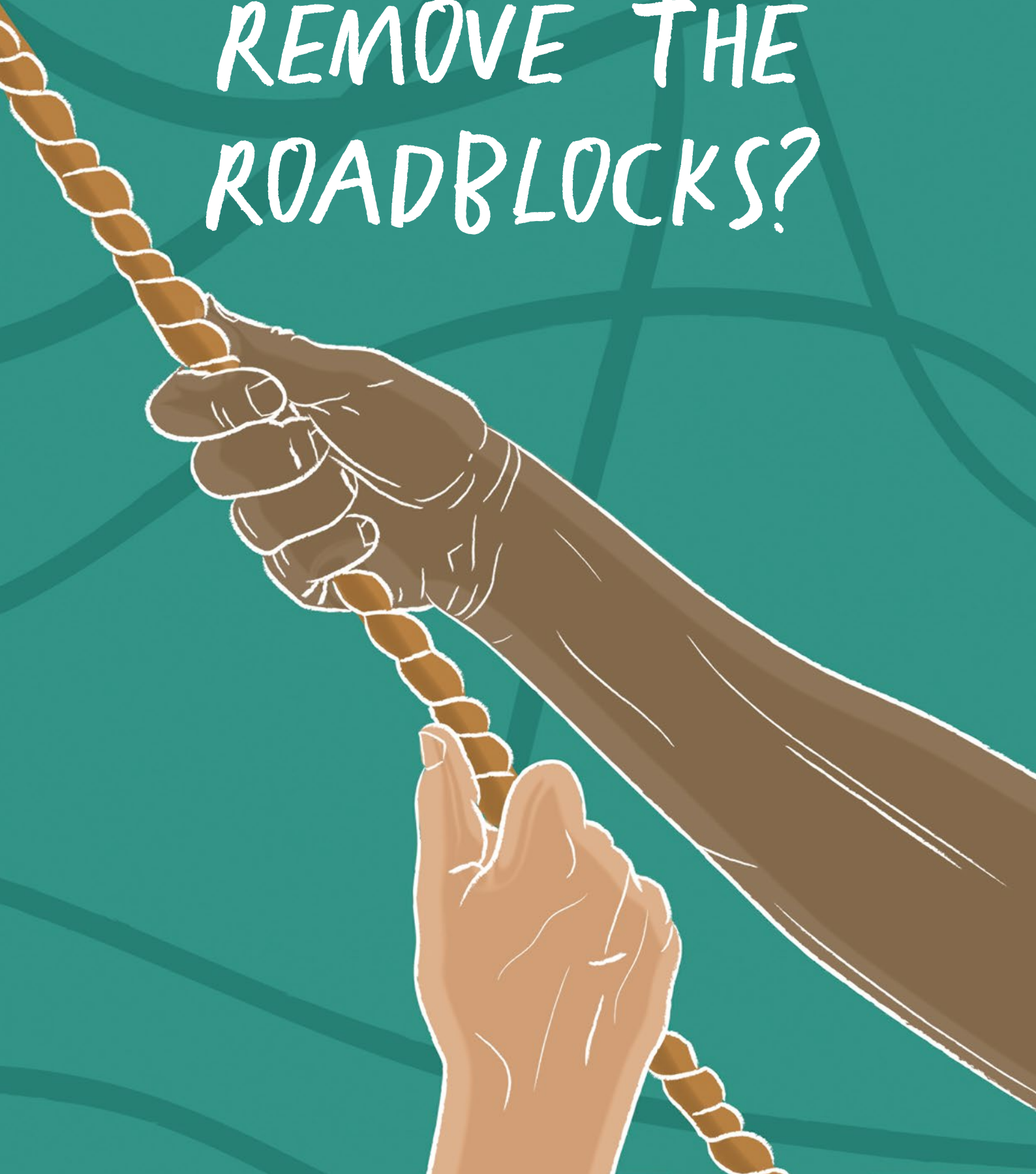


HOW CAN WE
REMOVE THE
ROADBLOCKS?



