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**PROVOKE**



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**Provocation:** *Learn & Explore*

**Disrupt:** *The normal way of thinking*

**Disagreement:** *Provokes ideas*

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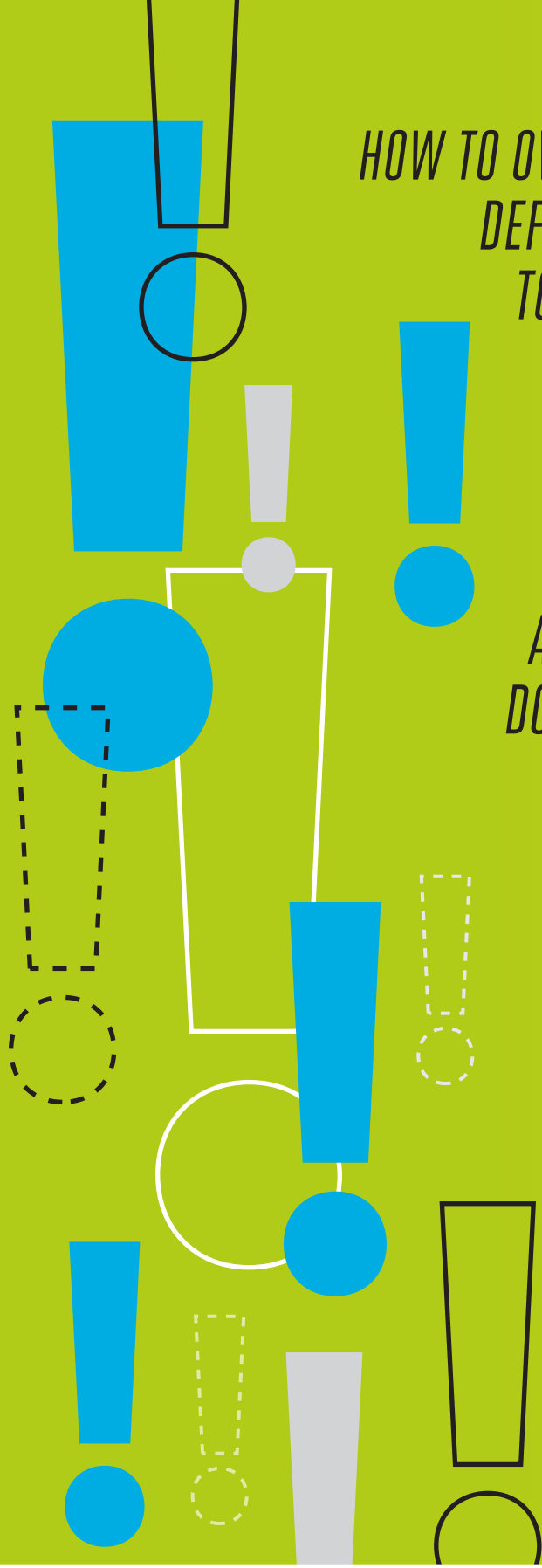
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## NQ17 Provoke: How to Poke the Bear

*By Jarrod Shappell*

You've heard the saying "Don't poke the bear." Perhaps today we should say "Don't tweet the bear." Regardless of what medium is used, it is safe to say that we live in an age of unending bear-poking, and the bears are increasingly sensitive.

When we are the bear, the poke (any external event outside our influence or control) inherently makes us reactive. Organizations are provoked by their competitors' new product and move to emulate. Finance is provoked by Marketing's spend and makes irrational budget cuts. Senior leaders are provoked by the boardroom behavior of c-suite peers and the staplers start flying!

In an attempt to avoid this kind of provocation, we hide. Many of us avoid situations where we will experience difference. We dodge difficult colleagues. We find information that reinforces our own world view. But as Jon Haidt says in his most recent best seller *The Coddling of the American Mind*, "[a] culture that allows the concept of 'safety' to creep so far that it equates emotional discomfort with physical danger is a culture that encourages people to systematically protect one another from the very experiences embedded in daily life that they need in order to become strong and healthy."


Hiding from the discomfort of being provoked is more than fruitless. Being provoked is inevitable, and as Haidt points out, not learning how to respond is self-destructive. How we respond to our provocations is the driving question.

