

Copenhagen Speech, June 22nd, 2016

Part 1:

As some of you know, I will soon be retiring from my position as chief executive officer of University Settlement, finishing a 36 year history with this organization. For the past 16 years, I have also served as Chief Executive for The Door, a large youth development agency serving, primarily, at risk young adults ages 12-24. And in a few more months, in Berlin, I will end my role as President of the International Federation of Settlements and Neighborhood Centers, a position I've had for six years. So this is a sad but fascinating time of transition in my life, with many things ending, perhaps a few things beginning. This is, therefore, a special honor for me to be asked to speak at the conference.

So let's begin with the obvious question you probably all want to ask and for which I have absolutely no ability to understand or explain. How did a person like Donald Trump get to this point of becoming the candidate of the Republican Party, challenging Hillary Clinton for the Presidency of the most powerful and wealthy country in the world? I can give two explanations, both of them speculative. First, I am from New York City, which as everyone knows is not really part of the United States. We live on an island that sits somewhere between the Americas and the rest of the world. We certainly have no idea how people think once you cross the Hudson River and go listen to people in the other 49 States. So my first explanation is that people living in the other States are just plain stupid, misinformed, have no interest in facts or democracy or what's in our Constitution and are, as we label them, angry old white men.

But, wait a moment, Trump is born and raised in New York, so in some way he has what are now being labelled by right wing republicans as "New York Values." But he clearly does not

represent what we think of as the classic New York type. He is a misogynist, a racist, an attack dog always ready to criticize and denigrate, generally a person devoid of character and any moral compass. Apparently, there are some New Yorkers who think like Trump...New York City is, after all, a unique composite of over 8 million people. But most of us are embarrassed and frightened by what has happened. To be sure, New York will never vote for him in the November election. I should note that Hillary Clinton is also from New York, so this is the first time in American political history that both candidates are from New York. My first explanation is just plain disbelief!

The second explanation is that Trump is our American version of a political character representing a political era where many of the politicians and parties here in Europe and elsewhere are characterized by common, very worrisome traits: isolationism versus openness, confrontation versus integration, racism versus opportunity, anger instead of collaboration, disconnection in place of engagement, ethnocentrism versus integration. Ignorance, performance, and theater now wins out over thoughtful discussion and debate. Attacking your critics rather than arguing with them, using language and statements completely disassociated from reality, has become the norm and not the exception...which must remind us of times past. There are no facts, only opinions; we tend to read and listen to and hang out with only people of similar belief structures and prejudices, so there is no chance of coming together. Our methods of communication do not allow for depth of understanding, even for reflection. Social media, perhaps the greatest vehicle for wide spread democracy in recent decades, is just as capable of being the most destructive force against democracy since truth, honesty, the belief in transparent discourse, has become irrelevant and outside our functioning attention span.

A very interesting recent article I read which drew on Plato as an inspiration argues that what is happening now is a logical outcome of the evolution of widespread democracy. The nature of democracy as it ages is to allow for too much freedom, too many choices, too little judgment, too much relativism rather than absolute principles, too much emphasis on situational ethics rather than core principles of community, too much open feeling and emotion and narcissism rather than reason, empiricism and public spiritedness, honest discourse replaced by loud disinformation and abuse which people seem to enjoy. Could this be reminiscent of historic events when good people sat back and let bad things happen? We must remember that presumably democratic processes do not always result in what we would consider democratic outcomes. Democracies are also capable of producing hatred.

So I have no answer for Trump except to hope that he will alienate so many people that he loses big time. And I am not informed enough to comment on what is happening in Austria or Hungary or any other European country which is slowly but surely drifting to the right both in terms of the general population and the selection of elected representatives. No grand statements today, and no recommendations except for one. **Silence, passivity, acceptance DOES NOT WORK!** We can't accept as normal what is NOT normal, though we have all done so in the past. But now I will turn, briefly, to a more personal, individual level of discourse.

No one would ever describe me as a religious person, certainly not in the formal sense of following rituals. I can't remember the last time I participated in any organized religious service or experience except an occasional holiday with family which reflects cultural tradition more than doctrine. But I find myself drawn back to some basic moral or ethical principles which I might have learned from my family but more likely came from my academic background in classical philosophy and my subsequent educational and work experiences. When asked to do

this talk, I decided to step back into my past, first to reread Kierkegaard, actually just a few of his easier to penetrate writings, which I had not done in over forty years. And I pressed myself to recall many afternoons in college spent with a friend and his rabbi, reading page by page over the course of a year selected works by Martin Buber.

