

Once again...Good Folk Ought Not Be Strangers

CLT

I had just finished facilitating an Off-Site workshop in Warrenton, Virginia at the Airlie Conference Center, a 19th century estate which, in 1960, was converted into a state of the art training and learning center. The weather was beautiful and the leaves had just begun to turn and I had been told my cab was on the way. I was lucky. When I walked out from the center, my Cab and driver were waiting. With my luggage securely in the trunk, I tucked myself in the back of the Cab and with a nod from my driver we were off. We had about a forty minute drive to the Dulles Airport. As I settled in, I just had to talk. Driving through such a beautiful estate demanded that a conversation be forthcoming. But what is Cab protocol? Should I just sit and talk inside my own head or should I engage the driver in conversation? I had just finished facilitating a workshop where one of our lessons centered on embracing 'courage' to build relationships with others who may look different than you. It was practice time!

Being a southerner, in most situations, we have little problems holding long and extenuating conversations. But he was foreign. Other than that, I saw myself. We were both guys. So I braved up and asked the country of his origin. He was from Afghanistan. And he was completely shocked that I was able to quote from a poet of 13th century that they admire, Rumi. One of Rumi's lines and my favorite is... "I am in search of that which causes the Rose to blush." And from that point, the back of his driver's seat disappeared and our humanity took over. We laughed and talked as if we were old friends. He took me inside his childhood home and introduced me to his grandfather and proudly shared his physical strength and his strong sense of character. We both cracked up when he learned that almost like him, my wife had been somewhat chosen for me by my mom and my wife's mother. The only difference, he had four choices from which to choose one and they only gave me one choice-a great one I might add! We talked about our kids and we carefully talked about a 'future' we wished for all people. And then in the midst of our laughter, he said, "No one usually talks to me. The fare gets in and I just drive."

We exchanged email addresses and phone numbers and promised to stay in touch. Oh, yes, we are both beyond the age of 35, but we agreed that '35' was our best number and decided to hang our hats right there. So I asked, how would he recognize my email or call? He said, "Just say I'm still 35 and I'll know it's you my friend."

"Good Folk Ought Not Be Strangers."

This conversation 'title' is not original with me. It was coined over a century ago by an African-American Oklahoma Territory Judge. Recognizing that survival depended upon them being able to live their lives beyond race, gender and social positions, Judge Buck Franklin in one of his captivating talks, looked around him and simply said, "Good Folks ought not be strangers." His sage advice is just as valuable and meaningful today as it was over one-hundred years ago, when men rode horses and ladies carried guns.

We must not let the back seat of a Cab keep us from holding a front seat conversation, nor should we let cultural, social status, racial differences and religious beliefs keep us from maximizing our workplace days and our learning environments. Yes, there are differences, but they all show up in our common humanity. **Brave up...and step outside of your comfort zones. I purpose to do this as often as I can.** You will be surprise to discover part of yourself in others. That day in the back seat of a yellow taxi-cab, our shared conversation saw the plateaus of Afghanistan meld into the rich alluvial soil of the Mississippi Delta. We couldn't stop laughing. We were human together. Discovering our common humanity still remains a great frontier.