HOW WE CAN BRIDGE DIVIDES



By Neil Denton

Across all of our discussions, many people have reflected that resistance to change is widespread, whether through culture, systems or practices but we can still play a part in driving change by:

- Challenging and changing whatever stands in the way, including the deep-seated assumptions that can prevent us from being our best selves.
- Calling out inequalities and abuses of power, and making sure everyone can participate on their own terms.
- Assuming the best in others and seeing difference, conflict and division as an opportunity to pause, seek to understand, and find a fresh way.

Over 2022 we're looking more deeply at how to do this, with Neil Denton as our thought leader. He writes here about how conflict and division can be bridged.

I act as a mediator in situations where difference has become a divide, including in areas which have experienced a disaster, and I also reflect on the lessons in my work as an academic. Sometimes I ask myself why I do this work. Being a mediator is difficult and it can feel overwhelming and exhausting. Someone once said being a mediator is a bit like bringing a bucket of water to a drought and it's tempting to think, 'What's the point?' But a bucket of water can also be seen as a million little drops that can help seed new growth, if you carefully place them.

Very often even a crisis can end up in conflict. The initial stage often brings people together, especially at a neighbourhood level, and with those whose identity and circumstances we relate to, creating what academics call bonding social capital. However, these connections and collaborations can fade as time goes by, and people begin to acknowledge that their own needs differ from others. As communities become aware of these differences, the energy generated by a disaster can change from being a force that brings people together, to one that drives people apart.

The Covid pandemic, for example, has brought many neighbourhoods closer, at least in the early stages, but it has also brought inequality into plain sight. As the pandemic wore on, we saw a reduction in connections and collaborations with groups ‘not like us’ (what academics call bridging social capital), with an increase in ‘out-group’ blaming, for example between vaccine advocates and anti-vaxxers, where the potential for destructive conflict is real. We can see this in the quality of public debate in recent years. Debate and disagreement has become more ‘tribal’ and polarised. There is a lot more shouting than listening.

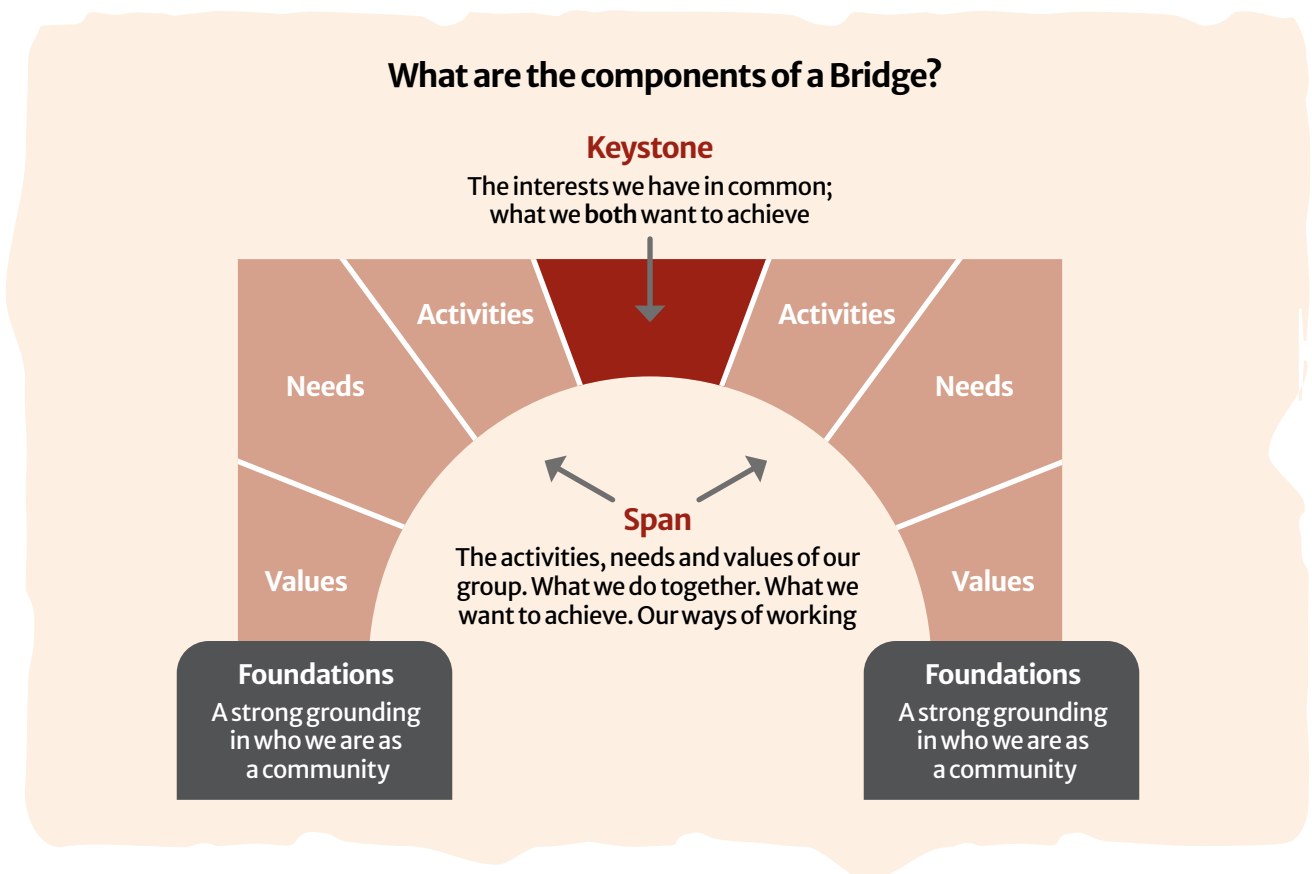
Differences, if managed well, can help us all see the world in fresh ways and achieve positive change. But what happens when conflict develops is what Marshall Rosenberg – in his work on NonViolent Communication – calls ‘enemy thinking’.

