



Stoking the Revolution

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Upon returning from a recent visit to Louisiana, I experienced a deep sadness as I realized the culture shift needed for my home to be healed. I also sensed a great opportunity and responsibility, both of myself and others in the sustainability movement. What does it mean to be a natural builder? Build houses, build nature, build community? I felt strongly that it was all of these.

It was from this place that I felt an urgency to act, and to inspire others to act. A small box in the corner of my heart was opening once again, the place where I keep my most sacred dreams. Dreams that poke their heads out only when there's a chance that they might be realized.

So, I reached out to the NBN community, and asked similar questions of a permaculturist, a community organizer, and a natural builder about how this shift might look from their unique perspectives, and how we in the community can "Stoke the Revolution". Some of the questions I asked were:

"What is your vision of a post peak planet and how do we get there?"

"What are the three most significant cultural norms impeding this movement?"

"If you had the opportunity to address our nation, what would be three concrete things that you would ask people to start doing tomorrow?"

The following interviews are the result.

[It's Not Your Carbon Footprint, It's Your Handprint. interview with Larry Santoyo](#)

[Get Over "Big Daddy", interview with Brandy Gallagher](#)

[Learn to Mentor, and Be Mentored. interview with Kevin Rowell](#)

It's Not Your Carbon Footprint, It's Your Handprint



Interview with [Larry Santoyo](#)

NBN: “Could I ask that you speak directly into the phone’s mouthpiece?”

L. Santoyo: “I’m pretty well known for yelling, actually.”

NBN: “That would be great, because my technology is a bit lacking! (laughs) Let’s just get to the first question if we could. What is your vision of a post peak planet and how do we get there?”

L. Santoyo: “We are in a post peak planet. Now it’s all about the descent. It’s not like it’s going to crash (as much as I would love it to go straight down). It can’t work like that. It’s physics. It’s a trajectory that’s set into motion, and there has to be some kind of descent. There’s all kinds of promise in green technology, which is still there and I think it’s always going to be there. We couldn’t be having this conversation [without technology]. People are dedicated to communication. It’s kind of the weak link in the post peak future. I can do everything else on the needs list about the same as now, except communication is weak.”

NBN: “Do you see people, from a permaculture standpoint, living in the cities again in close proximity to keep the village communication pattern going?”

L. Santoyo: “I think that’s really what we’re talking about, not necessarily megacities, but certainly tighter knit, higher density living situations. I mean, here I am, I teach community, but I live a mile behind a locked gate on a dirt road on 660 acres. I don’t think that that’s the vision of the future. I have links to the city, and to cities all over the world, and I have my own footprint, my own carbon footprint. But I don’t think it’s about a carbon footprint. I think it’s about our handprint, what we do with that carbon that we’re using. What do you build? What do you teach? What do you do, you know? It’s about getting out there and doing something.”

NBN: “What about edible gardens, co-ops within the city, connections between the farms and the city?”

L. Santoyo: “I think that food is not our weak link. People go off and off on it, and permaculture isn’t about food. It’s about solving our needs and one of those needs is food. I come from a long line of migrant farm workers. Food is easy. That’s not our problem. The problems in a post peak oil world are: How do we get emergency response to people? How do we take care of people? How do we build a hospital? How do we make that work? Food’s the easy part. That’s the last thing to worry about. Food grows. I’m sitting here by my washing machine and there’s all kinds of shit growing in my washing machine water garden.”

NBN: “When you look at cultures, specifically let’s just look at the United States, what do you see as the most significant cultural norm impeding this movement?”

L. Santoyo: “Yeah, I think that it’s really generational. It’s generational around the world, especially in America. I think the only ones worried about it and talking like this, using this kind of language, are people like us, that grew up spoiled. I don’t think that people really understand that it’s just our generation that’s worried like this, mostly out of selfishness and self-centeredness. It’s this ego and ethnocentric position that sort of kills everything.

Our grandparents know how to do this. They know what a skill set is, how to live in a world without cheap oil. There were vast civilizations in people's lifetimes that we know that didn't have cheap oil! These were vast, culturally rich civilizations. We'll have that all again. I don't understand what people are worried about. It bugs the shit out of me that people are creating this fear-based deal. It's our spoiled perspective, and we're thriving on each other's nonsense about that. Our children are going to grow up spoiled, but our grandkids or their children aren't going to have that opportunity to grow up spoiled. If you think about it we're in that in-between time where we get to intellectualize, and hypothesize, and speculate about what that future's going to be. It's not going to be like that. It's not going to be what we think it's going to be. It's going to be what our grandchildren create of it, and they'll think of us as the spoiled generation that we are.

