

Change Begins with Us

Thom Rutledge

"Change Begins with Us" is from Same Page, a series of articles by Thom Rutledge with the intention of challenging the extreme dysfunction political discourse in the U.S. from the perspective of his 30 years experiences as a psychotherapist. Same Page is currently a work in progress. If you want to know more contact the author directly at thomrutledgeauthor@gmail.com.

As a psychotherapist I spend considerable time helping people solve problems. In 30 years of facilitating these hopefully helpful conversations for a living, I have come to recognize a common theme among all of the unique individuals I have encountered. The one thing that is universally true if you intend to effect genuine and lasting change is that you must begin with yourself. Real change – growth – moves from the inside out.

I have spent plenty of time and energy in my own life learning, and relearning this lesson. And the majority of my time with clients and seminar participants is probably spent guiding people back to this single principle. Change happens from the inside out.

Once we recognize, acknowledge and accept that we cannot reasonably expect the world around us to change unless we are willing to change first, the rest is simple. (I said simple, not easy.)

The inside-out-lesson has never been needed more than it is now in our nation's political arena. If, as citizens, we want to do more than stand on the sidelines, shaking our heads, pointing and laughing or being controlled by the fear that is being handed out freely 24/7, we have to begin by looking at ourselves. This is our country, not theirs. Or more accurately, it is no more theirs than it is ours.

Here is how we can effect genuine, important and lasting change in the way government is run by our elected representatives: we the people must make a conscious decision to place "the ability and willingness to work well with colleagues of both parties" at the top of our list of what we value the most in our elected officials. Stop. Go back and read that long sentence again. One more time for good measure.

If enough of us will make that decision, and stick with it, politicians who want to continue to represent us will have to demonstrate an increasing ability to cooperate and collaborate with each other in order to gain and maintain our votes. Rather than dumping their latest marketing campaign on us, the politicians will need to offer us specific, documented examples of collaboration, cooperation and compromise. We tell them that we don't want all of their examples of how right they are about everything, but instead we want examples of their ability to problem solve in collaboration with each other. We tell them that we don't want to hear that someone else is always to blame for what is wrong, that we want to hear their new ideas when old ideas have not worked. We tell them that if they are not able to deliver such documentation, they will (here comes the simple part) not be re-elected to office.

The smartest person in the world is of little use in our system of government unless he or she can work effectively with others. We need to recognize this. We need to make individual decisions to join together in large numbers to demand – via our votes – that anyone who wishes to represent us in government will be required to have and to use this ability.

POLITICAL WISDOM

DOES NOT HAVE TO BE AN OXYMORON

With Same Page psychotherapist Thom Rutledge turns his attention to national politics, not to become one more partisan voice in the dangerously polarized noise, but to bring his unique therapeutic touch with the intention to help heal the relational pathology that is crippling our leaders' ability to solve our nation's problems. With Same Page Thom is presenting a challenge to all of us, not just politicians. It is a challenge to step back and look beyond the specific content of political argument and to do what couples are asked to do in relationship therapy: examine and ultimately change HOW we are communicating.

Since change occurs from the inside out, we cannot expect any of this to happen unless we – individually and collectively – become willing to do exactly what we want our representatives to do. In other words the buck stops here, with us, the voters. We must stop choosing sides as if our political system is some sort of a sporting event, and begin working together. If we don't challenge ourselves and each other to think in the broader terms of effective problem solving, we will never be in a place to insist that our representatives do so.

Regardless of the multitude of our unique, individual differences, in this matter let us speak with one very strong, very loud voice, saying with extreme clarity and the authority that is legitimately ours, “ If you wish to represent us, show us that you can work effectively with your colleagues (of both political parties). Otherwise, go home and get another job.”

Thom Rutledge is a psychotherapist and author in Nashville, Tennessee. He is the author of several popular self-help books, including *The Greater Possibilities*, *Embracing Fear* and *The Self-Forgiveness Handbook*. His political commentaries have appeared in *The Indianapolis Star*, *The Nashville Tennessean*, *The Chicago Tribune* and *Philadelphia Inquirer*. For more information about Thom's work visit www.thomrutledge.com. If you want to know more about Same Page, contact the author directly at thomrutledgeauthor@gmail.com.

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