Opinion: Cooperation needed to get Tahoe moving

By Tom Wendell

Why does it take a calamity like a natural or human caused disaster to bring out the best in human nature?

The question somewhat answers itself – because that's human nature. We as a species appear to be hard wired to put aside concerns for our own safety and well being during disasters. Witness the brave Japanese workers at a radiation leaking power plant, selfless Good Samaritan rescuers working to free earthquake victims from under a collapsed freeway or our own response to the Angora Fire.



Tom Wendell

Scenes like these have been unfolding all over the world with increasing frequency, yet collectively we seem unwilling to apply these altruistic sensibilities to avoid a slow motion disaster in the making. Acknowledging that biochemical responses like adrenalin affect our behavior in emergency situations, it still baffles me why we don't marshal our considerable cerebral capabilities to act decisively on commonly recognized issues that are slowly but inexorably deteriorating into emergencies. Much like the fable of the frog who will jump to safety if placed in boiling water but will slowly succumb in water that is gradually heated to a boil, we as a community are metaphorically sitting in water

that has been gradually heating for decades and is about to reach the boiling point.

Instead of responding to deteriorating economic and environmental conditions (which eventually affect everyone) with a major outpouring of community spirit and cooperation, we often act like purely instinct driven squirrels – fighting over a dwindling supply of acorns whilst the oak trees that produce them are slowly dying out because no acorns are left to propagate the species. While some squirrels would undoubtedly survive longer, in the end they will all have to find a new home or perish unless they work cooperatively to reinvest acorns for their common good. In the squirrel metaphor, it's easy to identify the common good – the continued growth of oak trees.

For complex human issues the trick of course is to come to consensus as to what constitutes common good.

There are scores of examples of this conundrum throughout the Tahoe region, never mind over the entire globe. The question is: What are we going to do about it? We could start by exhibiting the model community concept by working together cooperatively as a community instead of like gangs of squirrels squabbling over a diminishing supply of acorns. While each situation has its own unique challenges, one factor that they all have in common is a need for us to roll up our sleeves, work together cooperatively, be ready to identify and compromise on non-essential preferences/desires to achieve a common goal: The restoration and sustentation of our natural and built environment and our economy.

As I see it, the overarching goal is to ensure that we protect and maintain a physical and social environment that will provide a good quality of life for all and attract the kind of low-impact tourism that will sustain and enhance all aspects of our physical and social environment. This is a simple closed-loop model: Nurture your physical and social

environment and it will sustain you. If we can agree that this is the goal, then back casting from there, we can collectively draw a road map to a brighter future.

It’s my hope that this missive will attract some ideas and inspire us as a community and a group of communities to tackle critical issues and work together to achieve this goal. What do you see as major issues that pose a threat to social, economic and environmental sustainability? Let’s hear them and start the process of finding our own solutions as a community.

On April 29 there was a well-attended meeting about proposed changes and up-grades to Lake Tahoe Boulevard from Viking Way to Clear Creek Road. The majority of those in attendance appeared to be residents of neighborhoods who use this stretch of mostly four-lane highway to commute between their homes and South Lake Tahoe. Most (but not all speakers) were opposed to reducing the up to 55 mph stretch to two lanes and reducing speed limits in order to more safely accommodate bicycle traffic and better manage runoff. Reasons given ranged from legal challenges, snow removal and emergency response concerns to a perceived drop in home values.

The snow removal and emergency concerns were quickly quashed by county personnel and active emergency responders; some who live in the affected neighborhoods. The home value argument is a total red herring as home values historically increase whenever quality-of-life improvements like increased walkability and bikeability are incorporated into community plans. The issue of the legality of changing the road due to stipulations in the deed that gave the road to the county will have to be addressed but if all four lanes remain and the only substantial change is which type of vehicles are allowed to use which lane, that might render the legal issue moot.

Tom Wendell is a member of South Lake Tahoe’s Sustainability Commission.

Opinion: Wealthy Americans not paying their fare share of taxes

By Robert Reich

Nobody likes taxes, but shouldn’t the wealthy pay their fair share?

That’s a key question underlying the budget fight now moving into high gear in Washington. The plan pushed by House budget Chair Paul Ryan and his Republican colleagues calls for massive spending cuts along with additional tax breaks for the wealthy. The president says he’s just as serious about deficit reduction, but instead of cutting as much spending, he wants to raise taxes on the wealthy.

The president is right. In fact, his proposals for raising taxes on the superrich don’t go nearly far enough.

Over the past three decades, the distribution of income in America has become wildly out of whack. Despite an economy that’s twice as large as it was 30 years ago, the bottom 90 percent of Americans remain stuck in the mud. If they’re employed, they’re earning on average only about $280 more a year than 30 years ago, adjusted for inflation. That’s less than a 1 percent gain over more than a third of a century.

Yet even as their share of the nation’s total income has withered, the tax burden on average workers has grown. They’re shelling out a far bigger chunk of incomes in payroll taxes, sales taxes and property taxes than 30 years ago.

It’s just the opposite for the superrich.

Over the last three decades, the richest 1 percent’s share of national income has doubled (from 10 percent in 1981 to well over 20 percent now). The share going to the richest one-tenth of 1 percent has tripled.

