Communication and Conflict: We Must Do Better

The upheaval in Wisconsin politics since February of 2011 has caused me deep concern about the importance of learning about conflict, peace and nonviolent dispute resolution. Why teach students about communication and collaboration, active and mindful listening? Why guide a course of study that includes empathy, forgiveness and restorative justice when it appears that all one needs to achieve goals is the blunt force of power? What’s the point?

Students in my class, “Communication and Human Conflict,” learn about basic conflict styles and profiles. One lesson I teach is that each of the five conflict styles is appropriate in particular conflict situations. Avoidance, for example, is the best tactical choice when facing road rage. Too much avoidance, however, leads to groupthink. My aim is to raise awareness of the choices to be made and improve the ability to make choices mindfully. As a result, we can produce better quality outcomes, individually and collectively.

Assessments of my personal conflict styles profile consistently result in low scores for compromise. Every point between forcing (“I win”) and accommodation (“You win”) can be viewed as a compromise, but all are points on a zero-sum continuum. While we usually envision a compromise as a 50-50 trade, that is a misconception. Depending on power, skills and access to substitutions, any particular set of sacrifices might result in further splitting of interests. However, the split, however, it will still result in a zero-sum gain, classically known as “win-lose.”

I tell my students that I dislike compromise because it will not hold; human behaviors are driven by our unmet needs. When some of our needs are sacrificed in order to get others, the needs that are met no longer have the same motivating power, and the unmet needs rise in importance. Compromises only increase the intensity for the next fight. The “lost” side of “win-lose” is what we truly remember (reframed as “lose-lose”).

Recent events in Madison are a clear demonstration of how compromise only postpones and intensifies conflicts. As resentments build, each side awaits their chance to “make the other party pay.” The need to exact payback by forcing back when your side is in power is founded in a paradigm that envisions only zero-sum solutions. I prefer collaboration and consensus, as they offer the possibility for creativity and real change.

We must, and we can, do better to educate today and tomorrow’s leaders. For my students, past and present, I continue my work. As Wisconsin political history gets written before our eyes, my course moves into a study of anger, violence and nonviolence. How timely.

Evelyn Ang, Lecturer
Communication
Meet Douglas Stafford: Milwaukee Institute for Drug Discovery

I am pleased to join UWM as Director of the Milwaukee Institute for Drug Discovery (MIDD), a campus unit in the final stages of formal approval. The MIDD resides within the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry and has a mission to facilitate drug research among UWM faculty and promote partnerships with external collaborators. The MIDD will seek public and private funding to expand the range of basic science discovery programs and advance select therapeutic candidates to later stages of development. It will also work to develop cross-disciplinary relationships and the training needed for drug research and development. While supporting UWM’s broad research and educational mission, the MIDD’s long term goal is to provide the resources needed to bring innovative new pharmaceuticals to market that will contribute to improved disease outcomes.

Throughout my career I have worked to link scientific innovation with organizational structure to enable biomedical product development. Prior to joining UWM, I worked for 25 years in healthcare product companies with responsibilities in research and development, manufacturing operations, regulatory and clinical affairs, organizational development, licensing and partnerships, and finance. My previous assignments included executive vice president for international corporate development for GenExel-Sein, Inc., a publicly traded, diversified medical products company headquartered in South Korea. My duties included the management of intellectual property strategy, business development, contracts and licensing, and US diagnostic product commercial operations.

Earlier, I was president of Ophidian Pharmaceuticals, Inc., a publicly traded bio-pharmaceutical company focused on development of antibody-based therapeutics and held senior management assignments in product development and operations at Baxter Healthcare Corporation.

Although most of my career has been in the private sector, I have continued to be engaged with students and teaching through several academic positions, including adjunct faculty duties at Edgewood College and UW-Madison.

I am eager to link my experience in forming intellectual property, developing product strategies, and the organization of entrepreneurial ventures with important scientific discoveries of UWM research faculty. It is expected that compelling opportunities for new business creation will evolve from this work and through collaboration with the UWM Research Foundation and community partners.

My academic training includes BS and MS degrees in biology from the University of Detroit, PhD in immunology from the Tufts University School of Medicine, and MS in management from Lesley College.

Douglas Stafford, Director
MIDD

In Memoriam - Leslie Whitaker

UWM has lost a valued member of our campus community. Leslie Whitaker, an accomplished author, journalist and writing instructor in the Department of English, passed away on March 4. Leslie’s husband is Michael Fendrich, professor, Helen Bader School of Social Welfare. The Leslie Whitaker Memorial Award has been established to honor Leslie’s creative spirit and commitment to writing. If you would like to contribute, please send your donation to the UWM Department of English business manager:

Leslie Whitaker Memorial Award
c/o Kathy J. Doering-Kilkenny
PO Box 413
Department of English
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Milwaukee, WI 53201

Please make checks payable to “UWM Foundation” and write “Leslie Whitaker Memorial Award” in the memo line.
Bringing Iron Age Ladies Back to Life

It is a little known fact that archaeologists spend three to five years on analysis, conservation and write-up for every year of fieldwork. This process is especially prolonged and complex when it involves overseas collaborators and when the finds cannot be taken out of the country of origin. I am now a full Professor of Anthropology, and over the past 25 years I have conducted research or fieldwork in Europe on sites ranging from the Neolithic to the early medieval period. Most of my efforts since 1999 have been focused on writing up and publishing the results of three field seasons of excavations that ended in 2002.