Every provocation is accompanied by choices. When it's personal, you can choose what to focus on and let go of worrying about things over which you have no influence... or you can get on social media and rant as a way to vent and expand the echo chamber of "your side." When your organization is provoked by a customer's new product roll out, you can stay the course and believe in your own customer data and product vision... or you can set widespread mayhem and panic in motion across your organization. You could respond to your team member's curt answers with the cold-shoulder and try to change their behavior with feedback about how they're being rude... or you can be an encouraging colleague and inquire about their brevity. Being provoked says nothing about how you must respond. What if we could see provocation not as something negative to avoid, but as something calling us to new and different behavior?

On the other side of the analogy, there is the "bear-poker." In a world of echo chambers, false news, social media intended to manipulatively incite rage to drive page views, and the convergence of social and economic challenges we've never seen, we might conclude that provoking is just the latest form of emotional intelligence. It's inevitable, and done well, has the potential for great good. But most of the examples we see of being provocative are negative and painful. So, since it really is "the new normal," how do we learn to do it well? How do we poke without doing damage?

When we are the bear,  
the poke (any external event  
outside our influence or control)  
inherently makes us reactive.

As provocateurs, the choice happens in advance of provoking (or at least it should). A quick browse through a person's social media platform makes you wonder how much real thought went into some of those "provocations." What outcome did they want? What are they really trying to accomplish? Is being right and offensive more important than starting conversation and inviting curiosity? (And do we understand the difference?)

If you desire to have positive influence in the world, you are, by definition, a provocateur. If you desire to learn, grow, and explore the world around you, by definition, you are now a target of provocation. We hope that this NQ17 provokes you. We hope it brings out something good in you that allows you to provoke, and be provoked, in the service of your own greatness and that of some great bears. 





## HOW TO OVERCOME ORGANIZATIONAL DEFENSIVENESS: THREE WAYS TO PROVOKE NEW THINKING

*By Whitney Harper*

*"We tried that back in the early 00's."*

*"That wouldn't work here,  
we're different."*

*"We can't. This is how we've  
always done it."*

These are phrases I've heard in organizations all over the world. And while these statements can be made at any point in time, they ironically fly out of mouths most often when an organization is trying to pivot and be more innovative. These statements are evidence of organizational defensiveness. Success can produce an environment in which there is a pervasive defensiveness around how things are accomplished, how business is done, and how communication occurs. The appearance of any new idea or way of behaving activates these defenses, often without the people in an organization realizing it.

So, what can you do if your organization is unintentionally defending itself and stifling its ability to innovate or change?

I believe openness to new ideas starts with individuals. Have you met someone who is “stuck in their ways”? Sometimes there is an obvious tip off – a hairstyle that was nouveau decades ago. Less obvious is a leader who doesn’t understand how people can work from home or a manager who pulls outdated PowerPoint slides. It’s important to figure out your own habits – the ones that keep you entrenched and the ones that will help you stay sharp and open to new ways of thinking. Below are a few new habits you can try if you want to open yourself up to new ideas.

With these tips, you and your organization will avoid organizational defensiveness and ensure success long into the future.

## 1. DIVERGE

- Ask new questions to develop your ability to be curious and think about things in a creative way. Or hang out with a 4 year old; they are experts on this skill.
- The ability to think outside of your typical responses and get creative is a muscle that needs to be trained and developed over time. I love this cartoon that provides a visual for the façade around creative success.
- Write a list of 100.

## 2. EXPERIMENT

- I teach a class on creativity and one student shared his process for sparking new ideas. “I sit down at my desk with a pad, pencil, and a few toys like legos or building magnets. When an idea sparks I move from the toys to the pad and pencil. I need to play with an object I can manipulate into shapes and then draw out my thoughts.”
- Study those you admire and see which of their habits could apply to you. I started listening to Brown Noise after reading this article on how Amy Webb works.

## 3. STEAL (LIKE AN ARTIST)

- In Austin Kleon’s book, he taught the world how to Steal Like An Artist. One of the habits I picked up from this book is a personal swipe file. Capture and save in a file the images, quotes, concepts and ideas that inspire you. If you don’t hold all these brilliant ideas, they won’t be readily available when you need to tap into the wisdom of others when you are stuck. I keep mine on OneNote so I always have access to it and can update it on my laptop or phone. A standard notebook also works just fine.
- I am also reminded of my conversation with Scott Anthony from Navalent’s Virtual Summit and the behavior he shared to keep himself open to new ideas. Steal your kid’s phone. See what apps they are using and how they are communicating with their peers. Teenagers are consistently on the cutting edge of technology and open and curious to new ways of thinking.