I just don't see any one thing that's holding us back. I see that it's a lot of little things. And mostly it's each other perpetuating that it's bad, that it's going to be bad, or that you should also live in fear, because that's how we were raised, and if you don't live in fear then you're being a little more than naïve about it. We're not going to have a phone/fax charger for our car or some bullshit. The bottom is still the bottom. The recession didn't hit a lot of people that I know, because they're already living it."

NBN: "I think this is alive for me, because I just went to Louisiana two weeks ago and the culture down there is fear-based, and people are talking about it from that perspective."

L. Santoyo: "It's grown up, ingrained, everything that's happened in our American South."

NBN: "All you hear about is the economy and how I can't find a job and the same old trap. I'm down there for a week and I'm trying to walk with this bubble around me, and I come back to Emerald Earth and it's like ahhh, we can do this! We're living in community. We're growing our food..."

L. Santoyo: "It's not one thing. It's a bunch of little fear-based things that control. What's his name with the bowtie, the white guy that everybody loves, that says all of this shit, and everybody listens to, because he's an educated white guy. Oh, William McDonough. He reminds us 'Do we even have the capacity?' I'm not sure I'm agreeing that there's any impediment. I think that's just how we are. He talks about how it took us 5000 years to put wheels on our luggage. I think it just has to be over the top before we react.

NBN: For you personally what was the tipping point that put you into this mode of 'we can do it, we don't have to live based on fear'?"

L. Santoyo: "Well, I mean, I sort of arrived at this through anger. It wasn't through peace and love and all that stuff. I worked in a world where what I saw I believed to be true evil. But at the same time what changed my mind is understanding and knowing that in that lies the most incredible, anonymous heroism that I could ever witness, and that's what changed me. Seeing that it [compassion] is possible in all the weirdness. I was a cop for 10 years. I've seen some gnarly shit that people do to each other, but I've also seen how people come to the rescue and disappear not wanting thanks, just wanting security in their neighborhood, in their world. And that changes somebody, and for me I want to move past the revolution to a renaissance of creativity and of kindness. Compassion is worth it, whatever it costs. It's worth it."

NBN: “If you had the opportunity to address our nation, what three concrete things would you ask of them to do tomorrow morning?”

L. Santoyo: “Review your skill set. Get skills and when somebody asks, ‘What do you have to contribute?’ have a list of things that you can contribute. The most important thing I think we can do is to develop experience at doing something that can help one another.” I think that experience is key. Stop reading, stop going to classes, until you buy my book and go to my courses. (laughs) People really need to get out there and stop speculating. I’m talking about our generation and our people that intellectualize the apocalypse. Get out there and lose a digit, lose an eye from a flying digit! Actually do something, have something intelligent to contribute to conversation, because nobody gives a shit about your mental masturbation when it comes down to it. Stop preaching fear and stop buying fear. Beware of fear. Don’t get into sustainability because you fear the future, but because you love the things you love about the present.”

NBN: “Do you have one more thing that you could offer people?” Plant a garden? Wait, you said that food is easy. (laughs)”

L. Santoyo: “Travel to other parts of the world, to other parts of the state even.

Mark Twain said that ‘Travel is the anecdote to bigotry.’ I would say to get out and travel to other parts of the world and to experience it and listen to people. It’s not about the carbon footprint. It’s about your manual hand print.”

Get Over “Big Daddy”



Interview with [Brandy Gallagher](#)

NBN: “What are the three most significant cultural norms impeding this movement; the last things that people will want to hold onto?”

B. Gallagher: “In the general sense of community I would say that people immediately want to hold on to their sense of individualism. Particularly for Western-cultured people it’s been a societal norm to be into rugged individualism, and with that there’s a pretty big letting-go journey that folks are on. As much as we’re called to and yearn for connection with others, it immediately results in things like personal space, sharing resources, and scarcity thinking. It’s about how all of those three things tie back to this dance that a lot of folks have between individualism and community-based living.”

NBN: “What other things do you think impede this movement?”