How do I translate this now? I have never been especially motivated by outside rewards, never needed or searched for confirmation or praise or recognition, never got caught up in competition with other organizations or leaders. Shocking to many of my staff back home, I have also never been driven by calls for equality or equity or social justice, as those terms are commonly understood as social abstractions. Whatever I have done has come out of a personal conversation, a personal dialectic, a personal battle, between me and whatever inner or outer force was challenging me to live my life in a certain way. This is my simplistic interpretation of Martin Buber, who was not that easy to fully understand. I could not label this as a conversation between me and God which required a level of belief I did not possess. So it was me talking to me within a larger philosophical or religious context I was not that interested in or capable of pursuing.

For Kierkegaard, this was about philosophy, not faith...though I am not a good enough reader of these texts to see any distinctions he was trying to create between the two approaches to understanding. Clearly, however, ethical constructs had to possess a universal element and not succumb to what we now label situational ethics. Unfortunately for all of us, again Kierkegaard, “life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards.” Which means our value or ethical choices must be made or are set very early, even if not understood or explainable until much later.

Of course, now that I am older and retiring, this is a statement with which I completely agree. I should note that the only character who in fact lives backward in time is Merlin, the magician in the story of King Arthur, who could foretell both the glory and failure of the Knights of the Round Table because he already knew how the story would play out. Please note that the virtuous Knights did not survive for long as jealousy and competition and power overcame love and loyalty and civic virtue, which is probably not the message that Merlin wanted to convey. Again, I have never been satisfied by successes or accomplishments. Expanding programs, doing big real estate deals, growing budgets has not been what drives me, though that may appear to be my prima legacy. For Kierkegaard, “pleasure disappoints, possibility never.” Or as another great philosopher, Bob Dylan said....in his early years....”there’s no success like failure and failure is no success at all.” I am driven and motivated by what I have Not accomplished.

I have, therefore, reduced my work ethic and personal motivation to a very simply, direct position: the world was made broken, and it was my job, my purpose, in whatever very small way I could manage, to change the world. Not fix it, obviously, but perhaps make minor repairs along the way, joined with all of you in mutual supportive repair making. Individually, it might not amount to much, but collectively, we might actually fix something which went wrong or was badly designed.

I am very happy to be here, but I still think more about what I have not done than what I have. There is no escape from this reality.

Part 2

When I recently met with Annika in New York City, I asked for advice on what to say tonight. She responded that many people had read my book, How the Other Sector Survives, and that I should just highlight some key points and maybe add a few stories. I will NOT try to remember what I wrote, and will stick to new thoughts and ideas. The part of my book which emphasizes the importance of strategic thinking is still valid, perhaps even more so today as the world gets more complex and the problems we face seem more intractable. Thinking strategically in an ever demanding environment is essential for success, especially as our models for survival have evolved. There is not much I would change in my thinking regarding strategic planning except for one very important variable. The first step in any planning process is to “define the issue or problem” which will be the focus of your attention. What appears to be a very straightforward simply opening step has become almost impossible given some of the points I’ve already made in this talk. People can’t reach agreement on facts, or issues, on what’s right or wrong with society, or establishing any point of commonality on how to move forward. We no longer have shared languages or meanings and, as noted, no longer even want to hear what the other side has to say. Polarizing positions are getting worse, making honest problem solving almost impossible. So the changes I would emphasize are twofold. First, don’t even attempt to reach consensus on how to define problems or issues. Just do the best you can and be able to defend your position. And second, always be thinking about implementation and what your most important goals are. Be ready to move ahead forcefully even if there is a lack of complete clarity or a greater possibility of being partly wrong in your actions. Sometimes. This is about power and influence rather than consensus. The refugee/migrant problem is only the most recent, large scale example in which every country, every stakeholder, every power player, has a completely different

perspective on what needs to be done and what role it is to play, a situation with which you are far more familiar than I am. Every country, and communities within each country, acts on principles of self-interest rather than a shared sense of purpose or vision.

Since I live forward, not backwards, and mostly forgot what I wrote, I will focus on what I thought was the more entertaining part of the book, which covered subjects still missing from most of the management literature because I write and think like a practitioner and not a researcher or scholar.

I will therefore add to my list of ideas, issues, managerial tips, which have either been strengthened or have become more obvious in my last few years of this work. I have eight new items for the list.

