

RE: Idea for television or radio show / written 2012

The Idea

As a creative person, I let go of my grandiosity long ago. The voice that told me that I was an undiscovered genius poet and it was only a matter of time until I was discovered, is barely a whisper in the very back of my mind now. But wait..... listen..... oh my goodness, what a coincidence: just as I am writing this, that voice took its final breath. Details about visitation for the family and memorial services tba.

I am writing to you not so much about me, as about an idea I have that I really do believe needs to be discovered by the big wide world. It is an idea for at least a nationally syndicated or satellite radio show, and ideally for a game changing television show.

I'm good with ideas, I'm good with creative development, but I am not good at taking an idea like this and manifesting it into the big wide world. And I have no interest in getting good at that. I want to find the right people to partner with to bring this idea to fruition. I am sending this to a very few people – those friends of mine whom I suspect might have something to contribute to making this happen.

This idea has been hatching for quite a while, so know that I have a shit-load more detailed thoughts that I will lay out here. I am going to do my best to give you the briefest nutshell version I can.

I will describe it as a television show, with the disclaimer that this could be, or at least begin as, on the radio.

My working title for the show is Same Page. At least one of the hosts is a psychotherapist. Possibly they both are, but I don't think that is necessary. I think having the right 2 people, with the right chemistry and ability to work collaboratively is more important than credentials. [for clarity of description, I will write this as if I am one of the hosts --- I am not married to that idea]

Two (2) politicians – one democrat, one republican --- are the guests --- really more like “the clients.”

Same Page is all about communication and problem solving PROCESS, not content. This is basically the work I do with couples in marital therapy --- beginning with the point of view that battles can be won, but problems are not solved from adversarial positions. The entire focus of the show is to help the 2 politicians communicate in ways that are respectful, compassionate, honest, and most likely to contribute to actually solving problems. Like in marital therapy, I am not going to become involved in the content --- this kind of therapy is not about the “what,” it is all about the “how.” I am going to help these 2 people discover their “points of agreement,” I am going to help them break free from their all/none characterizations of each other, I am going to help them learn how to translate addressing issues from adversarial positions into the mutual creation of problem definitions that both can agree with, and I am going to help them make a commitment to each other

to take what they are learning “in the session” out into the world with them --- so they can practice this new way of addressing one another, and so that they might become part of a positive ripple effect into the status quo dysfunctional communication of our political system. Even if just pebbles in a vast sea, there still will be a ripple effect.

Of course, I don't believe we can accomplish all of this with everyone, but we can do some of it. The guests who come on the show will have to agree to certain terms that we will establish – basically translating that they agree to let the therapist run the process and that they contract with us to have a positive outcome. (I can say more about this later --- it is something I use in therapy a lot.)

My biggest dream for this would be a show that could be interesting and entertaining enough to become popular enough that politicians would actually want to come on the show to demonstrate that they can communicate in healthy, productive ways. And do the degree some of them demonstrate a lack of willingness to do this, our show sort of “outs” them. The way to look good on our show is to be a good communicator --- respectful, good listening skills, empathic, flexible, etc.

Okay, like I said, if/when we get into creative development of this, I have more thoughts and ideas about how to do this therapeutically than you will ever want to hear. But for now, that's the gist of it.

Finally: In the world of political commentary, I have had two voices. One is that of the outraged satirist, frantically pointing out the ridiculous on the political scene. This is, basically, a preaching to the choir voice --- only pissing off the other side, inspiring plenty of creative hate mail.

The other voice, however, is my therapist voice --- that is the one who wrote the 2 articles that follow --- and it is from this voice, that the idea of Same Page emerges. I am very clear that any of us who are affiliated with this project will need to be committed to speaking with and working from that therapeutic voice of reason. Otherwise, we are just part of the problem.

Thanks for listening. Let me know what you think.

Thom

Respect: The Uncharted Political Territory

Thom Rutledge

All or none thinking will eventually prove far more destructive to our species and the planet we inhabit than other dangers we so faithfully track on the front pages of our newspapers.

The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, threats of terrorist attack, depletion of the ozone layer, the horrific oil fiasco in the Gulf, are nothing compared to our lazy, simple-minded tendency to view the world in black and white terms. Are you a good guy or a bad guy? In other words, do you think like me or are you different from me? Different? Okay, that makes you a bad guy.

Democrats, liberals, leftists, peaceniks, 60's leftovers, whatever you want to call them can be as much a part of the problem as Rush Limbaugh's fans, or the most extreme of the Tea Partiers. No one as a corner on the market when it comes to political fundamentalism. We are living in a time of political civil war in our country, and as long as we continue to address this problem with even more, and increasingly venomous partisanship, we will never find solutions to our problems. In fact, as the system exists today, we are unlikely to even find a solution to the problem of not being to find solutions. If that last sentence confused you, then you see my point.

Of course, politics never have been the best place to learn about healthy communication and effective problem solving. We are radically imperfect human beings and it is not reasonable to assume that we would develop a system that would not reflect our imperfections. I tell this to my therapy clients all the time: the road to sanity begins with the acceptance that imperfection as our nature. And the best demonstration of that acceptance is a genuine admission that we are not always right. This seems simple enough, and even the most rigid politician will give this admission lip service. But, in actual practice, how often do we witness a politician admitting to being wrong? The bottom line on this is that most politicians will admit to being wrong when, and only when, all other options have been exhausted. Meaning: awareness of imperfection and willingness to admit mistakes is about political competition and posturing, not about collaboration and problem solving.

