How Much More Could We Accomplish
– And How Much More Would We Enjoy It –
If We Would Build Better Face-to-Face Relationships?

by Glen Anderson

You and I are part of the overall progressive movement and also a variety of specific movements for peace, social justice, the climate, etc. We work hard on the issues as individuals and through many organizations, so I’m always looking for ways to strengthen the organizations we work with.

A few years ago I read a book about using cutting-edge insights into quantum physics, etc., to provide fresh insights into organizational dynamics. The author quotes a friend who told her, ***“Power in organizations is the capacity generated by relationships.”***

This approach can make sense – especially if we want our movement to be sustainable. Let’s consider how we might strengthen our relationships both within and across our various progressive organizations and at the local community level overall.

This means getting face-to-face more often and finding other person-to-person ways to communicate and share. For decades some bold activist movements have used “affinity groups” to develop close, trusting working relationships. Wouldn’t it be exciting to have small numbers of local people developing strong relationships with each other and exploring how to put our best values into action?

Nearly a decade ago when I helped an issue-based organization conduct strategic planning, several members expressed interest in convening small group gatherings monthly for those persons within the organization who want to support and strengthen themselves while working for the issue that has brought them together. Small monthly gatherings could provide open discussion of personal reactions and feelings related to their issue – and to sustain their effectiveness and humanity over the long haul.

For a few years a local multi-issue organization brought people together for annual “Summer Socials” – simply sharing each other’s friendship and interactions while enjoying good food served on real plates, real silverware, and real cloth napkins. It was a lot of work for a few volunteers to organize, but these events delighted our participants. They attracted some of our regular people, additional people on our mailing list who had not been attending our other events, and also some totally new people. The emphasis was on connecting face-to-face with really wonderful food and well-engineered events designed to meet our social and organizational needs.

At another time, a savvy friend wrote to me, “Perhaps before we can take meaningful actions, we need to develop true relationships based on time, experience, and trust. These things will happen when people talk or work or sit, or talk together as equals. It's the eye-to-eye factor that makes relationships so powerful. We see it at work all the time. When people in a neighborhood get to know each other they are willing to offer help.”

She continued that the local group in which we both volunteered “has attracted a fullness of heart-full people, but we are still short of the means to develop the relationships that lead to works for peace and justice. People respond to smiles more than words.” She urged more face-to-face connections.

So how could any of our progressive issue-based groups bring people face-to-face and develop better face-to-face friendships (resulting in working relationships that will be more productive and more satisfying)?

Even without assuming that any specific issue-oriented work might arise from these face-to-face gatherings, how much would people appreciate the dynamic of getting people together face-to-face to build and strengthen relationships? How could we satisfy our people and help our local progressive organizations become more humanly sustainable?

What do YOU think? How could we move ahead?