—whether through choice or by dint of a Facebook algorithm. But because it is unlikely, and I would argue undesirable, for humans to ever simply be on the "same page" about all important issues and because it is essential in an ever-more connected and global world that we find ways of "being with" each other nonetheless in order to survive, developing an appreciation of the value of conflict resilience seems critical to me.

There is a fundamental and essential value in learning to sit and be present in the face of political differences and conflict. The pre-condition of problem-solving as an agenda item or purpose for the conversation with political nemeses can often get in the way of this worthy, independent goal.

B. Promoting the Skills of Conflict Resilience

Persuading individuals that "conflict resilience" is a skill worth developing is a challenging hurdle. Once it is achieved, however, the second area where conflict management professionals and scholars can contribute is in helping individuals build the skills necessary for "conflict resilience." Without a belief in the inherent value of "conflict resilience," though, it will be hard to persuade our fellow citizens or our students that they should take the time to develop the skills required for effective, meaningful civil discourse around deeply held political differences.

My experience training law students and observing facilitated dialogues around politically polarizing topics is that developing skills for facilitating and for participating in hard political conversations is incredibly challenging.

Let me start with challenges that many facilitators face: In their well-meaning attempt to create a low-risk space for dialogue participants, facilitators may be apt to 'over-design' conversations in ways that stress commonalities between the parties instead of bringing differences to light. Facilitators can be apt to design sessions that spend too much time on rapport-building or on activities that only touch gingerly and tangentially around the edges of truly hotwire political issues. In so doing, however, the fundamental differences between the participants that go to the actual heart of the political divide often remain unspoken, muted, or quickly extinguished and patrolled if inadvertently expressed by dialogue participant.

The seeming aversion by many facilitators to promote open expression of strong political differences is understandable: Unlike even a generation or two ago, there currently exist relatively few examples of healthy, robust, open, and respectful dialogue across political differences in our culture.[27] Instead, in their place, are plentiful demonstrations of less-than-edifying, shrill, and cheap political diatribes-masking-as-debates. Wanting to avoid the latter at all costs and not knowing what

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26. Walter Quattrociocchi, Antonio Scala & Cass R. Sunstein, *Echo Chambers on Facebook* (June 13, 2016), https://ssrn.com/abstract=2795110.

27. SUSAN HERBST, RUDE DEMOCRACY: CIVILITY AND INCIVILITY IN AMERICAN POLITICS 133 (2010); Ray Williams, *The Rise of Incivility and What To Do About It*, PSYCHOL. TODAY (Oct. 21, 2016), https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/wired-success/201610/the-rise-incivility-and-what-do-about-it.

the former might look like, facilitators unwittingly conspire with participants to ensure conflict stays out of the room.[28]

In addition, finding a way into deep and genuine dialogue around political differences takes time. It can be challenging for a group to feel comfortable enough to engage at a deep and personal level during a 90-minute or two-hour dialogue. And so, in many cases, they simply do not. It is for this reason that some of the most successful dialogue programs are sustained and iterative.[29]

While the avoidance-by-design approach to facilitation of hard political dialogue is understandable, it is also problematic for the missed opportunity it presents. As conflict management professionals, we need to do better at encouraging ourselves—and the people with whom we work—to lean in on differences and conflicts more directly. Yes, it may get emotional; yes, someone may feel a bit shaken by something said by someone else in the room; but that is part of what makes the work of deep engagement real, sustaining, and true; and that is part of what it means to live in a pluralistic and diverse society. We should not shun from this in a dialogue session; we should encourage it and do what we can to design the space to make it possible for such exchanges to occur.

Of course, it is not just facilitators who are often less-skillful in leaning into conflict and encouraging expression of differences. Dialogue participants often conspire—sometimes consciously, sometimes less-so—with facilitators in avoiding engagement around the toughest areas of difference in a dialogue.[30] Sharing one's views when one knows that others in the room may form negative impressions of them takes a high degree of tenacity, maturity, and vulnerability. Short of being pushed by a facilitator, participants in political dialogue may find it hard to muster the energy and courage to engage at the deepest level.