The problem is one I face everyday in my psychotherapy practice: dysfunctional communication resulting from the inability or unwillingness to make room for more than one legitimate point of view and an overwhelming tendency to avoid communicating in the more complex gray areas. I tell couples that come to me for counseling that the first step to solving communication problems is to stop wasting time debating whose perception is "right." I tell them, "Your desire to solve problems together must be greater than your individual desire to be right." To reinforce the point, a sign on the wall in my therapy room reads, "You can win battles, but never solve problems, for an adversarial position."

Dysfunctional communication --- that I encounter with my clients and that goes on in the chambers of our government --- is largely a function of a lack of respect between people. Disrespect may be a matter of conscious judgments held against others, but is usually more

insidious than that. Most of us confuse "respect" with "agreement," and that is a mistake that can bring any chance of effective communication to a screeching halt.

Genuine respect is about understanding and accepting that we are all separate individuals with our own unique perspectives. Respect is about accepting that we may be able to influence each other's perspective, but we cannot control what anyone else feels or thinks. Respect is about getting out of all-or-none, black-and-white, me-good-and-you-bad thinking, and becoming open-minded enough to recognize the legitimacy of other perspectives --- whether or not we agree with them. Ultimately respect is about one simple concept: recognizing that we are not always right and that xxxxxx

We cannot afford to wait for the change to begin with our elected representatives. After all, those we have elected are representing us quite well in their black and white, all or none rhetoric. Only when we dare to change will we see a similar change on the political scene. When we value open-mindedness and respectful communication more than we value two-dimensional simple mindedness that makes us feel good in the short run, then we will see the politicians change.

When we each do our part, respecting that change always begins with ourselves, we might just live to see a day when politicians are different. I want to hear politicians being human (the good side of human), acknowledging that they don't have all the answers and that the decisions they make today have the potential to be mistakes. I want to hear politicians tell us that they are always open to learn, and that they know that there is no end --- save death --- to the process of learning. I want to hear politicians being more interested in defining and solving problems than in being sure their team wins the next election. Call me crazy, but I want to hear a republican say to a democrat and a democrat say to a republican, "That's a good point; I had not thought of it that way."

No matter what problems and dangers we face, as individuals, as a nation or as a world, there will be no genuine resolution unless we decide together that our top priority must be learning to respect each other. Without that one simple (but not easy) decision, we can all look forward to game after game of "King of the Mountain" in our futile attempts to be God's favorite team.

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Thom Rutledge is the author of *Embracing Fear: How to Turn What Scares Us into Our Greatest Gift* (HarperSanFrancisco). He has been featured on NBC's Today Show, CNN's Anderson Cooper 360, Fox News, and Australia's Channel 10. For more information about Thom's books, e-books, articles, seminars and availability as a keynote speaker, visit www.ThomRutledge.com.

FIVE QUESTIONS

WE ALL NEED TO ANSWER

Thom Rutledge

I am a big fan of questions. Asking good questions --- questions asked with genuine curiosity, rather than just rhetorically --- is the way we solve problems. With the right questions and a willingness to follow where they lead, we are equipped to keep learning and growing.

As I look over the political landscape this morning (or any morning), listening to the television news and political ads and reading newspapers and blogs, I have come up with five (5) questions I believe can help point us toward some much needed problem solving.

I realize that we live in politically suspicious times. It is difficult to trust that someone, be they politician or commentator, does not have an ulterior partisan agenda to... well, to just about anything. In spite of our understandably suspicious tendencies, I ask that you trust me when I tell you that I believe that in order to solve the problems we face today, everyone is going to have to change. The days of “my side is right and your side is wrong,” or more accurately, “my side is good and your side is evil,” must come to an end. More to the point, we must do whatever it takes to grow beyond this over-simplified approach to handling highly complex problems.

My five (5) questions are intended to get us thinking in that direction. Here they are:

- 1.) If you were shown factually that your representative/candidate is inaccurate in what he/she is saying, would you consider changing your position on that particular issue?
- 2.) If you answered yes to the first question, here is the next one. Are you willing to look for information beyond the political rhetoric and simplified claims being made by your representative to gather more factual information to help you form your own opinion (as opposed to automatically adopting your rep’s opinion)?
- 3.) Would you be in favor of a political/governing system in which the people’s participation was more about having informed opinions based on factual information, rather than just automatically following (believing) a particular person and/or political party?
- 4.) If your answer to question 3 is yes, are you willing to do what it takes to become more informed, so that you can insist that your representatives in government explain their positions more thoroughly and debate differences with open mindedness and respect?
- 5.) If your answer to any of these questions is no, are you aware that if we do not change – individually and collectively – we cannot reasonably expect the system to change? We, the people, are what make up that system.

Admittedly, these questions are, to some degree, rhetorical themselves. They suggest that a system of government in which we, the people, are significantly more informed and more involved, is better than what we have now. But I hope that we all (I sincerely include myself in this challenge) consider the questions carefully and answer with candor. To do so, I believe, will put us face to face with our own reluctance to do our part in solving the biggest political problem of all: an almost total lack of respect for the very people with whom we must collaborate if we want to preserve our nation.

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