B. Gallagher: “As folks come into opportunities to change that individualistic path, there’s a very large growth process and you really need to be up for it. There is a letting-go of old cultural norms and breaking of patterns that for many folks are lifelong. Not a lot of people have been raised in village culture. So, to be in community is a challenge, when perhaps your distinct ancestral roots haven’t been recently connected to a village mind and heart and way of being. It means that people actually need to relearn it. That’s not true for everybody, and a lot of folks come from cultures that are quite recently and/or currently connected to village life. There’s something about being able to focus on the higher good that involves the group rather than just my personal higher good, and that’s the really big shift from individual needs to group results. You could call that

'community'. You could call that 'village'. People have different words and ways of saying it, but how do we live and work together in a way that's sustainable, in a way that we can look towards a future where we can really transform the direction that humanity is heading right now?"

NBN: "Please talk a bit about living in community, your personal community experience, and some of the challenges and rewards that you encounter."

B. Gallagher: "My background is one that's quite unique. I was born and raised in community. I was brought up on a cooperative commune in the 60s when the good ole commune era existed. By the time I went to school, because I lived in a very remote wilderness area, I ended up moving to a First Nations reserve in Canada, which was very clearly village life. I lived in a commune and a reserve where people instinctively knew that they needed to work together on some level in a cooperative way to actually coexist, and it's often quite subtle.

I would say in the '60s on we weren't all that organized, but now there's an opportunity available in the intentional community movement and the ecovillage movement. We call them lifeboat communities. You hear people use different language. Perhaps it's really just all words focused towards the same ideal, and no matter how we label it, it's about the possibility that people are creating a way to be in community that lives lightly on the land. It brings people back together on a fundamental level where we're creating our life, our forms of governance, our shared economies, and where our personal passion, livelihood, our love, and what we do, and our spiritual path are quite interconnected. I think there's an exoticism that that's what existed once upon a time in some idealistic long ago way, and I would suggest that cultures have always been evolving and living through community. Some have been massively awful situations where people lived horrific lives, and it wasn't pleasant to live in community and it's not all a nirvanic experience. On other levels, it was still people that were in it together.

I'm not so sure we're in a time any more where there is a fix, and certainly not a quick fix. Maybe now it's about creating scenarios where we can ride out things in the best possible way. I don't mean that in terms of creating isolated, elitist, or separate collaborations of people or communities. I mean where people actually learn how to live together. They have fundamental skills, and they can actually provide their resources, especially food.

Even in Greek philosophy and Roman law there was always this organizing of community trying to happen; the philosophy of it, the policy of it. And maybe we're getting to a place now where we can actually combine the best of all of human history and come together with a fairly obvious deadline ahead of us. When we look at the social, environmental and economic issues that we're facing now, it's clear that people really need to recreate community on a different level, and take the best of all that old knowledge and put it into motion. That often requires a lot of structuring. It's a constant joke in the communities movement that you probably never attended more meetings in your life! When you're in a marriage or a partnership with somebody you don't call communication and figuring out your life a meeting. I think there's something to be said for changing this allergy that we have to bureaucracy and hierarchy and creating power dynamics within our groupings and organizations of people.

It's time to just lay that down and get on with it, and I like to say that 'right now the ship's a rockin and we need all hands on deck!' It matters much less to me what degree you have, or if you bring a whole bunch of money, or whatever it might be, at the end of the day the most important thing is

whether people will live and work together in a way that creates the results they need and want.”

NBN: “That’s what I’ve found personally, living in community for a couple of years, that first and foremost you have to get along, because if you don’t get along, everything else falls apart.”

B. Gallagher: “I think it’s that notion of a nirvanic ideal that it’s supposed to fit like the ultimate relationship, where you just find your soul-mate and everybody’s going to ride off into the sunset. That’s another major roadblock that we have right now in a social context that people really don’t get, that it takes a fundamental amount of work to have relationships. Maybe it’s unfair to call it work, but rather we should be talking about it as a fundamental amount of living to have relationship, and that means a different level of communication and a lot of skill development around how to create agreement. What is a shared vision? Why am I in relationship with you? You need a contract to get married or to take a job, and this is even more important.”

NBN: “Do you think that some of the resistance we have against corporate America or the school system is because they’ve taken over and abused these fundamental relationships that were once sacred? We have to go to work, and we have to go to meetings. We’re going to school and being taught this way to live, but it’s not really what we want.”

