

Prescription for burnouts

Civic Reflection



The Write Connection

by: YOLY T. TUBALINAL

Last week's meeting of NaFFAA, IL officers at Jelly's home turned up some old issues common to many organizations, the lackluster participation of many club officers and committee chair people. Seeing only a handful of us who had come, a case that was true with the previous meetings she had also called, she couldn't help letting out her frustration and pent up emotion, to the point of once again threatening giving up and leaving... unless something is done.

She asked why we tolerated people who would accept the position in the club but conveniently forget about the responsibilities attached to it. She wanted commitment and demanded that the chair and the organization exercise authority in dealing with these delinquent members.

Our meeting that had supposedly already ended was extended right by her doorsteps for approximately another hour. Then, the voice of wisdom that he often is, Jerry C. suggested I or someone host what he and Arnold had done with AFIRE, a "Civic Reflection." He explained civic reflection as the practice of reading and discussing short pieces of literature as a means of reflecting on the central questions of civic life. This simple practice, he said, can help us talk more comfortably about values, think more deeply about choices, and respond more imaginatively to the needs of our community. It will define "what obligations we have to others... why we join one group and not another...to whom we should give... and what we expect of those we serve."

It is a fact that "civic reflection is

now being used by high school service-learning initiatives, AmeriCorps programs, Rotary clubs, foundations, social service agencies, no-profit boards, and other civic organizations."

I accepted the challenge of hosting the small group in our condo so Bart, who wouldn't have the time to leave home at this time of the year, could participate. Given a shorter than short notice on Tuesday morning, a lucky group of seven- Flor, Jerry, Jelly, Nerissa Rocco, Bart and I gathered to reflect on the very short essay, "Fellowship" by Franz Kafka. Jerry, who completed a 3-day training seminar for this was our facilitator who ably steered the group discussion to bring up a lot of interesting "reflections."

Kafka's article talked about 5 people deciding to live together as friends because of their experiences. A sixth person started coming and insisting on getting into the group. The 5 didn't like the 6th person; he annoyed them. But no matter how much they pushed him away, he still kept coming back.

As an exercise prior to our reflecting on the article, Jerry asked us to pick a partner other than our spouse and relate to each other one incident of exclusion in our lives. Then, we delved on the reading, each taking his or her turn to share his or her thoughts and impressions. The mention of cliques, exclusions and inclusions led to the discussion of the practice of discrimination as a reality in our society and not surprisingly, in every social institution - be it family, church, school, workplace, etc. Each one had a chance to examine our own actions and choices and interpret them as either the attitude of the 5 or of the 6th.

After approximately 2 hours of reflections, the five left feeling good about the conversation we just had. Bart seemed to have enjoyed it too and didn't seem to mind having been "taken away" from his urgent tax

work. I relished the conversation myself and I know I wouldn't mind having one every now and then.

The following day, Jelly emailed us her feedbacks. She said,

I understood better the significance of the 3 points of the triangle (participants, readings, & reflections) after our discussion. It became clear that without the other two, any one of the 3 points will not mean much.

To be honest, I read the topic and the article several times before our meeting, but did not see the connection, until each of us has shared our own understanding and interpretation.

I left last night with a renewed and improved perspective. I can feel that the civic reflections are now turning into personal reflections that I am sure will help in all facets of my daily life.

Thanks, Jerry for sharing this with us, and to all participants for providing your personal insights.

Jerry consolidated our individual reflections in a recap he emailed me after Jelly's. He wrote,

I am glad everyone had a productive and wonderful time last night.

Part of AFIRE's commitment to Civic Reflections Project is to help it grow. I believe the process will allow us to look at our own humanity. The collective reflection is so powerful because we validate the pain, anger, joy, happiness, sadness, success, failure, love, commitment, community, etc. expressed in the conversation in a very personal way but within the confines of common humanity. Civic reflections allow us to understand the interplay of human strengths and weaknesses in whatever pursuit we place in front of us, as individuals, as a member of a family, an organization, a community, a nation, or an ideal.

Yoly's observation of a "surprise" outcome was very insightful. I continue to learn from the process because new insights come out every

time I try to draw out lessons and outcomes from the reflections.

Jelly's prescription of education as a way to resolve the issue between the "five" and the "sixth" gave us a chance to offer solution drawn out of understanding human nature.

Rocco's passionate statement to treat everyone equally regardless of immigration status allowed us to hear a different voice.

Flor's recall of her unforgettable experience about the lack of customer's recognition by event's frontliners and reflecting on it as a "customer service" lesson is a reaffirmation of our desire to serve well our "customers"/kababayans.

Bart's evaluation of CR as a process of getting us civically engaged confirmed the expected outcome of the conversation. He not only painted the "exclusion/inclusion" experience as part of human reality but he also acknowledged the shift of his own action from being pissed off to sober or mature appreciation of the occurrence of "exclusion/inclusion."

Nerissa's recall of being treated as an outcast (6) without knowing the whys and wherefores of it suggested the different meanings that can be ascribed to the word "fellowship". She shared her confusion about the loose meaning of "fellowship" anchored in mechanical gathering and partaking of so much food.

I am sure you have your own take away. My summation is definitely not enough to express the feelings and reflections you experienced from the process.

Overall, the resolution to put civic reflections as a tool to raise the level of commitment of NaFFAA members to its mission is a step in making the process of CR grow in the community.

Indeed it is. And if you think this is something you can use in your organization or small group, please email us at filammegascene@aol.com.