



The History and Inspiration for a Movement

The founder of The Association to Improve Government had a 45-year career in business before his retirement in 2013. In 1982, he joined a US Conglomerate at one of their divisions that was based in Indiana. At this point, he had risen to the level of Plant Manager in previous organizations and continued in similar manufacturing roles with his new employer.

This company was excellent in terms of training and development, so their employees were exposed to a great variety of concepts that often included professional development courses. There were also routine quarterly meetings that brought together managerial level employees from their many global locations for discussion, training and team-building. The employee relations and interaction were excellent and personal connections among these managers was common.

In this case, the founder connected with many fellow employees and in one aspect of this, a group of 8 individuals with a common interest in golf established an annual outing. This group event lasted over 20 years and continued even as many of the parties joined other companies and relocated far and wide. It was at one of these golf events, that one of the members mentioned a training course he had attended on the subject of Group Dynamics in the workplace, that the seed was planted.

In his role as a Plant Manager, the founder had a great deal of experience with employee communication meetings over many years and although generally, he was comfortable with these, there were some instances where he had been searching for a solution. His friend's brief description of the Group Dynamics course included a discussion of using a secret ballot technique in meetings where one outspoken individual expressed a strong opinion. It immediately struck a cord as a possible solution to the few situations where he felt he needed a new approach. He understood that if he openly argued a point with an outspoken employee that the rest of the employees, who typically remained silent, would view it as the boss (the one with the power) shutting down the employee (the one with little power). The silent employees may or may not agree with the employees' position, but they had no interest in speaking up in these circumstances. Using this new approach, he would stop the meeting, restate the opinion of the employee and ask those in the meeting to vote on whether they agreed with the opinion. He passed a box around the room and the employees typically dropped in a secret ballot with a Yes or No on it.

The technique worked exactly as he had hoped. If the vote was split, it diminished the intensity of the outspoken employee's position without the boss being the bad guy but if it reinforced the complaint, he knew he had a significant issue that he needed to address and he promised to do so. It was simple, effective and productive. It avoided employee meetings from slipping into an emotionally charged situation on controversial issues and improved employee relations. He used this technique for the rest of his career, and it altered the way he thought about many things.

Two of those things were Government and Politicians.

He was not particularly interested in politics or government, but he began to realize that the problems had a similarity in principle to the one he had faced in employee meetings. He had come to understand why the silent employees remained silent in terms of speaking up but were more than willing to weigh in when the secret ballot method was used. They really wanted to express their opinion but were not willing to do so if there were other factors or risks involved. This was the principle his colleague had mentioned when discussing his Group Dynamics seminar. In this case, making an enemy of the outspoken employee was the risk with open expression but that risk was removed in a secret ballot process.

Over time, the more he considered the continuing news on politics and government, the more he was convinced that these problems had the same root cause. Politicians generally were faced with high risk factors for any position they took on any issue. If they openly supported one issue, they were attacked by those opposing that stance. These attacks could take many forms and ranged all the way from an individual openly disagreeing with them, to public demonstrations and even death threats. Intimidation by supporting their opposition, halting campaign contributions and negative media coverage were only some of the perils involved. These high-risk factors often became more significant than the issue itself in determining what any politician expressed publicly. This put the politician in jeopardy for just about everything they did.

His opinion about politicians was changing as he watch events and continued to consider these factors. Before this gradual recognition of concept, he, like most people, had a negative opinion about politicians. Mistrust and disgust were the norm across a very high percentage of the population but he began to recognize the helplessness of the situation that politicians faced. It was quite a transition, but gradually he shifted his opinion from one of negative to one of sympathy. His sense that politicians were in a no-win situation began to influence his thinking on the problems and how he considered things might be improved.

In retirement, he had more time to spend on looking into this and he did so. As he researched the process of Representative Governments, the principle that secret ballot allowed individuals the freedom to express their opinions without fear was always in the background. He knew that secret ballot had always been the standard for public elections and fully understood how important this was to discern the true wishes of the voting public. He also began to wonder when and how secret ballot became the universally accepted method for public elections.

His research to find the answer to this question would be the step that led to the fundamental solution to a major social concern, "Coercion and Corruption in Government."

He discovered that the global development of a secret ballot process for all public elections was the result of a movement that began in the early 1800's. It was a direct result of a massive grass-roots movement know as Chartism. The primary objective of this movement was to secure, "A vote for every man twenty-one years of age, of sound mind, and not undergoing punishment for a crime." The second element of their platform specified that the vote should utilize, "The secret ballot to protect the elector in the exercise of his vote."

This was the exact same Group Dynamics principle that he had embraced in his business career and had found so effective. It had taken approximately 125 years for this movement to accomplish their mission and by the 1920's not only did men have the vote but women, minorities and virtually all citizens of the free world.

It started as a simple, but new, idea and ended with accomplishing one of the most significant contributions to Representative Governments in history.

Today, The Association to Improve Government hopes to replicate the success of the Chartist and bring about a fundamental change in the current rules of government to move Representative Government to a new level where coercion and corruption are eliminated and the population's trust in their government is restored.

Success in this mission will impact every aspect of our lives and allow the global society to grow and prosper under leadership organizations that rationally address the important issues of our time.