B. Gallagher: “It has also taught us dependency. I think there’s a maturation process where we need to get over the ‘big daddy’ and the ‘man’ and this idea that something took our power away, and actually pull up our socks and suggest that we are the government, and we are the people, and we are the community, and we are the world, and nobody’s got us so that we can’t. It’s a personal choice to take responsibility in our community. It’s a particularly hard stretch for us, especially in North America, to take responsibility on that level, since we’ve been weaned on the teat of somebody else will take care of us, but then we’ll blame them for it anyway. We have that relationship with our parents, but hopefully we’re on this trajectory that we advance on as we get older where we figure out that our parents weren’t really to blame and it wasn’t all that bad.

It seems to spill over into government, to our teachers in school, to wherever it is that we can actually support cohesive leadership in our life. We’re not trained to actually support each other as leaders. The interesting notion would be if each and every one of us became leaders in our community. I don’t think that’s such a far cry. I think that it’s an incredibly large possibility and something that’s quite needed. If you look at a traditional village structure, every one of us had a major role and we were leaders in that role.”

NBN: “That’s a great point, especially for NBN members who are contemplating a leadership role in their community. Doing that alone is a huge step. One last question. If you had the opportunity to address our nation as a whole, what would be three concrete things that you would ask people to start doing tomorrow?”

B. Gallagher: “Number one is to stop fighting for peace. The days of fighting is needing to end now. Now it’s about reaching out for an opportunity.

The second one would be to start reaching out for what we want, and to start creating it and to have deep courage and passion for creating what we know in our highest ideals to be possible. Most of the time it’s the fear

of not having that builds resistance, so if we could just let go, then we really could create something. All we can do now is look towards the future to create the brightest opportunities we can imagine. If we really are going to have a next generation then we can look into the [unborn] eyes of our children and our grandchildren and know what we have to do. We know what we have to let go of, and we know what we have to embrace, and it does become really simple on that level.

Third, you need to take care of yourself, and I don't mean that in the sense of rugged individualism, but really take care of the body, mind and spirit on this journey. That then reaches out to those you love, and the people that you meet in the grocery store, and then we start to take care of ourselves as a community."

Learn to Mentor, and Be Mentored



Interview with [Kevin Rowell](#)

NBN: "What is your vision of a post peak planet and how do we get there? Will people have to go through a green phase where everyone uses compact fluorescents, low flush toilets, etc., or can we just jump straight to something more sustainable?"

K. Rowell: "Watching the trend over the past few years and also studying the historical context of architecture,

food, and agriculture, I think we're on a steep learning curve and we have been for the past 100 yrs. We've seen the advent of technology which has made our lives so much more feasible and possible, and I think we feel this collective energy of possibilities. Maybe we're not flying out to the moon on the weekends, but we literally have nearly whatever we want when we want it, and there's a naivety about it. What we're seeing now in our current generation and our young people coming up is that there are consequences to these actions.

There's a looking back. I think the whole natural building movement is part of that reflective process trying to understand where exactly did we step off the path of alignment with our planet. I think it's a learning curve and we're trying things like new technologies that are "ecologically friendly" or "green" and this experimentation phase is huge. If you go back to the 60s and 70s you can look at things like asbestos. Asbestos was claimed to be the be all end all of siding and roof building material for about a twenty year period, and then they decided that actually it causes asbestosis. I look at a lot of the green materials that are out there now and many of them are still based on extractive mining processes, huge transportation infrastructure, and I think we (as a planet) haven't really learned what the lesson is here, but I think we're getting there.

As more and more progressive leaders are pointing to peak oil and the transportation issues involved with our current economic system, we're beginning to learn. Specifically, I think the evolution of the natural building movement is going from

being a part of the mediocrity out there on the outskirts, building their little cob houses, to actually looking at what the systems are that will integrate well with a society that is always looking to develop, always looking to have a feeling of ascension. There's a huge possibility here.

NBN: "Do you think that it could be more of a spiritual or intellectual

development as opposed to putting our energy into making more, better gadgets?