- (1) Get more angry in your work and in your personal lives as you get older, but be constructively angry (not like all the angry white misogynist racist males supporting Trump). Anger shows you're alive, that you're thinking, that you believe something must be different....and that the world needs to be challenged. There is a generally held myth – with some truth to it - that as people get older, assume more responsible positions, worry more about their own economic security, they get more conservative. Fight this tendency, even at some risk. As I describe when defining strategic planning, the key factor in planning is how one defines the problem in the first place. If complacency or popular opinion or political correctness...or what your boss tells you, defines the problem, we're in a whole lot of trouble. And this does not mean only being angry at other people or things external to you. It should be anger about the state of the world. Anger about the role you are playing in the world.

- (2) Think in full sentences and not in the minimal number of digital characters which now defines most forms of social media. I literally mean, FULL SENTENCES. As many educators have said, if learning was so easy, we would all be a lot smarter. But most of the world is not smarter, maybe because we no longer need to do heavy analysis, or engage in deeper thinking, or be more persuasive and articulate in our argument structures. Full sentences means to me that you have thought through what you need to say and what you need to do, and have utilized the more disciplined rigorous parts of your intellect. Use full sentences not just in writing, but in speaking as well. I recently read an article written by a linguistics professor who noted that periods, those punctuation marks at the end of sentences, are vanishing from popular use because they are not needed in tweets or texts or whatever. Don't let this happen to you, or to your children who are even more susceptible to this evolution in communication.
- (3) Spend even more time learning about the other side, your opponents. And yes, I've said this before, but this has become more important than ever as our world gets more polarized. Increasingly, we only read what we're supposed to read, talk to the people we agree with, listen to the media we support, agree with the policies we're told to agree with or think we believe, even socialize with people like us. This is all dangerous practice if you expect to make the world a better, safer place. And I don't especially care where on the social political spectrum you place yourself. I am not necessarily asserting one side is right and the other is wrong....though if you ask me questions later in the evening I might give you a more personal answer. I am asserting that you must understand multiple perspectives, respect that there are multiple views on almost any topic, that a somewhat legitimate case can be made for what appear to be diametrically opposed

positions. First, **understand** this as an intellectual and professional necessity. And then go back to my first point, which is to get angry and fight for what you believe. You will be a better fighter when you know what's coming at you.

(4) No matter who is leading the government at the moment, spend some of your time and energy opposing them! You represent the people, not elected officials, or bureaucrats, or even your bosses. Now I know none of you wants to lose your job or damage your career, but a little bit of resistance or skepticism never hurt anyone. I will digress for a quick story. When I was 18, I worked at the residential youth camp run by University Settlement. I was a counselor for kids 9 and 10 years of age. At the end of the summer, my supervisor had to write a review of my performance. He noted that even though I had grown in my work with the kids, and was sensitive and supportive enough to win their trust, my BIG problem was that I had difficulty listening to or responding to authority figures. I resisted and resented their interference and didn't trust their expertise. Well, here I am fifty years later, and apparently I have learned nothing! My 18 year old self never quite got buried with age, so I am giving you the same advice. Behave when you need to behave, but remember that the authority people have must be earned, not simply granted.

(5) Never buy the argument that "volunteerism" or "building on peoples' core strengths" is the same as or a substitute for "professionalism" or "substantive support," even if they are equally important in our communities. This may sound a bit cynical, but if everyone was capable of doing what they need to do to live a better life without concrete directed support, the world would not be in the shape it currently is. I may be over-simplifying this position, but I have now visited several European countries where the popular

political mantra is to do “more with less” by essentially returning to the days when people did more for themselves utilizing minimal government or external support. First of all, those good old days never existed, and second, the issues faced by too many people today are far more complicated than can be resolved by such a presumably virtuous position. Before the various forms of European socialism or American social welfare programs existed, there was a vast social support infrastructure systems provided by religious institutions, privately funded charities, and even direct public programs! This is not the time to go into all the variable which have created more intractable social issues to address, e.g. family structure, changes in the economy, changes in life span, and so on, but I believe it is clearly wrong to believe that our future relies on further withdrawal from publically financed communal obligations.

(6) Never let policies adopted in a time of fiscal or political crisis become doctrine for all time. This is a follow-up to my previous point. For example, cutting back on social welfare policies because the emphasis has shifted to building and nurturing individual strengths and responsibilities is NOT a philosophical or policy position, it is an economic strategy. Too often, the short term necessities of economic pressures give rise to what appear to be sensible public polices, but be careful of whether this is a disguise for more critical substantive changes in social values and priorities.

