

Roots of Crosby & Associates

An excerpt by Robert P Crosby

Kurt Lewin was the founder of social psychology. In the late 30's his doctoral student, Ronald Lippitt, undertook a study of boy's clubs where they attempted to limit the research to a single variable - the style of the adult's leadership. A year into the study another student, Ralph K. White, joined the project. Eventually they used the terminology Autocracy (though two variants surfaced), Democratic (though some attempts turned laissez-faire), and laissez-faire/permissive, a style that surfaced in the study by the unintended behavior of mature adults who were instructed to be democratic or, in some cases, to be autocratic. The switch from autocratic to permissive happened when conflict occurred and reflected, apparently, the leader's life-long learning about what to do when things get rough!

So, one of the unintended findings was that how these sophisticated leaders were carefully instructed to behave and how they behaved were sometimes quite different. Democracy, *which is one form of authority*, was often seen as authority-less! In a strange interpretation - given that we live in a society aspiring to democracy and structured with laws and checks and balances - this familiar word is also seen as permissiveness in the business world. "You can't run a business like a democracy where everyone decides!" is a common way of thinking. Say "democracy" and business leaders think *permissive or consensus* and, of course, reject it. But rejection does not free them from the dilemma of how to lead. Clarity about these dynamics is directly related to productivity.

Democracy is not complete freedom of the individual. That is anarchy, or laissez-faire or permissiveness. Freedom is an important dimension in democracy, but only if it is contained within order! In a work setting, we use the term "order" to mean leadership that ensures involvement of all employees in problem-solving while persistently working on clarity about expectations, goals, and roles (including who decides what...based on work flow needs as well as hierarchical position). Order that essentially allows only the bosses to do all the thinking and make all the decisions is autocratic. Democracy is an effective principle in politics and in the business world so long as it maintains a balance between the two extremes. In a permissive society it's, "everyone for themselves." In a highly ordered autocratic society the slogan claiming that it is "good for the masses" crushes the individual. Democracy is a way to define authority. Those who equate freedom with democracy without these distinctions can easily confuse permissiveness with democracy. White and Lippitt extrapolated, from the research, other factors critical in democracy - my adaptation is as follows:

1) While freedom of speech is essential, curtailing certain freedoms of action is critical in the interest of community. It's not "do as you please," but rather choose what you do within the parameters of the social fabric. (Later, Joseph Campbell would write as recorded in *The Joseph Campbell Companion*, "Self-preservation is only the second law of life. The first law is that you and the other are one.")

2) Compromise is *utterly* essential. "Creative, artistic compromising is a necessary characteristic of most sound decision-making" (p 296, *Autocracy and Democracy*, White and Lippitt, 1960 - the primary source for this section of this article).

3) After a decision is made by a majority, or more often by those imbued naturally (parents, teachers, managers, etc.) and/or those delegated by election such as mayors, governors, congress, presidents, or courts, "...then freedom and individuality SHOULD BOW to unity and coordination". Hitler thought that, "...half measures were an inherent curse on democracy," not realizing that democracy, that is, real democracy, allows for decisive, autocratic, efficient actions when needed, but often functions more slowly due to more conversation and open disagreement.

4) After discussion, the minority must yield to the decision of the majority... While retaining freedom of speech, the minority must realize that...

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Inside This Issue:

Roots of Crosby & Assoc.	1
Editor's Corner	1
Roots...(cont)	2



Editor's Corner



We at Crosby & Associates are understandably proud of our founder, Robert P. Crosby. This, his latest writing, highlights the roots of our theory and practice, born from the struggle against totalitarianism and racism in the 20th century, and the misguided modern reaction which holds that democracy and the involvement of employees in the workplace means the absence of authority. Robert's life work has been to apply true democratic principles, which require compromise and a balance of leadership authority with employee empowerment...a balance which has been proven time and again to result in a winning combination of high morale and business results.

Happy New Year!

Gil Crosby, Editor, Human Factors

democracy leans heavily on the validity of decisions made by the majority or by delegated authorities. To consistently undermine majority decision-making with actions intended to block majority rule diminishes the effectiveness of democracy, no matter which party is in power. The "loyal opposition" is essential. An "obstructionist opposition" breeds distrust of governance and hopelessness. The same holds true in business - "us and them" must be discouraged, and decisions at all levels must be supported.

5) There must be a belief that there is equal opportunity. In business this translates into equal opportunity for advancement based on performance rather than favoritism, and sufficient pay for the job. On the other hand, in study after study people have consistently rated "feeling respected by their boss" as even more important than pay considerations. Effective and emotionally intelligent engagement is the key to productivity and morale.

