Harnessing Tension

Leadership approach is a new way to solve conflicts.

Jackie Headapohl | Managing Editor

Two women — an ardent Jewish Zionist and a pro-Palestine advocate — are out to prove that conflict resolution — transformation even — is possible. Those women, Brenda Rosenberg and Samia Bahsoun, recently published Harnessing The Power of Tension. The book is a guide to building alliances, whether among Jews and Palestinians, Christians and Muslims or communities of color and police.

“We see a need to create a tectonic shift in how leaders lead and problem solve,” the women say.

This book introduces their paradoxical and evolutionary leadership approach called Tectonic Leadership. The word tectonic comes from the Greek word “tekton,” which means builder and is used by geologists to infer very significant or considerable changes in the Earth’s structure.

They use Earth plate tectonics (the large sections of the Earth’s surface that shift) as a metaphor for visualizing human interactions. “Human interactions in situations of conflict are like fault lines between tectonic plates,” they say. “Plates interact and build friction at their boundaries, causing earthquakes to occur when the natural elasticity of surrounding rocks has been exceeded. Human interactions can similarly create fault lines.

“When the pressure generated by tension and fear becomes unbearable, the energy released is tsunami-like, creating mass hysteria, inciting hate and fear, separating nations, destroying businesses and communities, oppressing people and instigating wars.”

Tectonic Leadership harnesses the power of tension and uses tension as an opportunity to inform those in conflict of the deepest fears, pains and trans-generational wounds that separate people and plague the world.

The book comes at a time when the world is on high alert from the terrorist attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, Calif., which are resulting in a backlash against Muslims and Syrian refugees. These attacks have put many in the public on edge, and the anti-Muslim rhetoric has reached a fever pitch, with Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump calling for a ban on Muslims entering the country.

“It’s worse than after 9-11,” says Bahsoun, who identifies as culturally Muslim. “I understand the fear, but not the political agenda to vilify an entire group. It’s basically instilling fear within the majority of people.

“We must acknowledge the fear but appeal to the higher values that America represents,” she says. “We are capable of creating a better world. It’s a choice, and we want to educate people.”

Resolution can only come when both sides of a conflict have their feelings and beliefs validated, and a solution is built on what improves life for both sides, she says.

BRINGING THE MESSAGE HOME

U.S. domestic conflicts also need addressing. Just recall recent clashes between communities of color and police, which have led to protests in Baltimore; Ferguson, Mo.; and Chicago.

Rosenberg has been talking with local chiefs of police and community leaders on how to improve relationships between police departments and their local communities.

“The starting point has to be what you can start new together,” she says, “something that benefits both sides.”

Working with the chief of Roseville police, Rosenberg is bringing a nine-part program to Roseville High School that
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**A LIFE OF ART**

Don’t miss Brenda Goodman: A Life on Paper, a survey exhibition that includes 70 works on paper from six decades, offering an extended view of intimate works by this noted New York artist who is a native Detroiter. The show is presented by Paul Kotula Projects, 23255 Woodward, Ferndale, through Saturday, with extended hours from 11 a.m.-8 p.m.

Goodman, a recent recipient of an American Academy of Arts and Letters Award in Art, is recognized for her emotionally packed and brutally sincere autobiographical paintings and works on paper.

She studied at the Society of Arts and Crafts, now the College for Creative Studies (CCS), and was affiliated with the Cass Corridor group of Detroit artists that garnered attention for their raw and experimental work. Her work is included in major museums, including the Detroit Institute of Arts.

Showing concurrently is Brenda Goodman: Selected Work 1961–2015, a survey of the artist’s paintings, at CCS’ Center Galleries, 301 Frederick St., Detroit; 10 a.m.-5 p.m. through Saturday.

**JN** December 17 • 2015 27