(7) Returning to my philosophical baggage, this time drawn from Machiavelli, it is sometimes better to be feared rather than loved if a choice is to be made. I have frequently used this famous line in the courses I teach in my unsuccessful attempt to present a better image for Machiavelli. But there seems to be little question for me that to be a good manager in the non-profit or human service sector, you may need make

unpopular or difficult decisions and be less concerned about the potential side effects on people you make like or dislike. Such is the burden of leadership.

- (8) Even in countries more openly socialistic than the United States, you should not absolve yourself from PERSONAL investment in fixing the world nor rely on government to do what's necessary, either from a financial or service delivery perspective. The philanthropic movement in Europe is not nearly as sophisticated or influential as it is in America, but in fact, great private wealth is generated in every country even if it is not at all transparent how this money is earned or to what extent it is given away to public charitable purposes. I recently read that five of the ten wealthiest women in the world, all multi-billionaires, come from European families. But I don't think I've ever heard one of my comrades at an IFS conference tell me that they received support from one of these families. But I need to make another point ere as well. When I recently met with a friend from one of the German settlement houses, I asked him if we could expect some of his peers to contribute scholarship funds to send people to the Berlin conference, as a number of us in New York were doing. He said absolutely NOT. In his opinion, social workers felt that government organizations or the State should pay these expenses, and that there was no personal reason or obligation to contribute one's own money. I found this to be a very sad statement. On a personal note, since you may think America is very different than here, I pay about 50% of my salary in taxes, health care, and social security payments for when I retire, and funding my own retirement plan.

Part 3

Finally, I want to turn to the subject of the future of the International Federation of Settlements and Neighborhood Centers since I assume the main reason why I have been invited here is because of my work with The Federation. I went to my first international conference almost twenty-five years ago in Curacao, an experience which taught me a great deal and gave me an appetite for engagement. The neighborhood centers on that Island were, essentially, extensions of the oil industry which controlled almost all economic development and cultural activities available to the workers. This is what we would label “benevolent paternalism.” But the key lesson learned, which would be reinforced time and again, is that in every country the model might be different, but the core values which characterize our work were much the same.

After Curacao so long ago, in an order I can't remember, I participated in conferences and visited cities in Canada, England, Holland, Finland, Sweden, Hungary, Rumania, France, Austria, Russia and many more. In some locations, settlements and neighborhood centers were more like extensions of government agencies, deliverers of a selected group of services defined by and determined by those agencies. In other countries, though funded by government, these centers were more independent, struggling as we do to provide whatever range of programs could be supported with professionals or volunteers. In a few cases, the model was expanded to include efforts in community economic development, production and operation of housing for lower income and working class families, and all kinds of methods for social entrepreneurship and political engagement. And, of course, in America we compete in the marketplace with non-profits and for-profit entities in the delivery of a very wide range of services and activities as we have grown in scale, complexity and managerial sophistication. At my final meeting with my Board of Directors, held just two weeks ago, when some members felt compelled to say nice

things about my long tenure, one said the following: that he always knew, deep down inside, that I was a CAPITALIST, even if I was running a settlement house. It was meant as a compliment.

But I did not mean to spend time on a superficial survey of settlements around the globe. I want to focus on YOU and your future obligations with IFS.

For a number of reasons, the central office for IFS has always been located in the same city – in fact, in the same organization – as the President of the organization. For more than twenty years, headquarters for IFS has been either in Canada or in the United States, most recently at University Settlement for six years. I am not certain how this came to be, except that I believe this occurred for two reasons: first, many of the activists willing to be engaged with international issues were in America and were willing to take on the work; second, some of the American settlements were big and strong enough to financially under-write the work of IFS. On a personal level, I distinctly remember at a conference on Toronto getting into heated arguments with the Heads of Toynbee Hall and Oxford House in London – both individuals long since replaced. I thought their views on the role of settlements was myopic, way too paternalistic and completely unwilling to engage in a more competitive marketplace. These arguments led to me join in the IFS Board, and eventually getting elected as President in New York City when we were also celebrating our 125th Anniversary.