Similar to your own personal creative practice, organizations need to intentionally build the skills to think divergently within their organization. Here are a few ideas for helping your organization practice new tricks:

## 1. DIVERGE


- Create a space for idea generation. One of my students has a large whiteboard in a high traffic area, by the cafeteria, for people to post ideas on sticky notes. People are encouraged to write their names so they can be contacted for follow up. “We have already started taking action on some ideas that folks shared. The look of surprise on some of the faces of the contributors is awesome. They commonly respond, ‘I never ever thought anyone would think that was a good idea.’ When we announce publicly that we’re taking action on an idea that “Ms. Jones” contributed we then get so many other ideas.”
- Encourage divergent thinking when brainstorming – IDEO lays out the rules of brainstorming beautifully
  - Defer judgement
  - Encourage wild ideas
  - Build on the ideas of others
  - Stay focused on the topic
  - One conversation at a time
  - Be visual
  - Go for quantity
- Pass out blank notecards during a team meeting for the purpose of writing down various ideas that pop up. At the end collect them all and have a scribe roll them into a document of general ideas that can be tackled at the next meeting.

## 2. EXPERIMENT

- Minnow Tank is a concept where employees pitch ideas to the senior leadership for innovations or improvements that will help the business. Playing off of the show Shark Tank or Dragons’ Den, organizations can create their own process for generating new ideas while also rewarding employees for practicing creativity.
- Networked working sessions. If one part of the business is struggling to come up with a solution to a challenge invite another department for a chat and chew. Have some drinks and an informal time for the team to get to know each other and then have a working session to encourage the departments to collaborate on some creative solutions

## 3. STEAL (LIKE AN ARTIST)

- IDEO is the company that comes up most frequently in the class I teach on creativity and innovation. Private companies, start-ups, and government entities all find inspiration from this company that has been extremely open about sharing their approaches to fostering a creative organization.
- Keep tabs on companies that are consistently awarded Most Innovative Companies to see what they are doing that may be applicable in your organization.

With these tips, you and your organization will avoid organizational defensiveness and ensure success long into the future. What additional tips can you share for how to foster new ideas for yourself or your organization? 

# Trigger Warning: How you can trigger yourself to do good

*By Josh Epperson*



Your phone vibrates, you check for new emails. A GIF pops up on slack, you laugh. Your map app chimes, you turn. A birthday text from a college roommate appears, you reminisce. Your calendar alert dings, you freak – you’re 20 minutes late for an in-person lunch with investors. If you own a cell phone, you experience this algorithmic triggering an average of 3 hours and 35 minutes daily or roughly 47-86 times a day. And because of the way dopamine works on the brain, the more notifications you receive in a shorter timeframe, the more compelled you are to respond (Instagram’s algorithms are designed to do this).

These triggered responses go beyond cell phones. All of our senses produce stimuli powerful enough to trigger behavior. In cases of PTSD or leadership, triggers and conditioned responses are usually detrimental to sociability and success. Does this sound familiar? “I hate throwing my teammates under the bus (conditioned response) but they made me look bad (trigger) and no one gets rewarded for collaboration (conditioned stimulus)!”

But what if triggers could be an offensive strategy? What if they triggered you and your organization’s growth? A growing body of research suggests working on creating good triggers for positive outcomes. Stanford’s Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education mission states, “Our capacity to feel compassion has ensured the survival and thriving of our species over millennia.” In other words, it’s the upside of our behavior, not the downside that has ensured forward progress. The Center’s research complements the business case for triggering altruistic behavior as a means of generating employee engagement, and the intersection of altruism/employee engagement/increased performance. The bottom line: Triggering altruistic leadership does more than create warm fuzzies.