White and Lippitt conclude that, "The most efficient procedure does appear to be, as a rule, democracy -- if democracy is sharply differentiated from laissez-faire, with clear acceptance not only of active leadership but also of the firm use of authority when firmness is called for, and explicit delegation of authority to certain individuals when such delegation is appropriate." Also, "A leader or boss must be prepared at one time to exert authority so broadly and energetically that his opponents are sure to call him *autocratic*, and at other times to let other people take all the initiative...or all the glory. A parent, teacher, or employer who wants to be *democratic* and also efficient should continually seek to broaden the base of participation in decision-making, whenever participation is really functional and not too time consuming; yet he should usually (not always) exert active leadership and he should unhesitatingly, without the slightest feeling of guilt, use his natural authority whenever the situation calls for firm control or for swift, decisive coordinated action".

Democracy is at times clumsy and slow. "All MEN are created equal" said the original document of US democracy and yet we all know how difficult and long is that journey to equal rights for all!

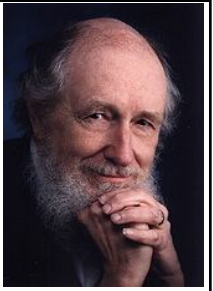
The founders of the first T-group laboratory wrote, "Democracy is an ideology which above all others demands that its practitioners be masters of skills of human relationships adequate to help groups of people make intelligent decisions concerning the changing problems that confront them...Without appropriate and experimentally tested skills and methods for building efficient cooperative relationships, democracy has no hands and feet" (*School and Society*, 1947, quoted in *T-Group Theory and Laboratory Method*, Bradford, Gibb, and Benne, 1965). Both John Dewey and Kurt Lewin emphasized that democracy must be learned anew in each generation. It must be experienced, not simply conceptualized - in the classroom, at home, in community events, at work. Yet rarely is this true. Richard and Patricia Schmuck write about the lack of democracy found in their visits to 25 rural K-12 school districts, all west of the Mississippi River, in their, *Small Districts, Big Problems: Making School Everybody's House*. Each district had at least three schools (Elementary, Middle, and a Senior High); thus they studied more than 75 schools...

...I believe that my three business books illustrate the direct application of Lewin's work (and his students) to the workplace. My latest, *Cultural Change in Organizations*, tells in mostly story form what I believe he intended without using the word democracy...

...Lewin and Dewey laid the ground for teaching democracy experientially. For instance, authority and "who decides" was a major theme in the early T-Group movement. I've seen participants split from the group to create a new group only, in time, to return with new learnings about authority. Usually the learnings come from less dramatic but still profound confrontations with a T-Group leader or, when done in a business, with a supervisor, CEO, manager, in the same T-Group. The transfer of unfinished childhood authority issues onto teachers, employers, and, in the T-Group setting, the trainers, seems universal. Certainly this seemed apparent in our Italian, Ukrainian, Egyptian (with participants from many nations - staffed by Gilmore and Chris Crosby), Jamaican (primarily Gil), Canadian, Mexican (primarily Chris), and U.S. Events. We consider this opportunity to help participants deal directly with this issue - often directed at us, the T-Group leaders, in expressions of anger that quickly emerge into mutual respect - as a major reason for the existence of the T-Group. As they deal with their current authority dilemma, they are then also open to a richer understanding of democracy, decision-making, influence, and the skills and differentiation needed to lead or follow in a democratic way.

We, in Crosby Associates, call this "Tough Stuff," partly to have our own name brand, but more significantly, because we are dismayed by many practices done under the T-Group name and other names such as "Encounter Group." A Tough Stuff trainer must distinguish between and move across the poles of order and freedom, firmness and warmth, emotion expression and emotion description, thinking and feeling, openness and personal confession, judgments and the ability to describe behavior, and be able to help participants learn from the immediate moment. And perhaps, above all, s/he must catch those moments when authority issues surface. As noted above, these are often issues, though veiled, with the trainer.

Research for over a half century has confirmed that *democracy ferments creativity and initiative* far more than autocracy or laissez-faire. These foment scape-goating. Market conditions and product relevance being good enough, *democracy also enhances productivity, bottom-line results, morale, and the equalizing of opportunity for all*. At its heart, it is a constantly evolving system. Difficult to learn, it always lies in danger of tipping to styles of too much order or too much freedom. Enter institutions, consultants, and others who share the values highlighted in this article! We have an important mission!!!

<p>Don't miss Robert P. Crosby Tough Stuff April 23-27 2012 in Seattle!</p> <p><i>With exclusive coaching for advanced students!</i></p> <p>Contact us at chris@crosbyod.com or 206-369-9200 and sign up today!</p>	
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To read the entire document, including an explanation of the T-Group methodology, email us at gil@crosbyod.com