

Governance & Commerce: collision or cooperation?

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Recently, I read an article at [Fortune.com](#) about how Uber consumers pressured CEO Kalanick to resign from President Trump's so-called "CEO kitchen cabinet." Further, it implies others may follow suit. While I understand and empathize with Mr. Kalanick's situation (#deleteuber), I am concerned about the bigger picture here and I suggest further resignations are not constructive.

When President Obama was first elected, much was said about his practice of "keep your friends close, and your enemies closer." In fact, many praised this practice and declared it wisdom. Here is just [one article](#) on this subject referring to his first 100 days in office... This practice said that President Obama valued open dialog with those who had views that differed from his own. In fact, over his eight-year presidency, President Obama made a practice of engagement with those of differing views including Cuba and Iran - a practice his supporters applauded.

Fast forward to the now two-week-old presidency of Mr. Trump. Many who supported President Obama on this practice of engagement (the press included) are deriding it and demanding that CEOs who engage in dialog with President Trump – should be boycotted. This is self-defeating for us all.

Our nation already suffers from the disease of #uncivilcancer where we actively, and without civility, disengage from the practice of meaningful dialog that seeks to find solutions. Much, of late, has been written about the absence of civil discourse in the realm of politics.

I personally view this practice of intentionally polarizing communications as our greatest societal cancer. We have become a nation that oversimplifies issues and talks at the other side not with the other side. We have devolved from civil discourse where we respect the other person (but not necessarily their position) – to a place where we consistently and completely demonize those holding views of the 'other side' while deifying our own. We toss out labels like 'hater' with careless abandon. I know lots of people on 'both sides' who are not haters by any definition of that term. And I am sure we can agree that none of us is a demon or a diety, so let's dispense with that immediately. For the most part, such practices have historically been limited in depth and breadth to the realms of politics, religion and entertainment (including sports).

Now this cancer is bleeding over into commerce as well – and that is why I am writing about this, here, on LinkedIn. I am appealing to all businesspeople. It doesn't matter where you hail from, or with what personal label you self-identify, including what “side of the aisle” you stand on – this is our UNITED States of America and we, collectively, must contain this cancer or it will destroy us. Commerce is one of the key backbones from which our national strength emanates. We, as business people, value pragmatism and solutions. We value outcomes. If we allow this metaphoric cancer to invade our metaphoric mind and limbs – we risk being unable to successfully engage in commerce, and that outcome hurts us all.

Just because I choose to engage in a dialogue with someone with a different view than my own – doesn't make me a 'turncoat' or a 'traitor' to my 'side'. It doesn't mean I support them or their views. It means that the only chance I have of persuading them over to my point of view – is through civil discourse, and by listening. (gasp!) I may actually see a glimmer of wisdom in their point of view - if I am indeed of an open mind. Personally, I suspect both sides would learn that things are not so binary. We would all learn that there are fractions greater than zero and less than one - that are still constructive. Civil communications is the only way we have of reaching an outcome we can all live with. A practice of disengagement (or demonization or deification) is not constructive or productive. No, the only way for all of us to move forward, is together – somehow; and I am willing to explore how that might happen - are you?

We, as the business community, must remain engaged in dialog with those who do not share our views of governance, including Presidents, Governors, Legislators, Justices and our constituents – particularly when that governance does or could impact our businesses and, thus, our customers and shareholders. Like it or not, engagement is the simplest and best remedy for this cancer of disengagement. Not talking with the opposing views, will only further divide and polarize us. Perhaps I'm missing something, but I fail to see how that is helpful. What is called for here, is engaged leadership by the business community. not the opposite.

Of course, you are free to disagree with this point of view. I only ask that, if you do, then let us have a meaningful – and civil – conversation about it so that I can understand your point of view – and you can understand mine. From this point of mutual understanding (notice I didn't say agreement) – we can begin to find a way to work together – assuming we cannot find common ground – which is still a better outcome.

Governance and commerce can choose a path toward collision or toward cooperation – I favor cooperation. In life, politics and business, sometimes cooperation is harder to achieve than collision – but far more productive and less damaging. Let's try to work together which means being in the same room and listening as well as speaking.