Participants in dialogue frequently report to me that they are of two minds when they are participating in a facilitated session: On the one hand, their agreement to participate in the conversation itself is motivated precisely because they *want* the chance to interact with those who have opposing views from their own. At the same time, at a conscious (and sometimes subconscious level), personal sharing around these issues feels very risky for them. Once these courageous individuals are in the room, it can be easier to simply collude with a facilitator who has designed a session around seemingly endless (and possibly even fun) introductory exercises, ground rules, and arms-length sharing at the edges of the polarizing issues rather than "getting real" and going deep. Indeed, one of the fears of going deep for many participants is the realization that they will realize there is no "solution" to the "problem." Fearful of directly confronting this painful reality in the room makes avoidance an even more attractive option. Yet, in my experience, participants who engage in conversations that fail to get to the heart of a particular issue, nonetheless often report regret and disappointment afterward; they may be less likely to return to a second session because of their experience failed to meet their expectations.

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28. MAYER, *supra* note 23, at 68-80.

29. Harold H. Saunders et al., *Framework for Analysis: Sustained Dialogue*, in SUSTAINED DIALOGUE IN CONFLICTS: TRANSFORMATION AND CHANGE 23, 23-30 (Harold H. Saunders ed., 2011); Haggai Kupermintz & Gavriel Salomon, *Lessons to Be Learned From Research on Peace Education in the Context of Intractable Conflict*, 4 THEORY INTO PRAC. 293, 294-95 (2005).

30. MAYER, *supra* note 23, at 56-60 (citing nine major reasons why those in conflict often avoid direct engagement: fear, hopelessness, uncertainty, energy conservation, systems or relationship preservation, powerlessness, shame or embarrassment, inadequate skills, and resource depletion).

At least part of what holds participants back in dialogue sessions—in addition to some of the issues around social media and reputation that I already discussed—is a lack of skill in articulating their viewpoints in ways that are genuine, that can be heard by the other side, and that nonetheless avoid sweeping statements, attribution, and blame.

Conflict management professionals are uniquely placed to assist in equipping participants in dialogue with the skills to speak truthfully and powerfully, but also in ways that can be heard by others.[31] At their best, conflict management professionals can also design dialogue spaces where people are given permission to be less-than-articulate when they are struggling to communicate but are unable to find quite the right words. For the past six years I have worked with Seeds of Peace ("Seeds"), a non-profit organization that convenes and promotes dialogue work in several conflict zones, including the Israeli-Palestinian context, one of the most enduring and politically polarized conflicts in the world. I have observed many facilitators at Seeds articulate a concept they call "being raggedy." When a dialogue participant has something they want to express but is not sure how to phrase it articulately, rather than just remaining quiet, the participant asks the group for "permission to be raggedy." This is a signal to others in the session that what they are about to say may not be as well-formed as they prefer. Receiving permission to be "raggedy" encourages others in the group to accord an extra measure of grace and good intention before making judgments about the speaker. "Permission to be raggedy" invites the others in the room to put on their "curiosity hats" instead of their debate or judgement ones.

IV. CONCLUSION

As conflict management professionals think about what role we might play in a world of increased political polarization, I would urge our field to de-emphasize the problem-solving components of what we do and to amplify the independent value of engaging with those who hold deeply held political differences. Building "conflict resilience" skills and learning to sit in the midst of open conflict helps to humanize the other and creates the kind of environment that might lend itself to problem-solving in areas where possible and to respectful co-existence and increased empathy and understanding in those where it is not. If nothing else, conflict resilience avoids the creation of new problems—namely villainizing and dehumanizing the other—at the same time it provides opportunities to avoid conflict escalation by dint of bottling up hard feelings and strong views that otherwise boil over and can lead to destructive violence.

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31. E. Franklin Dukes, Resolving Public Conflict: Transforming Community and Governance 69-71 (1996).