We stick labels on people, seeing them as good or bad, blaming others and always starting with what is wrong. Words like ‘I can’t, you have to and they must’ go with an ‘either/or’ mentality in which we either win or we lose. That’s how wars begin. In peacetime, people are curious. They don’t say that they know what the other group are thinking, they try to find out.

So how do we build bridges when differences become divides?

With the Relationships Project I have written the Bridge Builders Handbook, which sets out the critical components of how to build a bridge. This diagram sets out what a good bridge looks like.

What you don’t do is build the bridge from the middle. If you try to start from superficial points of connection and



similarity, the bridge eventually falls down. What you need instead are strong foundations on either side first.

A mediator in these circumstances sits in both camps, listening with their eyes, head and heart and looking at the activities, needs and values of each community to see if they can build a story about them that will make sense to the other group, so that differences stop being deal-breakers and start becoming objects of curiosity. That's how you build a lasting keystone. It is held in place by genuine connection to the values, needs and activities of both two strands. The trick is to find legitimate goals that work for both groups and don't harm either. For example, not keeping a park safe by keeping the other group out, but making it safer and inclusive for everyone in the community. The energy for change comes out of genuine partnership.

This work is messy. It won't all go to plan and that's ok, as long as we keep talking to each other, and remain open to surprises.

You need a compass, not a map, in which you keep aware of two things at once – where we want to go, and where we are now – and accept that the exact route is uncertain. It's like putting bi-focals on, keeping sight of the goal, but being attentive and responsive to the everyday happenings.

Above all, you need to give it time. Time to be kind to ourselves and each other. Time to reach across empty and suspicious spaces and to place the drops from the bucket of water in a way that brings lasting change.

Neil Denton is an Independent Community Mediator and a Professor in Practice with the After Disasters Network at Durham University who specialises in conflict transformation. He also works with the Relationships Project, with whom he has produced the Bridge Builders Handbook.

DON'T BUILD BRIDGES FROM THE MIDDLE



By Tom Neumark

We've been looking at how to see difference, conflict and division as an opportunity to pause, seek to understand, and find a fresh way, one of the cross-cutting questions on tackling roadblocks emerging from our discussions last year. Tom Neumark writes here about what he's learnt from his experience of trying to do this.

As I looked out onto a half empty floodlit pitch, I kept repeating a simple question to myself, 'Why is this going so wrong? Everyone loves football!' I had tried to organise a girls' football group but almost no one had shown up.

