

# Tea parties and stinking thinking

It is wonderful that many faces of remarkable intelligence aren't always found on those wearing academic robes or earning advanced degrees. For example, who can deny heartwarming moments of genius by a curious, albeit naïve child or the wisdom just being a grandparent often confers?

However, there is nothing wonderful about the ugly face of abusive intelligence seen when leaders betray our trust by wearing the masks of stinking thinking. It is not wonderful when we on the listening end give such nonsense a pass or do no better in our protests.

The tea party movement is not immune to the stink of bad thinking. Its grass-roots nature without coordinated command and control and significant use of non-edited Internet multimedia platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and blogs compound the problem.

So when I was invited to attend and observe the Vacaville Tea Party Patriot's second meeting and return to speak at its third meeting, I welcomed it. Although I belong to no political group, I admire that one.

I wondered what might happen if they all worked together to verbalize their understanding of man's nature in order to emulate the small leap of logic and faith the Founding Fathers took when holding that the best government embraces and not conspires against man's nature. Furthermore, hoping to foster better com-



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munication skills, I wondered if they would be willing to look at common ways stinking thinking ensnares us.

Tea party folks contend we are at war against ourselves to save America. Thus I wondered if they would listen to Sun Tzu, the 6th century BC strategist

who famously wrote . . . "If you know your enemies and . . . yourself, you will not be imperiled in a hundred battles; if you do not know your enemies but yourself, you will win one and lose one; if you do not know your enemies or yourself, you will be imperiled in every single battle."

Here's what happened.

In no time folks were reaching across tables and time recognizing their bond with our Founders.

They saw man as non perfectible and hard-wired for discernment of good and evil while remaining capable of choosing either. They held man was divinely designed to be productively creative but easily enfeebled by entitlement or addicted to the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain. They understood core talents aren't equally distributed but the right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness are and remain inalienable. They held that government was to protect us from ourselves and sustain our freedom, and it isn't spelled governness.

Establishing that, group members eagerly confessed to and gave examples of some common masks of stinking thinking such as

exaggeration, lumping items together unfairly, hasty generalizations, attacks against the person instead of their argument, shaming, relabeling topics, emotional appeals to avoid contrary evidence, posturing as an expert, and more.

They understood two crucial Founding Father messages: how you define men determines best governance and stinking thinking makes thriving together on an uncontrollable planet all the more difficult.

As our time concluded we seemed less concerned with who had what letters after their name and more concerned about communicating effectively. The warmth, humor and sense of family (complete with weird uncles) were also unmistakable.

My mentor once told me when building a team the greatest compliment one can pay is to be complementary to the team. The notion of a nation built to complement the nature of an imperfect man is difficult and challenging but seems an inevitably successful formula.

So in this season of faith, giving and rebirth, I give my thanks to a group of fellow Americans who took a little time to untie the rhetoric that bound them, clear the air that clouded sound thinking and reflect on the reasons this nation makes it all worthwhile.

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