

The circumstances of my becoming your president were unorthodox, to say the least. I was newly-returned to Kutztown and had spent my first months back in town working for the Obama campaign. I wasn't involved with the KADC, except peripherally helping out with a few projects. I started coming to your meetings toward the end of the year and worked on the committee planning the holiday party. I agreed to become the president if you voted me in, but I had developed a case of shingles that kept me from attending the holiday party and the meeting where you elected me. As a result, many of you knew very little about me when I became your president. For instance, you knew nothing of my experience working with groups like yours. I spent my career as a trouble-shooter for corporate libraries and other organizations. I was always brought in to fix a big problem, usually a personnel matter or a budget crisis or a perception problem or a problem moving a project forward, or, usually, a combination of problems. So I was always the new person/leader just as I am the new person/president here. I was always recognized for my ability to turn a situation around. And I'm seeing the same dynamics at play now that I saw in every situation I worked on then.

Organizations get stuck. They always go through a honeymoon period when they're new and excited and passionate about what they're doing, but eventually the bloom is off the rose and the fighting begins. Eventually, things become uncomfortable to the point that some subjects can never be broached, resentments build, and the relationship becomes dysfunctional. And, just as it's a mistake to think that a new child will save a failing marriage, it's a mistake to think that bringing new people into an organization will be its salvation. In both cases, the relationship can only be saved by the people who were already there. I may have been recognized for my abilities, but the success was never mine. It always belonged to the groups I was working with who were willing to address their own issues.

New people can't save an organization, but the idea of new people can. In other words, the key to being able to save an organization like this one is to envision a KADC meeting where you don't know a single person in the room because they haven't been born yet. Put another way, the key is to structure an organization so that it can survive and enjoy a long life. Here are the things you need to do to make that possible.

- 1) When you're setting up a small business, the goal is to create a turn-key operation, the idea being that you need to be able to hand responsibility over to others, transfer knowledge, and train new people methodically. And you need to establish trust. The better job you do at creating a turn-key operation, the easier it will be for you to trust others to fulfill their responsibilities. The previous executives of the club have been a great resource for the current executives. Nevertheless, organizations that haven't gone through the process of becoming turn-key operations don't realize how much was never written down, how much memory was lost, and how much was taken for granted.
- 2) The organization needs to welcome new people, new ideas, and even the notion of revisiting old ideas. That's especially important when new people are also in leadership positions, as is the case here. We weren't here when the club formed. We weren't a part of all the great things you did. We didn't see how well you worked together. We didn't go through the battles you fought when you didn't work so well together. We will never be able to appreciate what it was like because all of that is relegated to the past. While we all want to respect the club's history and preserve its character, we also need to recognize that the club will never be exactly as it was, and that we need to be even more concerned with the club's future, if indeed we want it to survive. I know there's a lot of sensitivity around the subject of endorsements to the point that we can't even discuss discussing have a discussion about them without all hell breaking loose. Please try to understand that, while you see endorsements as the third rail of the KADC, I see things differently from where I sit. I have experienced resistance to almost every change I have

proposed. I couldn't believe the fevered reaction I got from doing something as simple as mistakenly scheduling the first business meeting I ran for 6:00 instead of 7:00. From where I sit, you have a hard time discussing any change. I've even been warned about words I can't use, like the "P" word. This goes directly to my point that you are the only ones who can "unstick" yourselves. Unless you can accept that new people are going to bring with them new ideas and question old assumptions, all we can do is provide life-support.

- 3) You need to find a way to work together constructively. No topic should be too hot to handle. No one should sit on the sidelines and snipe. Nobody should be excluded from the conversation. People have left the organization because of these things. New people stay away. This behavior just brings the group down. And I believe it has driven the group into dysfunction. There are so many things you want to avoid saying or doing to avoid the resulting reaction that I find there are very few things you *can* say and do. It makes it impossible for anyone trying to lead.
- 4) You need to participate and encourage others to. The same handful of people do virtually all of the work for the club. That's bad for the club and bad for everyone in it. People are much more likely to want an organization to succeed when they're active participants in it. We really don't have a committee structure in place. And, to the extent that we have committees at all, they're committees of one. That needs to change. Surely, some of the current lack of participation is due to the fact that you're exhausted from your work in the past. But I'm concerned that some of it is due to the cumulative effect of the group dynamics I've already discussed. Don't get me wrong – I have been grateful for all of the support I've been shown by the vast majority of the members, but I've got to be honest that it's not always easy to participate in this club. People are much more inclined to participate if the organization is sensitive to what they're contributing and how they're contributing it. Everyone's opinion should be valued. Everyone's contribution should be valued.
- 5) You need to remember what the organization is about. The more you are affected by the issues I've already raised, the less able you are to fulfill your own mission, which reads as follows:

*The Kutztown Area Democratic Club will act as a gathering place for political activities, programs and educational events so that individuals may develop a sense of membership and connection with the progressive democratic movement and its candidates.*

- *Will work with residents and progressive local organizations to create a community that supports legislation and elected officials dedicated to civil and labor rights, environmental protection, gender and reproductive rights, the protection of religious liberty and the separation of church and state.*
- *Will promote the right of all people to live in peace, free from racism, war, discrimination and institutional domination.*

Respectfully,

Karen Feridun

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