

*(Dan's informal recollection of what he said in the AFSC Board meeting on Sunday, June 22, 1997. Prepared on Tuesday, June 24, 1997)*

When I read Kara's proposal, I tried to consider its recommendations in the light of the three factors which inspired the Board of Directors to ask her to do this work. These are the three factors, as I understand them:

1. As we saw yesterday, the AFSC is experiencing a constantly tightening, or straitening, of its financial state. This is combined with a widespread feeling that we have become so spiritually and programmatically diffuse that there seems little hope that we can project a vision capable of rallying enough contributors to reverse the tightening financial noose. We face a combination of deteriorating finances and an inability to mobilize a coherent enough vision to attract new resources.
2. We also find that the decision-making and administrative structure of AFSC has become Byzantine and circular, so that it seems disempowering and frustrating for anyone who becomes enmeshed in it.
3. We seem to be haunted by continuing distress in the areas of our common life for which the Affirmative Action Office and the Nationwide Programs have been trying to serve as resources to us. We seem not to be getting where we want to be in these areas, in spite of many years of effort and the expenditure of very significant resources.

So, when I read the material I did so with these three things in the back of my mind. Was this a proposal which adequately addressed these issues, I asked myself.

But before suggesting a conclusion about this, I think there is something that must be placed on the table. We have come to a point where, if I understand the situation correctly, almost no one imagines that we can simply slide along into the future on the trajectory on which we find ourselves. We cannot simply allow present trends to continue.

The second thing I think we need to get on the table is that when an organization gets to a point where its foreseeable future is bleak, and where some sort of draconian surgery seems to be necessary, it is because the Board has failed it. We Board members must own the organization's present dilemmas as stemming from our failure to do for the organization what a Board should do. Our job, properly understood, is to examine the organization's life, and help it make frequent small adjustments which keep it on a healthy track. The Board and the administrative staff should function as a unit in doing this. To the extent that big stress seems necessary, it is because we have failed to be wise in smaller, more manageable increments over time.

Third, to the extent that this situation is our failure, we must recognize it is because we have failed in awareness in both the spiritual and intellectual spheres. Unless we come to terms with the fact that we have failed, that the present situation stems from our own errors, there will be no way out. If we

continue with the same understandings which have caused the trouble, we will be unable properly to evaluate proposed solutions. Therefore, although the way out of our dilemmas may be painful for the staff, it will also be painful, although admittedly in a different way, for us, for we have to face the fact that we must think and behave as a Board in new and different ways, and such change is always painful and difficult. I believe we have suffered from errors of thinking, and we have also suffered from errors in the way many of us relate to staff.

Given this overall situation, I concluded that Kara's proposals represent a substantial effort to address the three dilemmas we face. Clearly, if they are implemented, the organization will be in a much better place. Perhaps Kara would agree with me that there are many ways to address difficulties, and there are probably other approaches which would also be meritorious. However, as a Board, we should be clear that there are probably no alternatives to Kara's plan that would be less stressful or painful. If our search for alternatives is a search for a solution which is free of discomfort or stress, we will be frustrated and will further delay the implementation of remedies.

(In response to questions)

I really did not want to get into any detail about errors of thought because it would make you all furious with me.

(Don Gann: Better you than me. *Laughter.*)

It is hard to do this briefly without the danger of caricaturing people's points of view. But, for example, even this weekend it has seemed sometimes that people expect that the AFSC can present itself to "communities" as a totally blank sheet upon which each different community draws a picture of its own liking. This is a confusion of thought which results in as much of a malady, of an equal and opposite kind, as what we have been terming the missionary approach. There is a very complex relationship involved between AFSC and the communities in which we work, one which must take careful account of the AFSC's own priorities and its spiritual value system, as well as the condition, experience and aspirations of communities. If we fail to be astute about these delicate balances we inevitably wind up with a soulless, diffuse AFSC for which it will be very difficult to rally support.

Another idea which I frequently sense is that the AFSC should somehow be analogized either to a Quaker meeting or to a democratic polity. Actually, an organization with a vast paid staff supported by a widely spread constituency of financial donors can behave neither like a Quaker meeting nor like a New England town meeting. Staff, for example, should be thoroughly and sympathetically listened to by the Board, but staff must be willing to swallow hard and digest things they do not like from the Board day after day. They should have a sense of deference about this. For the Board or the staff to imagine that it is fruitful to go on endless searches and establish many committees seeking solutions which will discomfort no one is futile, and certainly is not good Quakerism. The Quaker business process depends on obedience, humility and patience. I have never heard any Quaker sage expecting to emerge "empowered" from a monthly meeting for business. Unless we come to terms with the necessary division of labor between staff and Board in the governance process, and if we continue to expect that the Board can magically provide solutions to the AFSC's problems which distress no one, we will betray ourselves. We will wind up with a snowballing array of problems requiring ever

more draconian solutions. The staff, seeing these more far-reaching steps looming, perhaps not realizing that they are necessitated by the deferral and evasion of smaller steps, and perhaps unaware of their own complicity in the deferrals and evasions, may lose trust in the Board, leaving the Board in the untenable position of collecting funds from people who trust us and then turning them over for use to people who do not trust us.

Board members should examine carefully their way of relating to staff. Of course, we want warm, affectionate, resilient relationships with staff. But these need to be based on maturity on the part of both staff members and Board members. For Board members to serve as agents of sectarian or parochial groups within the staff, or for Board members to over empathize with particular staff, is a mistake and leads to trouble for the AFSC in an overall way. In terms of the Board's functioning, over-empathy with staff can be an enemy of integrity.