K. Rowell: "I'm a Buddhist practitioner, not to get too philosophical, but we all have to come up together. There's no 'I'm going to get there. I understand sustainability, and I'm going to tell you how it is'. We're going to figure this whole thing out together. I like to play around with technologies that are both ancient and archaic in some circumstances, but also try to not just look within myself for new ways of using them, but inspire others to look at them. I think this inevitably becomes a deeply personal, spiritual process for each of us as we find a way to bring that out, not just in the technological world, but bring that invitation to other people, and invite them to imagine their life as something more sustainable. 'What would it look like for you? What would it look like for my brothers or my sisters or my cousins? What does it look like for my neighbor?' It's been a beautiful transition for me to go from being somebody focused on the technology as though that were the answer, to somebody who is aware of the human level, seeing that it is the human level that is the evolution and not the building part. That comes after.

NBN: "There was already a green revolution that created fossil fuel based agriculture, and now we're going through a new revolution that I think is similarly flawed. The direction is positive, but there's a huge amount of waste generated as each new technology is rapidly developed then discarded. Do you think we can leapfrog this phase and get straight to something truly sustainable?"

K. Rowell: "No, you can't leapfrog the human process. You leave people behind. That is the thing we're facing. We all have to agree that there is a situation here, and we all have to find some way to agree about what parts of that situation we're going to address as a population. People agree that there are problems with architecture, or with building technology, or building science, but we don't have enough agreement yet that chopping down all the trees is a problem.

What we haven't seen is a real waveshift in how people are approaching architecture from the level of the buyer, the person who is commissioning an architect, or the contractor. We haven't seen that village level upheaval where everybody says, 'You know what? I know that this is a problem and I'm going to look for the solution.' I think our biggest task as members of the natural building network and other natural building related organizations is to create that inspiration. Create that opportunity, whatever it may be.

And I don't think we can shorten it. People are going to have to go through a process. If you want to know what human beings are going to do in the next 100 years, all you have to do is look behind you at the past 100 years. Human evolution is very slow to take place, and to use this term of leapfrog, even in a game of leapfrog there's a strategy that applies. You actually have to contemplate who's back you're jumping over, how tall they are... there's some thought process. I think we will see an evolution and we will see a group who are awakening, and the game of leapfrog will transpire if we can agree what the conditions are. For example, as a natural building movement we've been fairly sporadic and ununified. We come together for colloquiums, and there's a lot of talk in the scene of evolving past our own proprietary nature around our ideas. I think that's the biggest hindrance, or has been the biggest hindrance, in the natural building movement as far as I can tell.

There's a beautiful dialogue that's gone on in the past few years. None of this is something that any of us can hold on to. It all comes from the ether

and it's all going to disappear into the ether. I think we're finally getting to a point within our movement where we can get beyond that, but that facilitates the inclusion of the rest of the world, in my heart. And that's when we start to leapfrog. It doesn't mean that you don't go through it. It means that you don't have to go through such a painful period."

NBN: "What do you see as the most significant cultural norm, in the United States, impeding this movement?"

K. Rowell: "The biggest one is tv and the entertainment industry. I'm a couch potato as much as anyone else. I don't own a tv, but when I see one on, it's like some vector in space that I have to look at. We've become a culture of entertainment. We sit passively by while our planet sinks around us. There are so many more ways that we can engage the world with creativity and at the same time enjoy the creativity of others. I'm not the one saying, 'Throw away your tv, and work in the garden all day!' That's a personal decision. But I think that the more we can create a culture that finds and values the entertainment of providing for ourselves, we're just going to have a healthier culture for it. That's all there is. Being outside and working in our gardens. It's a wonderful thing for those people who feel drawn to it. And moreover, cultivating an individual's sense of creativity and giving them the outlet and the empowerment to do something with it is a beautiful thing. The couch potato syndrome, I think, is one of the biggest things in our culture. We are trained on tv to sit back and passively watch as the world happens around us. And we carry that forward in our life. Beyond that, there are a lot of a wonderful visionaries looking at what it is to have top-down or shall we say outsider-down administration of new infrastructure ideas. Looking at, for example, the method of water distribution and the way that we treat wastewater. Those kinds of planning level, administrative level changes, that are finding ways to, on a citywide level, countywide level, address waste water and the redirection of waste streams. They're really the most effective way to create an education route and at the same time an empowering way for people to engage it. As it becomes easy for people to do it, they do it. What are people's capacities for sustainability, shall we say?"