The idea had been to bring people together over their shared interests, to build a bit of community in a highly segregated neighbourhood, but it had not worked. A few kids had shown up from the local estate, barely enough to get a kickabout going, and none had come from the leafier streets up the hill. One parent, expressing a mild interest, had tentatively enquired 'Will there be any rough kids going?' I never saw her again.

Now I realise that the reason for this failure is that I was, in the words of Neil Denton, trying to build a bridge by starting in the middle. This is a recipe for disaster.

Instead, as Neil lays out in his *Bridge Builder's Handbook*, you should start from something, not from nothing.

The football project had started from a problem, an absence, a need. It had started from a lack of community cohesion. It had started from nothing. It had not started from a group of girls that love playing football or from a group of parents who wanted to design fun activities with their kids.

In Neil's term, you need to 'establish your foundations' and 'build your span' before you 'reach out to another group'. I had raced to the finish line before going through all the initial steps and had fallen on my face.

What do they say about houses that are built on sand? The same can be said for bridges that are built from the middle out. This is a timely and important observation, given our divided societies.

There is no shortage of people decrying how polarised our society is, and no shortage of people offering solutions. Invariably these solutions fail because they are based on the idea of using some form of activity to bring people together, as a way of healing divides. They are focused on building the bridge by starting in the middle.

Activities can bring people together. Football can be a great way for people from different backgrounds to get to know each other, to break down stigma, but a game of football, just like any other activity, has to be organised in the right way and by the right organisations, otherwise no one will show up or, worse still, they may have a negative experience that reinforces their prejudices.

We are lucky to live in a country full of groups that are passionate about running activities in their communities. There are more people still that would love to be involved but have never been asked and are not sure how to start.

Rather than building bridges from the middle out, we would be much better off

getting to know the people that already do so much in our communities and supporting these often beleaguered and besieged groups to 'expand their span'.

After the failed football project, I changed tack and spent my time listening to the community. Quite quickly I found someone who loved basketball and wanted to get a team going. He was just one of several people in the area that were keen to get involved in a variety of different ways, from photography to parties to newspapers. I supported them to start or develop their activities and, over time, I noticed they started to use a common language, referring to their work, their neighbourhood and each other, using similar terms to each other. We had started to develop a shared keystone. The middle of the bridge was the end of the journey, not the beginning.

Tom Neumark is CEO of 999 Club a charity in South East London supporting people to escape homelessness for good.

GETTING BETTER AT OVERCOMING RESISTANCE



By Roger Martin

When we've been discussing how to remove the roadblocks to change, we've concluded it's important to challenge and change whatever stands in the way, including the deep-seated assumptions that can prevent us from being our best selves. Roger Martin reflects on this here.

I'm inspired by the Better Way principles and behaviours. They speak to what I think we collectively need at this time.

And they cause resistance. In myself primarily.

Let me share how I became aware of this and what has helped me overcome it, with reference to two of the Better Way behaviours.

Sharing And Building Power, because power is held in too few hands, and we all have more power than we think to change things for the better

Ever since the age of seven, when a teacher hit both my open palms with a wooden ruler as punishment for a misdemeanour I didn't commit, I've had trouble trusting those with power.

Over time, beliefs connected to this event gathered momentum. They had headlines like 'Power corrupts,' and 'Be wary of authority'. Looking back, many of my subsequent interactions with others, provided yet more evidence they were true.

At the time though I was unaware of these beliefs. They lay hidden in my sub-conscious. All I felt was resistance whenever I had to ask those with power for resources or a favour. I showed up feeling suspicious. My 'what's right-and-fair' radar was in overdrive. Had I been conscious of the notion of *sharing* and *building* power, it would have seemed alien.

Recently all this changed. When a mentor helped me join the dots between my unjust punishment, the belief system it catalysed and the resistance I felt in the company of those with power, it led to several realisations.

I saw for the first time how beliefs form and get confirmed as truths via subsequent experiences. In the vocabulary of psychology, what I was ‘projecting’ on to others became clear.

Clarity helped me entertain the idea that some leaders experienced power as a privilege to be used wisely, not a corrupting ego boost. I became tearful whenever watching Nelson Mandela for instance. To me his actions showed how he understood ‘the we’ not just ‘us and them’. Less attached to my truth about how power corrupts in every case, I saw how many have similar traits. They’re everywhere. I just hadn’t seen them.