This is about to change. The next President, to be officially elected in September, will be coming from a European country. This is a very important shift in influence and engagement. The so-called Euro-Group of IFS, which had some difficulties a number of years back, is now very well organized, has many fully engaged and supportive local and national organizational members, many of which are playing prominent roles in their national social agendas Equally important, organizations and nations are partnering in order to pursue resources available through the

European Union. These resources are not to conduct local programs, but instead are focused on the core objectives of IFS: to promote exchanges of staff and exchanges of best professional practices across national boundaries. This is our primary purpose and what we do best. Many of the staff at University Settlement and The Door have participated in these programs, and hardly a week goes by when we don't have visitors from one of our European friends. The Euro-group accomplishments happen to come at a time when, in America, it has become more challenging to get States or cities to cooperate with each other or learn from each other, and though Settlements may be prospering as individual organizations, collectively they have a lot of work to do to get to the same level of collaboration.

Perfect time for a change....and a perfect time for every one of you to find a way to be personally and professionally involved, which is another of my key messages tonight. In recent years, thousands of new members have been added to the IFS roster. In Great Britain, LOCALITY brought in over a thousand new members, representing a fascinating mix of traditional settlements and what we would call community development organizations. After years of disengagement, the French Federation of Neighborhood Centers, with over 1000 members, also joined IFS. Many other organizations have also signed on and have begun to play active roles. The current leadership and emerging leadership of our movement is impressive and reassuring. If willingness to participate and lead is any measure for success, the European story could not be better.

Another important measure of success is that IFS has been willing and able to agree on important policy positions which we have provided to the United Nations and other international groups and which we have, when appropriate, submitted to local governments. Some of you know that IFS has the highest standing available to Non-Governmental Agencies (NGOs) issued by the

UN, and in recent years we have taken almost full advantage of this opportunity. I say “almost” because there are still opportunities for you and others to get engaged in UN related activities here in Europe. These policy positions have been issued on the subjects of human trafficking, racism, violence against women, response to natural disasters, and others.

That’s the good news. And now for the more pessimistic news, and I choose the word “pessimism” carefully. Do we have the desire or the appetite or moral compass to define and take on the big challenges confronting all of us today? Some days, pessimism turns to optimism, as most of Europe responded in an amazing way to the unimaginable refugee and migration tide coming out of the Middle East, Asia and Africa – or, as another quite different example, how much of the world finally took notice of global warming and climate change and decided (maybe) to take the measures necessary to avoid this crisis. There was a time, in America when we thought it was our national obligation, maybe even our God-given purpose, to lead the world to democracy and economic security. The so-called American Project, emerging out of World War II, fit our image as the global leader, the global protector of a way of life, a universalistic perspective that had a philosophical and somewhat messianic fervor. Occasional misdirected regional wars, or failed international efforts, and even occasional economic disasters, did not persuade us that this self-image was wrong...until now. Whether Hillary or Donald wins, there is a strong current to pull back, to let others do their own work, too use our military or economic power more prudently. Many of us are fearful of this isolationist or protectionist positioning because we know where it has led in the past, but it is s a growing issue.

So here in Europe, what is it to be, and what small but important role does IFS play in this power game? I raise this concern not as a politician, but as a practitioner. I believe now more than ever, that IFS must greatly expand its role as communicator, as an agent for honest and transparent

sharing, as a vehicle for getting back to the human scale and away from all the shouting and sloganeering. We have heard countless stories of settlements and neighborhood centers throughout Europe helping, again on a very human scale, to address the immediate and longer terms needs of migrants and refugees, even as their governments move more towards policies which are dangerous and unacceptable on the surface. Isolating refugees in separate camps and communities, cutting the resources needed to fully assimilate strangers in a new land, doing deals to limit free movement of people for political or economic ends, limiting opportunities and civil rights, is not what we're about. IFS must take positions, and actions, against politically expedient government decisions. Right wing parties, gaining strength in essentially every European country, must be challenged and opposed. Reinforcing boundaries and restricting borders is a reversal of human progress, not a vision for the future. Passivity, avoidance, allowing the abnormal to become the normal, are strategies proven to be wrong throughout history.

So I'm back to my basic arguments which reappear throughout this talk. Be engaged. Play a personal and professional role in fixing the world. Don't let anyone tell you that you can't do what you need to do. I don't care where in your organization you happen to be placed. Everyone has a job to do so just go do it.

And why do I say all this now, pretty much at the end of my career. Primarily because I became a grandfather for the first time eight months ago. As I have made clear all my life, nothing has been more important to me than my family, my children, and now my new grandchild. I would do anything for them, but doing for them is not sufficient to say I have led a good life. Everyone must paint on a bigger canvass. I've had mine, you each get to choose yours. So I will close not by referencing my own work, but by quoting from a singer I enjoy: "In the end, only kindness matters."