NBN: "We feel that we can't [make a difference], because of the culture that we're brought up in. It seems that it takes a critical mass of people to make a difference. I know when I go into the city it's actually difficult for me to live sustainably; it's actually impossible. Unless I sit on the sidewalk and be homeless, it's impossible to interact at all with the city and not be toxic to the environment."

K. Rowell: "I totally relate. I've lived in rural villages in northern Laos for several years, and I feel like that was the epitome of sustainability. If you want fish, you go out and catch it. You want a house, you dig the soil beneath your feet, and you chop some bamboo down. You chop too much bamboo, and you don't have any next year for re-thatching your roof. The burden of people who have that kind of insight [into the lack of sustainability in the world] is to evolve ourselves beyond the judgment, and when we start to touch that place beyond judging ourselves and others, we start to generate the ideas that create possibilities that create openings.

Another realm for me is that I am an urban dweller. Last year I bought an electric truck. It's not the most serviceable vehicle in the world, it goes 20 miles, it rides at 40 mph, carries 900 pounds, but for a lot of the jobs I do it makes sense. I think that's in line with the concept that we are on the path, and we are figuring it out, and we have to be patient with ourselves, because we didn't start the fire. But I empathize with the catharsis that can

happen when one comes into the city as an abrupt adjunct to living in a more land-based home.”

NBN: “If you had the opportunity to address our nation, what three concrete things would you ask them to do starting tomorrow morning when they woke up?”

K. Rowell: “Look at the sky at least three times a day and once at night.”

NBN: That’s four things! (laughs)

K. Rowell: “Just look to the sky once in a while, then. I think the biggest things are really not physical things, because it’s so different for everybody. You could say ‘change all of your light bulbs’ or you could say ‘recycle more bottles’ or something like that. And there are people out there who [would] benefit from that, but I think that the big question for everyone in the world is, ‘What price are we willing to pay?’ and ‘What does our happiness look like in relationship to the planet?’ Embracing people with that question is the first step.

NBN: “So you’re challenging people to ask these questions of others?”

K. Rowell: “Yeah! You’d be going right over to your neighbor’s door and popping that question first thing in the morning. That would be a little intimidating! I’m talking about creating the opening for dialogue. Look at our peers at City Repair and see what they’ve done over the past few years in Portland. They’ve not just created a dialogue about sustainability, but about community. That has the multiplicative effect of inspiring new innovation.

Everybody wants an answer, right? The answer is to change to fluorescent light bulbs, but three months down the road we decide that they have too much mercury in them so you shouldn’t do that any more. I don’t recommend people do that, but I do recommend that people find ways to engage the question.

The next thing would be to actually engage in mentorship and working with people, because when we work with people who are younger than us in years or in spirit we learn to open our hearts to them and to who they are. In the process we learn how to be mentored. Engage younger people and the next generation of builders or scientists and just empower their vision. It’s huge. The door opens and all of a sudden these questions of sustainability have daily answers.

I think that kind of social conditioning is the biggest thing that we lack in our culture at the moment. It’s all been institutionalized, so we’ve lost our clan mentality where the clan was contributing these ideas and you absorbed them when you took on the clan identity, and you added to it. Instead what we have is ‘Oh yes, I went to Yale, and I have the Yale mentality and that’s my game.’ It’s very silly to me. I’m a contractor. Sometimes I say I’m an artist, sometimes I say I’m an artisan, and sometimes I say I’m a farmer, or sometimes I say I’m a lover, a friend, a brother, an uncle... fill in the blank.

The second part of this is asking the questions of ourselves, ‘What can we do to engage the world and create the world that we want to live in? How can we do that? What does that look like?’

NBN: “Yes, and that comes first before all of the gadgetry that we’re going to need to get out of this mess.”

K. Rowell: “They will respond to the moment and say, ‘OK, I’ve contemplated these things that I should do, these three things that Kevin,

that crazy guy, said. But now I want to know what I can do in a day?' Well, you just go back to those three questions and the answer will arise of its own accord. For some people that will look like recycling, or people will find their own vision in it, and not just from looking in their head, but from engaging in their community. That's really when you start to get the people's power and start to tap into their creativity. That's what I want. I want everyone engaged with this, engaged with me on it, having the dialogue, engaged with their family and friends, their community. That's the way we're going to do it!"

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