Gradually, the grip of resistance lessened. I spoke from a place of curiosity inside, not fear and suspicion. I stopped assuming I knew what power does to colleagues. And to my surprise, they not only started *sharing* it with me, but I was able to *build* on it too. By holding lightly what I’d always believed to be true, I rediscovered some assemblance of my own power.

If I’m frank, I feel cautious about sharing personal realisations like these. They can look obvious and trite to some. Self-indulgent even. But I do so knowing clarity eludes us when we’re caught up in beliefs we’re unaware of and only have resistance-like feelings to go on.

Nowadays I try to read such feelings as a signal I’ve not yet joined all the relevant dots.

Listening To Each Other, particularly those least heard, because that is the only way to find out what’s not working and discover what will

How often do you feel really heard and your humanity affirmed as a result? In my experience this is a rare occurrence for many.

Why might this be?

I used to consider myself a good listener. I’d justify this claim by pointing to how comprehensive my notes were. This, alas, turned out to be erroneous.

As am I, we’re all prone to listen to reply, or to negate, or to confirm, based on the mental or written notes we’ve made. This is quite different to listening to understand.

In my case for example, when someone was speaking, in effect I listened to my thinking and interpretation of what they were saying, not what was actually being expressed. Only when I stopped taking copious notes did I fully appreciate the difference it made.

Another distinction I found helpful, especially when disagreements were in the air, was not to conflate listening to someone with agreeing with them. Seeing these as two separate processes freed me to focus on the former and resist the temptation to agree or disagree until I fully understood another’s position.

Inevitably, when listening, thoughts flood the mind. They can either entertain us – by drawing our attention away from what the person we’re conversing with wants to express – or we can entertain them.

In the latter case, a thought experiment that helped me – which I invite you to try out yourself – is to simply notice when your mind does the following, and instead of letting your attention and curiosity play along, bring them back to *what* the person before you is saying and *how*.

- Drifts.
- Interprets and immediately compares and contrasts.
- Wants to interrupt with questions (so deprives the speaker of time to collect their thoughts.)
- Agrees and confirms what it likes to hear.
- Disagrees with what causes discombobulation.
- Worries about how you'll respond when your turn comes.

When I notice thought-related distractions like these, and don't play along, it's easier for me, and the person in front of me, to uncover *what's not working*. In most cases, when I've been fully present, heard what they have to say, and play that back, our desire to explore *what will work* grows.

Imagine if this seemed true to most of us: when removing roadblocks and overcoming resistance to the Better Way, we each have more influence than might first appear.

Roger Martin is a Co-Founder of The Mindset Difference – a niche consultancy focused on helping leaders and teams be at their best, irrespective of the circumstances they face. Having witnessed the limitations in conventional methods of developing leaders and teams, the business was set up to offer a new approach. Put simply one that helps people subtract or take less seriously thinking habits that inhibit access to innate human qualities such as openness, creativity, resilience, compassion, collaboration, innovation, resourcefulness, courage and root cause problem solving. The very same qualities that bring out the best in teams, those they serve and create a one-team, can-do culture.

'YOU'VE GOT TO STOP HIM HITTING YOU IN FRONT OF YOUR CHILDREN!'



By Kristian Tomblin

Across our discussions in 2021 and beyond, we've heard about the many roadblocks that stand in the way of change. Kristian Tomblin writes here about his experience of challenging and changing the obstacles that stand in the way of reforming public services, including the deep-seated assumptions that prevent us from being our best selves.

I work for a Top Tier Authority. I am a Principal Commissioning Manager, that puts me above Commissioning Managers but below the Chief Principal Commissioning Manager. I work in a grade 2* listed Building. Its corridors are clad in Italian marble and its offices lined with oak panelling.

It reeks of patriarchy, tradition and old power.

In a definition taken from the internet, OLD POWER can be characterised by:

- Managerialism, institutional, representative governance.
- Exclusivity, competition, authority, resource consolidation.
- Discretion, confidentiality, separation between private and public sphere.
- Professionalism, specialism.
- Long term affiliation and loyalty, less overall participation.