The brain's reward system is responsible for creating a, "Yes, do that again!" experience. Neuroimaging and social neuroscience research shows how altruism is motivated by a specific pattern of activity in the Mentalizing, Reward, and Emotional Salience regions of the brain. In particular, the striatum and VTA (clusters of neurons in these regions) motivate actions, reinforce decisions, and aid in learning. This image shows the connection between these reward pathways and clusters. Furthermore, research on compassion-related display behavior shows how certain experiences can trigger compassionate responses. So, we're learning that prosocial behavior...

- Keeps individuals and groups (even enterprises) growing
- Impacts business performance and profitability
- Happens in identifiable and specific regions of the brain
- Can be triggered through certain experiences.

As a leader, you can prime your reward pathways and ultimately build a library of conditioned prosocial responses. The release of dopamine will help you do it.

## Triggering altruistic leadership does more than create warm fuzzies.

Dopamine is the chemical messenger (neurotransmitter) active in triggering your, "Yes, do that again!" pathway. If you want to trigger your leadership (and dopamine) for good, try the following.

**Increase Your Results Cycle-Time.** I have a friend who had this encouraging little quip in his signature block: "Finishing is fulfilling." I worked with another leader, a CTO responsible for multimillion-dollar IT initiatives, who required quick cycle times for his leaders' results as opposed to the multi-year initiatives common with many IT functions. He required tangible, bite sized results delivered in less than 6 months. These task-related cues are shown to condition responses in the stimulus-response cycle. BestSelf Co. has great products to help you capture, track, and make changes to ensure you speed your results cycle time. Check out their Win the Day and SELF journal.

**Change How and What You Eat.** Eating bad foods (yes, you know the ones) reinforces eating more bad foods and leads to selfish, unhealthy rewards. Nutrition plays a vital role in the brain's impact on our choices and behaviors. Familiarize yourself with foods that are loaded with natural probiotics like yogurt and sauerkraut and eat them. Increase your intake of iron, vitamin B6, and folic acid. Similarly, eat smaller meals more frequently to keep positive dopamine levels higher. If you need more, here are 33 Ways to boost Dopamine and increase your productivity, half of which are nutrition related.

**Join a Bigger Story.** It is easy to become overly self-focused. Much research has shown the down side of social media and its ability to increase self-focus that results in depression and anxiety. Gratitude and practicing thankfulness have a powerful impact on your brain, resulting behaviors, and organizational outcomes. Regardless of religious preference, spirituality often encourages thoughts and attention toward concepts and stories that are bigger than one's self. Spiritual retreats, Stanford's Monk study, and the University of Utah's religious experience study all indicate the upside of spiritual experiences and the brain's reward system.

**Be Social.** Social media isn't all bad, but the reward cycle isn't directly in your control which means a lack of likes and negative comments can trigger you to lead in less than effective ways. You know the relationships that bring joy and life; ensure you spend time there. Did you ever hear the following cliché? "Show me your friends and I'll show you your future." The people we spend discretionary time with have an impact on the behaviors we exhibit. This is true for introverts as well. Isolation and avoidance behaviors do not create more dopamine.

**Doodle.** Listen to Music. Have you ever noticed a colleague doodling on their notepad during a meeting? Have you ever done it? It may be more than them simply checking out. Research indicates that freeform drawing actually opens up your reward pathway and triggers the same part of the brain active in your most altruistic moments. Music you like can have a similar effect on your ability to lead in altruistic ways and reward you for doing it. It may seem like your reward pathways and conditioned responses control you, but research shows that we are in control of them. It's your choice. Choosing to trigger your reward pathways and build new conditioned responses, will not only help your brain rewire itself, it will also ensure those new altruistic pathways are strengthened. And that is an algorithm we all can benefit from. 🎨



Gratitude and practicing thankfulness have a powerful impact on your brain, resulting behaviors, and organizational outcomes.



## Accidental provocateur: Do you know what you do that provokes others?

*By Mindy Millward*

Great leaders (and even the not-so-great) pride themselves on being able to read the crowd; to know and manage the effect they have on others; to be able to take in critical cues about how others are reacting to them and modulate that effect. But the reality is, many of us just aren't that self-aware. Since many reactions are hidden or covered, we often miss the mark on knowing when we are provoking unintentional and undesired reactions in others. Even the best of us can be accidentally obnoxious or mistakenly mean.