Public perception tends to view this follow-up activity as less exciting than the fieldwork itself. Nothing could be further from the truth. Various recent technological advances allow us to roll back the mists of time in new ways, especially in the areas of costume and bodily adornment. The human body in many pre-literate societies was a kind of walking billboard; what a person wore communicated multiple messages about his/her identity.

As an archaeologist I have always been especially interested in dress, personal adornment and body modification. Iron Age Celtic populations in central Europe, where I have been conducting research since the late 1980s, are described by Greek and Roman authors as being especially fond of flashy ornament, and brightly striped and checked fabrics. Unfortunately, until recently, archaeological confirmation of this body-based communication system was hard to come by because so much of it was made of perishable material like cloth or leather.

The “Landscape of Ancestors” project, which I have been directing since 1999, focuses on mound burials of the early Iron Age in an area of southwest Germany known as Swabia. Supported by the National Geographic Society, the UWM Graduate School, and the State Monuments Office of Baden-Württemberg, between 1999 and 2002 I and my colleague Matthew Murray (University of Mississippi) excavated two burial mounds containing 23 burials, including six women wearing elaborate bronze decorated leather belts and head ornament. We recognized immediately that the thousands of delicate bronze staples attached to the leather were too fragile to be excavated, so we removed those areas (no bones had been preserved) encased in plaster. CT-scan equipment was used to scan some of our plaster casts, resulting in some of the first images ever seen of the truly astonishingly complex decorations of these early Iron Age belt ensembles.

Women with these belts often also wore bronze ring ornaments and veils of loose fabric attached to their hair using bronze pins. Both wool and linen fabrics have been recovered adhering to metal finds. Red textiles were especially rare and valuable in the early Iron Age because the dye was made from the crushed bodies of insects imported from the Mediterranean. Since fieldwork ended in 2002, conservation of finds and costume reconstruction has been the main focus of the project. A major museum exhibit opening in Stuttgart in 2012 on the Celts in Baden-Württemberg will feature one of our Iron Age belted ladies in all her finery, a demonstration of how technology really can bring even the very ancient dead back to life.

Bettina Arnold, Professor
Anthropology

Fieldwork in the German area known as Swabia
Research about U.S. Presidents Proves Roller-Coaster Experience

Writing biographies of the presidents who presided over the Great Depression of the 1930s and the Great Recession that began in 2008—simultaneously—has been a roller-coaster experience. My biography of Barack Obama, written at a feverish pace during the campaign, chiefly for a popular audience, diverted me briefly from a longer, scholarly work, a massive account of the presidency of Herbert Hoover to be published in 2012. The Obama biography, which ends with his inauguration, is not a judgment on his presidency but rather an analysis of the tools he brings to the presidency and the exciting 2008 campaign, when the Democratic frontrunners pitted the first black man with a serious chance to win the nomination against the first white woman who was the front runner.

Hoover, the first Quaker president, and the first born west of the Mississippi, came to office famed as the “Great Engineer” and the “Great Humanitarian” with the unrealistic public expectation of perpetuating prosperity. Obama entered office on the promise of revolutionary change, and the vow to dig the nation out of the deepest recession since the Depression of Hoover’s time. My study of Hoover is revisionist in a positive sense. Hoover is often blamed for failing to end the Depression in a single term, which was probably impossible. Ultimately it did not end because of anything the government deliberately did.

Both men are highly intelligent. Hoover was a poor speaker while Obama is an incandescent one. Hoover was modest and inhibited, a virtually non-political president who never was blessed with a working majority of Congress. Obama initially had massive Congressional majorities while Hoover never had reliable working majorities in both houses. The Illinois Democrat is far more aggressive politically than Hoover, a shy Quaker. Hoover wrote his own speeches; Obama relies exclusively on a speechwriter. It is too early to draw a verdict on Obama. As for Hoover, one who wants to write a revisionist study of Hoover can only revise his reputation upward. The similarities and differences, both works falling chronologically within courses I teach, have proven revealing.

Glen Jeansonne, Professor
History

Great Learning Experience

Writing is hard. Really, really hard. Even if you have a fairly good command of English, conveying your message to paper is easier said than done—especially when you have some quite specific goals in mind. This I discovered when I took Sonia Khatchadourian’s business writing course in fall of 2010. I found myself yanked out of the realm of term papers and into the arena of business communication, and there’s a world of difference between the two. You see, once a term paper has been graded, it can be deleted, thrown away, and forgotten. In business, however, whatever you put down in print and send out into the public sphere is permanent. I don’t know if I’ve really gotten the hang of business writing yet, but I’m glad that I had the opportunity to study and practice that skill in Professor Khatchadourian’s class. I’m especially grateful for the opportunity to participate in the Business Writing Challenge. The course and the competition weren’t easy by any means, but they were great learning experiences. I have no doubt they’ll serve me well in my future, no matter which career path I may choose.

Hannah Mann, Junior
College of Letters & Science

Business Writing Challenge Awards

The 2010 Business Writing Challenge Award recently was presented to six students. The competition, open to all UWM Business Writing students, honors those who demonstrate exceptional writing skills, which are essential to success in the business world. The Challenge takes place each semester, with annual awards presented the following year. I, and my fellow Business Writing instructors, commend all of the students who have participated in the competition and successfully applied what they learned in our courses.

Sonia Khatchadourian, Lecturer
English

Hannah received 3rd place in the Business Writing Challenge Awards