I've spent a good chunk of my professional life in suits and ties, in formal office meetings poring over data trying to catch commissioned services out – it's a truth isn't it that 'providers' want to cut corners, shave costs, maximise margins. Commissioners know that. We want to squeeze the pips!!

I commission domestic abuse services. More specifically, risk management for people (women) at imminent, possible risk of being killed.

About five years ago, I had an epiphany. I spent time in the lives of people the services I commissioned were there to help. I sat in people's living rooms and kitchens and they told me their stories. I heard that our services don't talk to men or challenge abuse of power in relationships, we reduce complex human issues to a series of 'problems' or deficits our services are commissioned to deal with, we deal in crisis and fail to support prevention or recovery.

Access or eligibility to services is contingent on whether levels of distress and risk are assessed as severe enough!

The sorriest thing I heard of was social workers telling victims of domestic violence (always women victims) – ‘you’ve got to stop him hitting you in front of your children or we’ll have to take them away from you.’

The second sorriest thing I heard was that, out of hundreds of professional encounters, only a handful of people – and what they did – were seen as being helpful or valued. And all of these examples were because they went ‘above and beyond’. They were working outside of what was described in their job description! Or their ‘service specification’.

Their special skills, knowledge, job title, professional affiliation weren’t valued. The things that were valued were: being kind, compassionate, persistent and non-judgemental. Being Human.

People working in services frequently told me they weren’t able to work in accordance with their values. They paid a price for this in their energy, motivation and wellbeing.

Has old power-driven humanness out of human services?

My epiphany? That I was (am?) complicit in a system that causes harm. Looking from my perspective of managing commissioned services through my ‘old power lens,’ performance data, things looked great! Markets, competition, professionalism and specialisms work.

I was more naïve back then and I thought that presenting these stories back to the system would be a catalyst for change. How could we continue to hold in place a system that we know is routinely causing harm?

Well, it wasn’t, and we could!

I’m no expert in systems change but I’m learning. Understanding and working to reveal and change the dynamics of power is crucial.

I’m trying to develop my own practice in ‘new power’ as a means of exploring and bringing about transformation.

NEW POWER (as defined on the internet) can be characterised as:

- Informal, opt-in decision making, self-organisation, networked governance.
- Open-source collaboration, crowd wisdom, sharing.
- Radical transparency.
- Do-it-ourselves, ‘maker culture’.
- Short term, conditional affiliation, more overall participation.

I’m learning to challenge old power and build new. Building networks of fellow travellers seeking a paradigm shift.

And what does that look like? Well...

We’ve started a ‘trauma network’ – a place for people in our system (working in it and receiving support from it) to connect and build communities of practice, learn together and from each other, about how to better understand and respond to people’s distress.

We're moving away from competition and target cultures and instead building alliances where organisations cooperate towards shared ambitions. We're orientating towards valuing thoughtful reflective practice and learning as the key currency of our alliances.

We're listening to people who need support and learning about their lives. Not jumping to conclusions about the services they need but co-designing bespoke responses with them.

And we're learning how to tell the story of failure and waste inherent in many current models of service delivery and helping people ready for change to connect with a better way of working.

Kristian Tomblin lives and works in the beautiful county of Devon. He is a proud public servant and sees himself very much in the service of our citizens. He is increasingly drawn to recognising and embracing the complex nature of the challenges he works on and the importance of 'whole system' responses.



IN THE FACE OF ALL THE CHALLENGES, DESPAIR IS NOT AN OPTION



By Duncan Shrubsole

The roadblocks to a Better Way are many and, as set out in *Building a Bigger We*, we've been gathering insights about how we can tackle them. In this concluding essay to this publication, Duncan Shrubsole reflects on the challenges we face and on how we should respond to them.

Our times are terrifying, bewildering and immensely challenging.

War in Europe – millions of refugees, rape, torture, destruction and death, taking us back to scenes reminiscent of the Second World War. The cost-of-living crisis affecting all but pushing millions who were already on the edge over it. The climate crisis, ever starker, yet the will to tackle it slipping away. Partygate and the loss of trust in our leaders and politics when we need good leadership more than ever. A raft of long-term challenges that don't hit the headlines but shape them nonetheless – poverty, racism, lack of housing, underfunding of our public services, mental ill-health, social fragmentation and more.

