

On Accommodation

Blog
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Accommodation. An interesting word, with many meanings...At one time I would have gone immediately to a definition of lodging. And people who know me will recognize my absolute first choice of accommodation is a Fairmont Hotel. Definitely my favourite – if I can't stay with family or friends. Recently I have thought of the word, accommodation, in many other ways. From the [Free Dictionary online](#), I now refer specifically to: *“5. willingness to help or oblige.”*

Most of my life I have learned it is important to accommodate others. If you want to be heard, you must accommodate and speak the words others will hear – with appropriate body language and appealing tone. Over the years we learn to accommodate our relatives to stay connected and – even more importantly – our children to keep peace in our homes.

The last few months I have been swimming lengths at a public pool. That was my preferred exercise for many years – because I could swim at 6 am and then head home to get the household off to school and work on time. That 6 am time accommodated the schedule that was my life. We lived in a small town then and I almost always had the whole pool to myself. Total bliss! Now, in this large urban centre, there are many people in “my” lane most days. I find it interesting to examine which swimmers accommodate and which ones let others accommodate them. There were four of us in the lane this morning and three were accommodating and one was continually being accommodated. (I am certain it was completely an accident the three accommodating people were women, and there was one man).

Swimming these lengths, I have been reflecting on my inclination to accommodate. I have come to feel that accommodation – or what I coin as “terminal niceness” that is so prevalent in the community sector – actually hinders us from truly being able to make a difference in the world. I clearly recognize our recent focus at Vantage Point on a different kind of people engagement does not accommodate old models. So pushing a new way of doing business is definitely making me uncomfortable. This new way is not about accommodating – we are actually saying you must do it differently. And I still question – is this the “right way” to be?

The way we have historically engaged people – particularly volunteers – might continue to work. Most indications are it will not. So at Vantage Point we have deliberately moved to working with people in changed ways with changed processes – and we're on our fifth iteration of providing others with an opportunity to learn how to do the same. These new ways work for me. For us. And for many of our community members. They are oh-s-exciting!

The challenge is the tried and true way is SO ingrained for everyone. But we are not accommodating. Horrors. We are saying there must be a new way. I spent the first twenty years I worked in community with that “old” model. I taught it! My friends and colleagues all did too. So it is really hard to say good-bye to those “not-working-so-well” ways – and many of those people. We must. I must. It is critical. And to succeed, I must return to a definition of accommodation that means I think first of the Fairmont Hotel.