Leaders who want to learn more about the impact of their behaviors rely on feedback from their team members. But because of the power dynamics in relationships that are amplified in organizations, the information they receive is not necessarily accurate. Power dynamics are not just about hierarchy. Power comes from multiple things in organizations: position, expertise, coercion, rewards, and personal relationships to name a few. And even these power sources are impacted by gender, age, race, and other factors we may not even be cognizant of on a daily basis. This power has a tremendous effect on a leader's ability to hear the truth. Executives become stilted and filter data even when they ask for direct and specific feedback. More often people don't hear the truth but use selective listening for what they want to hear or send softened and weakened messages that allow them to continue with their present actions. The sadder thing is they actually begin to believe that people have blessed their behavior. The question for leaders is, "How do you better tune-in to the ways that your behavior provokes others and what can you do about it?"

Much of the time any behavior that seems mean or inappropriate is because we ourselves have been threatened, either consciously or subconsciously.

Multiple instruments, such as the Hay Group's ESCI, provide data on your emotional and social intelligence, as well as your capacity to recognize your own and others' feelings, motivate yourself, and manage emotions effectively. Availing yourself of this assessment or one like it can provide you with a great baseline of your impact (intended and otherwise) on others. But in the meantime, or even in addition to the data, what can you do to make sure you provoke at the right time in a way that adds value? Here are a few specific recommendations:


**Carve out observational time:** Find time to watch yourself in relationships. Mentally prepare to think more about what is going on around you than what your next statement will be. Be curious about the context around you.

**Journal those interactions:** Over a period of one month write down your own observations of yourself. After any significant interaction capture how people reacted to you: their specific words, nonverbal cues, and responses. Use the month's worth of data to explore patterns and discover what those patterns are telling you about you.

**Get real visuals:** With continued advancements in technology, the ability to "catch yourself on tape" is commonplace. Video yourself interacting with others in real-life team settings or in role-play interactions specifically designed to give you feedback. The playback won't be Oscar-worthy but you will gain new insights. Put yourself into new feedback environments: It is difficult to remove yourself from existing power dynamics. Find a new "community" that connects you with others (volunteering, joining a club, signing up for a new assignment) and ask those new relationships for feedback. The things you hear are less likely to be couched or controlled by pre-existing conditions in your relationship and may allow you to gain clarity about your impact in more familiar settings.

**Know your audience:** Even if you've assured yourself you aren't doing anything to provoke, put yourself into the minds of those you interact with and think about what could be stilted or hurtful interactions from their standpoint. Just because your comfort level with certain approaches, topics, and styles is high, don't assume your audience feels the same way. Trying to explore where they are coming from may give you increased permission to ask for feedback in new ways that promote candidness and honesty.

**Understand your own triggers:** Much of the time any behavior that seems mean or inappropriate is because we ourselves have been threatened, either consciously or subconsciously. Knowing what triggers you to take a defensive position can prevent you from going into a corner and trying to (inadvertently) fight your way out.

We hope that the tips above help you better understand the impact of your behavior on others and how to deliver a keynote with a specific nonthreatening zinger to provoke a lighter mood. Or how to reorder the slides to provoke confidence from the board when presenting the ROI on a recent innovation investment. Or how to adapt your style to engender candor and possibility when you have a particularly challenging performance conversation. You can do all of these without unintentionally provoking silence, hurt, or anger. 

Even the best of us can be  
accidentally obnoxious  
or mistakenly mean.



# STAYING THE COURSE: HOW TO STAY STEADY WHEN PROVOKED BY COMPETITORS

*By Ashley Morris*

There's a difference between staying competitive and reacting to competition. The latter is the classic, monkey see, monkey do. A CEO or Senior Leadership Team sees or hears of something their competitor is doing and then decides they too want to do that.

Perhaps the most classic case of "reacting" is the Cola Wars that started in the 1980s between rivals, Coca-Cola and PepsiCo. Over the years they've engaged in numerous advertising campaigns and product releases in constant reaction and response to the other. Whatever one of the brands did, the other soon followed. A more recent example of an organization "reacting" was Facebook's acquisition of Instagram. Snapchat's story feature attracted the younger generation and mainstream media. Facebook wanted to do what Snapchat was doing, but didn't have the technology. So what did Facebook do? They bought Instagram and launched their own Stories. And just last week the competition between Boeing and Airbus came to a head, when all Boeing 737 Max's were grounded. With investigations still underway, one thing is clear: Airbus announced the release of its A32neos jet to the market, which provoked Boeing to release the 737 sooner than they originally planned. Because Boeing reacted and didn't stay true to their course, they suffered the consequences.