And, given this pace of events, we have barely had the opportunity to process the last two years and the level of trauma that people individually and collectively experienced from Covid, lockdowns and their ongoing impacts.

It can feel easy to despair. But for those of us who want a better, fairer, greener world, despair is not an option. In a blog I wrote back in May 2020 I said: 'So we who will a better world need to be putting in the hard graft now to build the practical, policy and political cases for the changes we seek and persuading people to make it happen.' Nearly two years on that seems even more, not less, important.

So how can we build a country and beyond where, as a Better Way calls for, 'Everyone is heard and believed in, given a fair opportunity to thrive, and the ability to influence the things that matter to them'? How can we turn frustration to action, despair to resolve, deliberation to real change – not just willing a better world but actively helping it to happen?

I humbly suggest six things:

1. Understand the context we are living through and working in – to remake the world we also have to understand it – the trends that are helpful, as well as the challenges and the blockers. The NCVO Road Ahead document is a good place to start but much can also be gleaned from an inquiring mind and constant conversation with those swimming with us, those stuck in the tide and those we must win over.

2. Focus on the cause not the organisation – the challenges we face are too big for any one of us. The model of the heroic individual leader or large brand are certainly not up to the task. We need to focus on advancing causes and building movements, not individual organisations. Easy to say, sometimes hard to do, particularly if you are a charity trying to bring in enough income to keep the lights on. That's why it's most incumbent on those who have the broadest shoulders to carry the largest load – funders, larger charities, established leaders – to reach out and across, ask what they can do to help, not, as was too often the case in the past, expecting others to fall in line. This also requires us all to look out for and after each other.

3. Build from the ground up – we all saw that the things that worked best during lockdowns were built and led locally and the things that failed were top-down and led by central government (Test and Trace and its utter waste of £37 billion being the prime example). As we captured in research we commissioned at Lloyds Bank Foundation, small and local charities played a particularly

important role in responding to the big crisis of Covid that we faced. And 150,000 households signing up to host refugees in communities right across the UK is shaming the callous incompetence and rigid bureaucracy of the Home Office. So street by street, community by community, region by region, nation by nation we can and must come together to build an effective response to the challenges we face.

4. Look for allies not enemies, build bridges not dividing lines – we know there are politicians, newspapers and others seeking to create and fan the flames of 'culture wars'. Whilst we must be resolute in defending positions when under attack, evidence suggests the public are much less interested than those fanning the flames think. We also need to be honest with ourselves that sometimes in our own passion for a cause we can be too quick to mistrust the motives of those who disagree with us on a course of action, missing that they actually shared our concern, and just had a different view of how to get there. Even where there are MPs, newspapers and institutions who may hold views on certain issues that we find challenging, we should seek to tap into the things that do positively motivate them – indeed mobilising 'unusual suspects' has been key to many victories. And in our choice and use of language we can sometimes alienate potential friends and allies, making issues harder to resolve not easier.

5. Celebrate, be inspired by and learn from all the fantastic changes that have been achieved – as the old saying

goes, wherever there is human misery 'look for the helpers'. Ukraine is sadly giving us a masterclass in this now. But despite all of the challenges I started this blog with, campaigns are being won on a regular basis on a whole range of issues – Kirsty McNeill is running this list of **campaign successes in 2022** alone. They should each inspire us and we should actively learn from them.

6. Don't stop believing – as the song says! We know it can be done, change can be achieved. The vote, gay rights, the NHS, the United Nations, the Geneva Convention, the welfare state, action on climate change, international debt

relief, the end of Apartheid, changing attitudes to mental health and so, so much more were all won through people campaigning, arguing, fighting, mobilising, protesting and persuading.

We in civil society must be the thinkers, the dreamers, the uniters, the builders, the lifter-uppers, the change makers. Let's get to it!

Duncan Shrubsole is Director of Policy, Research and Communication for the Lloyds Bank Foundation for England and Wales and is writing in a personal capacity.