

Change

I LEARNED so much in self-organizing for the Obama campaign.

I learned a hefty dose of imagination. I did not have a boss that will tell me what to do or not. I knew if I organized an event that was meaningful to the voters, I would get them to come, not because of me, but because of Obama, the candidate. So, I learned to imagine what events would draw them: a walk in the park, A World Cafe Conversations at a bakery, a meeting on the platform on mentoring, a study group on *Audacity of Hope*. Some that I organized involved me serving food, but in others, it didn't. Still, the level of enthusiasm was unlike I have encountered before: folks had a natural high, as if they had just finished doing yoga or aerobics or pilates, high in serotonin and quite accommodating of everyone. Except in one meeting, where I encountered a person who was not emotionally present; most were serious, thoughtful and inspiring in their own right.

And in applying my imagination, I got psychic dividends of meeting great folks and consequently, at a nearby bakery, or a grocery store, where I ran into them, it made us all feel safe and secure in our communities. I suppose this is what Senator Obama spoke of: not just belief in him, but belief in the change we can muster and the change we can make happen.

I learned that authenticity carries through all events. For most events, being myself got me through as much as for others. Even as nervous as I was while anticipating folks to arrive, I told myself to trust the process and to trust the folks coming to the event. And they did come. And they came prepared, they came ready to participate, ready to engage, ready to share their perspectives. And it did not matter what age group

they were. If the event host and process were accommodating and inclusive of their input, they left their footprints and their marks. The youngest participant I had was a ten-year-old girl, and she drew animated figures cartoons to give life to our ideas. And even the oldest participant shared her viewpoints.

At some of the meetings, it was usually the young teacher, or the retired artist/writer who imagined clearly the blueprint of change and what it would take for our neighborhood to turn around. It was as if they had their own crystal globe. And invariably, the folks who were positive and had no self-doubt contributed a lot to others, and the folks who had anger issues contributed no more than their anger and negativity. That too became a lesson for me, as I knew I had to be clear within, in my sense of purpose and intentions, for me to navigate each meeting and achieve what I wanted to achieve: a collection of perspectives, a synergy, a consensus, a much better understanding,

an energized group of participants more fired up than when they arrived. And to report about each event to the Obama headquarters after each event also required a special diligence for me.

I learned to be gracious and patient when someone's ego is in full bloom. This is challenging for me particularly in the midst of facilitating a group process, as I usually do it with strangers and new friends, but at that time, I had no inkling as to who was a skilled facilitator. Hence, it is a leap of faith and a healthy dose of trust, and I remember how Senator Obama extends a full dose of trust in his staff, and because of that, I am also encouraged to follow his example, by examining, by challenging and by asking one question: "How would Senator Obama handle this?" On a critical juncture of a hosted meeting on mentoring, an older gentleman interrupted me while I was facilitating and whispered to me in a harsh tone, "You are doing this wrong." Mind you, he is not the organizer, he did not advertise the event, he did not create the event, but he had the audacity to tell me I was wrong. But, I dare not disrespect him, so I

said, "No worries, it will work out. And it did, as I simply allowed the group process to move forward."

I learned that I did not have the final word on any meeting. By allowing the group a choice on how to proceed, by practicing democracy in action, I gained credibility amongst strangers. For example, one Saturday, it had started to drizzle. So I was poised to cancel the meeting or postpone it for the next Saturday. But I was wrong. I miscalculated the enthusiasm of folks who came this one gray, drizzling morning. They admonished me that the event is so important for me to cancel, and they requested that we proceed. So I ran to my car, unloaded my dry erase markers, but in hurrying, I left my portable Post-It flip chart. Luckily, my husband was simply a cell phone away, and he hurriedly dropped off the flip chart, and we proceeded even as the chairs were partially wet. Folks did not mind the traffic on the sidewalk, folks did not mind the slight drizzle, and this turned out to be the best meeting I had organized called "World Cafe Conversations." Why? Because of the synergy created, in the absence

of debate or opposition, folks saw more patterns, folks recognized the insights shared, folks heard the wisdom of what was shared. One participant came from San Diego, and she shared, "My soul was looking for this type of positive meeting," and she drove 200 miles to get to my hosted meeting, and then said "and my soul is now satisfied!"

That says it all, the campaign provided us a medium, a process, a forum, a space for us to be who we are, to develop the potentials in others, and together, we all grew to appreciate our positive

spaces of engagement on behalf of democracy.

Senator Barack Obama, we are blessed by your presidential campaign. We rediscovered our strengths as civic participants in public square of discourse. Thank you for this website for without it, I could not have learned these organizing lessons with folks I spent time with for a year-and-a-half! Take care, and we are praying non-stop for clean elections, a landslide victory and a renaissance administration that will truly serve the majority of Americans, in our beloved country! ♪



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