These examples illustrate what it looks like to "react" to competition. Oftentimes, these reactions are made without considering whether the organization is even capable of doing that which it is trying to copy. Despite that, you see this reacting and emulating everywhere. And if you constantly become provoked by competition and react, it's likely you do not have a clear strategy yourself. If you're a leader in an organization that behaves like this, it is guaranteed to drain resources, lower engagement (customer and employee), and affect productivity over the long run.

A strategy guides an organization. It's the company's north star. It defines how an organization will do what it has set out to achieve. But most importantly a strategy is used to define and then design the organizational resources (people, technology, processes, etc.) that are required to achieve goals. Therefore, having a clear strategy helps to effectively use resources and capabilities, increase employee engagement, and increase long term productivity.

So here are some ideas to get you started. Rather than monkey see, monkey do, you want to articulate a good strategy with a View of the World and a View of the Organization.

## View of the World

Having a good understanding of the external environment and industry you compete in, including a look at your competition, gives you a whole lot more data for making choices; this is important as you begin to define your strategy. So, while you don't want to constantly react to your competitors, it is important to have an idea of the competitive landscape and the market in which you operate. And having this knowledge and awareness prevents reactions and promotes strategic decision-making in the organization. It will help you say no, so that you're not distracted by the next shiny new object.

### To become more aware of your external environment, answer these questions:

- What's going on in the market/Industry?
- What are the current trends?
- Who are your competitors (current,emerging, potential)?
- Who are the disruptors?
- Who is your target customer?




## View of the Organization

Equally important to knowing the external environment is knowing your own organization. When we help clients write their strategy we ask them to take a look under the hood to see what their organization is capable of (and not capable of) and what capabilities they would need to build (hire, grow) in order to achieve their strategy. This is important so that you know what you have and then you can start to assemble and design the organization in a way that will support the execution of your strategy. For example if your organization is designed to make software, and suddenly your CEO wants to introduce a hardware product into the market, do you even have the existing capabilities (engineers, supply chain, go to market) to do that? Having this knowledge helps answer those sorts of questions.

### To become more aware of your internal capabilities, answer these questions:

- Based on your strategy, what are the most critical organizational capabilities to leverage, which ones need improvements, and which ones may be missing as you move forward?
- What distinguishes you from competitors?
- Where could you spend \$1 on your organization and get \$10 back?
- Where do things slow down or get bogged down in your organization?
- Are the capabilities you have today scalable? Agile?

There are several ways to collect this data. The simplest way would be to deploy a survey. The limitations to this method could be data integrity. Perhaps it requires more time commitment, but you would certainly get better quality data through interviewing key stakeholders in your company. Unlike a survey the interview allows you to ask follow-up questions. Another source for gathering information is a consultant who often uses quantitative and qualitative data collection methods.

Regardless of which data collection method you choose, having a strong View of the World and a strong View of the Organization puts you in a better position to stay true to your own strategy and not be provoked by the other monkey's next moves. 

*If you constantly become provoked by competition and react,  
it's likely you do not have a clear strategy yourself.*

# Provoking good in a world full of outrage

*By Ron Carucci*



Recent days have wrought the agony of a large massacre in New Zealand, the exposure of widespread corruption in college admissions processes, fierce debates about immigration and border security, devastating plane crashes, and more immoral misconduct from public figures.

Scientists also announced major breakthroughs in Alzheimer's research. An Indiana businessman donated \$7.5 billion to charity. 3-D printed homes are being expanded in the U.S. to fight homelessness. Stem cells are being used to restore vision to blind people and halt HIV. And a small group of teenage boys mounted an innovative, death-defying rescue of a young boy dangling from a ski lift.

From all sides, we are barraged with information that provokes both fury and faith in humanity. And with each dose of provocative material, we are faced with a choice.

**What will we bring to the mayhem?**

**Silence? Cynicism? Dismissal? Escalation? Vitriol?**

**Hope? Gratitude? Compassion? Understanding? Curiosity?**

**Let's bring the question closer to home.**

People with whom we disagree are not our enemies. Disagreement is healthy. Indecency and contempt are destructive.

