

## 'Making friends with discomfort' Blue Jean Nation

Written by Mike McCabe, Blue Jean Nation

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ALTOONA, WI - Several decades ago three young students journeyed through dusty rural California in hopes of meeting famed migrant farm worker organizer Cesar Chavez. Once they found Chavez, they sat with him and asked, "Cesar, how do you organize?" Chavez replied, "well, first you talk to one person, then you talk to another person, then you talk to another person...."

The students assumed Chavez misunderstood their question and clarified that they wanted to know how mass movements are built. Chavez repeated, "first you talk to one person, then you talk to another."

The key to making change is as elementary as Chavez's secret of organizing.

It comes down to discomfort.

Comfortable people don't move. They stay where they are because they are comfortable where they are. To make them move, they have to be made uncomfortable.

It's like the basic law of physics . . . and object at rest will remain at rest, unless some force makes it move. A corrupt political establishment will stay corrupt and a failing political system will keep failing us, unless some force makes the powers-that-be change their ways.

That force is discomfort.

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Living in interesting times is said to be the Chinese curse. The curse we're living is uncomfortable times. Anxiety and fear about the country's future are running high among tens of millions of Americans. With deindustrialization and economic globalization, the only thing that seems certain for the time being is uncertainty. Official reassurances that unemployment is falling and the economy is recovering mean nothing to someone who once earned \$25 an hour working in a factory before that work was exported overseas and the best available replacement job pays maybe \$11 or \$12 an hour. For someone whose standard of living has been cut in half, claims of economic recovery are an abstraction. For them, the American Dream appears to be in the process of being downsized. And worse yet, their gut tells them their children will probably have it harder than they've had it.

The discomfort this reality produces has fueled a reactionary, authoritarian populism that gave rise to the Tea Party movement and paved a route to the White House for Donald Trump. Back in March, *Washington Post* columnist E.J. Dionne [asked the question](#), "can a moderate left beat a radical right?" His question was answered on November 8.

American now stands at a crossroads. We can take a divisive, backward-looking, destructive path. Or we can choose a uniting, forward-looking, constructive route. For the moment, a large segment of the population appears to favor the former for lack of a well-defined and compelling alternative. That better road won't be paved until people who are disturbed by the direction we're currently traveling get uncomfortable enough to move.

Those alarmed by the actions of the radical right are going to have to warm up to agitation and provocation. They are going to have to make friends with discomfort.

— *Mike McCabe*