You enter a conference room before a meeting and overhear two colleagues cruelly belittling the work of a third colleague who hadn't yet arrived. You can't stand the two of them, but you also agree that there are legitimate concerns about the missing colleague's work quality. What do you do?

You are having coffee with a friend, exchanging views on politics of the day. Someone in the coffee shop who doesn't share your views at all overhears your conversation, leans over, and calmly explains why he feels your views are wrong. He's a fellow parent on your child's soccer team. How do you respond?

During a team meeting, your boss turns to you and asks your opinion about his proposal for a new division-wide communications plan. You have strong concerns about whether it will actually address the employee engagement concerns raised in this year's survey. The rest of the team already "told him what he wants to hear" and gave their support for it. What do you say?

Everyday opportunities invite us to use our voices for good. But we often lack the courage, confidence, or skill to respond in a way we feel can have a positive outcome.

Worse, our increasingly polarizing political landscape has conditioned us with trigger-happy instincts to refute views we might disagree with, reject others for having those views, and convert others to our views. We have dangerously conflated speaking "your" truth with speaking "the" truth. We seem to have lost our sense of civility and discourse.


In the face of being provoked by the humanity around us, many resort to silence, neither speaking out respectfully with dissenting views, nor speaking up with encouraging support. On the other extreme, people resort to outrage and harsh judgment when we even remotely detect disagreement, or blind advocacy if we've determined someone thinks "enough like us." To be provoked or provocative has deteriorated to mean "Be offended, insult back, or shut down."

None of these reactions results in positive outcomes or change. They only provoke perpetuating the status quo. So how do we go against the grain of either being the silent majority or the loud, hateful minority? In his book, *Love Your Enemies: How Decent People Can Save America from the Culture of Contempt*, Arthur Brooks discusses research on conflict due to motive attribution asymmetry – the phenomenon of assuming that your views are based in love while your opponent's views are based in hate. We see this in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. And more recently, we see this in American politics between Republicans and Democrats. Brooks says, "There is an "outrage industrial complex" in American media today, which profits handsomely from our contempt addiction. This starts by catering to just one ideological side. Leaders and media on both the left and right keep their audiences hooked on contempt by telling audiences what they want to hear, selling a narrative of conflict, and painting gross caricatures of the other side. They make us feel justified in our own beliefs while affirming our worst assumptions about those who disagree with us—namely that they are, in fact, stupid, evil, and not worth giving the time of day."

There is good news. We have other choices. People with whom we disagree are not our enemies. Disagreement is healthy. Indecency and contempt are destructive. Disagreement provokes positive change and innovation. Indecency and contempt provoke exhaustion, fear, and hopelessness. To counter the provocation of contempt, Brooks suggests spending more time with those who are different than you. Go where you think you're not welcome. He says, "Seeking out what those on the other side have to say will help you understand others better. You will be a stronger person, less likely to be aggrieved or feel unsafe when you hear alternative points of view. Plus, such understanding will also improve your ability to articulate and defend your own beliefs in a way that others find compelling, or least defensible. You might change a mind or two. And if your argument is weak, you'll be the first to know."

In my interview with Chris Campbell, former Senate Finance Committee member and Assistant Treasury Secretary, *Insights from Congress on Working with People Who are Very Different than You*, Chris offers profound insights about building bridges across the greatest of divides. The most difficult, but most provocative advice, was to see opposing views as legitimate, no matter how outlandish they seemed. When we start from a place of legitimacy, we provoke a hospitable and open exchange.

When Brooks asked the Dalai Lama what to do when feeling contempt toward others, the Dalai Lama responded, "Practice warm-heartedness." So simple. So difficult. So provocative.

All of life is a circle of provocation – provoke, get provoked. Our capacity as humans to do both is beautiful and dangerous. That we can incite changed minds, hearts, and behavior in others is nothing short of miraculous. That we can do irreparable damage to minds, hearts, and relationships is catastrophic. Be thrilled by humanity's magnificence. Be outraged by humanity's depravity. Decide what to do with that thrill or outrage before it provokes you. Today, likely in response to one or the other, you will provoke someone to think, feel, or say something. You get to decide what that is and how you do it. 



From all sides, we are barraged with information that provokes both fury and faith in humanity.



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