Robert Reich, former U.S. secretary of labor, is professor of public policy at UC Berkeley and the author of the new book “Aftershock: The Next Economy and America’s Future.” He blogs at www.robertreich.org.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Grego needs to be disciplined

To the community,

Kathryn Reed reported that Bruce Grego and Kathay Lovell complained to the State Bar that Jacqueline Mittelstadt, former city attorney for the city, was guilty on two counts of misconduct. The Bar dismissed the complaint.

The Bar reported that Grego and Lovell filed “… the complaint in their official capacities as council member and mayor of the city of South Lake Tahoe.” Thus, Grego and Lovell are guilty of misfeasance. They acted as city officials without having the authority to do so from the city. Three members of the council had no knowledge that they filed their complaint. But it would appear to an outsider that the city had filed the complaint. That is false.



Bill Crawford

Grego’s complaint is the second time he has used his position as council member to mislead others to believe he was speaking for the city. He used the city’s letterhead when he spoke before Nevada’s state Legislature.

It is clear that Grego places himself above other council members. That’s especially so when he complained to the Bar. I say again that he and Lovell hadn’t the authority from the city to do so.

It is clear that the City Council must discipline Grego. He is not a free agent who can on any occasion speak for the city. As a former council member, one of the three kept in the dark, I look forward to the council tethering Grego’s bull before he destroys the credibility of city government.

Bill Crawford, South Lake Tahoe

Opinion: Why people make mistakes

By Peter Demarest

None of us is immune to mistakes, and the one universal truth of making mistakes is that we all hate that moment when we realize that we just screwed up.

When it hits us that we've made a mistake, we always have that instant of "Wow, that was stupid, what was I thinking?" before we move on and try to solve the problem we've inadvertently caused.

I refer to the elimination of that space of time between when we screw up and the time we realize we've screwed up as practical enlightenment. For the past dozen years or so, I've been studying mind-brain science to see if there is a way to help us think better so we make fewer mistakes and create a better life.

I believe we can go further than just preventing mistakes. I believe through the science-based techniques I've discovered, people can dramatically improve how they think, make choices, act, and react without having to fix their so-called weaknesses. I derive these ideas from research in a science called neuro-axiology, which is a combination of brain science and value science. Axiology is the name of a fascinating science about how our value perceptions influence our thoughts, choices, actions, and reactions. It's also about how value actually gets created in the world and in our lives.

I invite people to start thinking better by asking themselves what I call the central question of life, love, and leadership. It's amazingly simple, but tremendously helpful.

Whenever you're feeling confused, upset, reactive, conflicted, confronted, or frustrated, or at anytime that you simply want to be thinking the best you can, just ask yourself, 'What choice can I make and action can I take, in this moment, to create the greatest net value?'

My entire coaching process is based on the natural functions of the brain that allows people to make better use of the strengths and wisdom they already have to get better and better at answering "the central question".

Fundamentally, success in life is not about the value we get,

it’s about the value we create. When people make the deliberate effort to think it terms of “the central question”, they naturally make fewer mistakes, make better decisions, and create greater value in life and work.

You see, most of us, most of the time, act out of habit. We allow ourselves to be controlled by our emotions and our ‘mental programming. We basically let our weakness and our self-centric perceptions of the world run the show. Case in point, do we really need to let our upset over the guy who cut us off on the way to work in the morning ruin our whole day and keep us from being as happy and productive as we could be? We get angry out of habit, but if we consciously shift our perspective from our self-centric upsets and concerns to what we value and the value we can create—then we can literally change our lives.

“The central question” quickly helps us gain more confidence, satisfaction, joy and fulfillment. We get better in our work and in our relationships. We argue less and empower others more.

Using this one idea has made a bigger difference in people’s lives and organizations than anything I’ve ever seen. We all want to make a good living and live the good life, but there is so much more to life than money, power and status which are fleeting and easily taken away. When you focus on the question of what creates greater net value, you’ll develop more of that practical enlightenment. You’ll have a greater sense of meaning, purpose, and fulfillment. Not only will you be professionally more successful, but you’ll have greater personal success as well—and so will many of the people around you.

Peter Demarest is the co-author of the book “Answering The Central Question”. He is also is a co-founder and president of Axiogenics.

Opinion: City clerks descend on South Tahoe

By Susan Alessi

This past week, I was honored and pleased to have hosted the 2011 Annual State City Clerks Association of California in our beautiful city.

The conference was well attended and all of the attendees appeared to have enjoyed the conference and all the great sites and activities that South Lake Tahoe has to offer. Many city clerks and their families stayed through the weekend to sight see and also experience the shopping, dining and night life.

A big thanks to Mayor Hal Cole for his welcoming remarks and historical information during the opening ceremony, to former Mayor and Councilmember Margo Osti who beautifully sang the national anthem, local Calvary Chapel Pastor Jerry Foster who provided a meaningful invocation and to the South Tahoe High School NJROTC who perfectly executed the color guard ceremony.

Kudos to Embassy Suites who did a fantastic job as the hotel and conference venue.

Also noteworthy to mention as the 2011 CCAC conference host city, through an IIMC (International Institute of Municipal Clerks) Green Project Grant, a Mountain Ash tree was planted at the linear park Wildwood site and a bronze plaque entitled "The City Clerks Association of California, Exhibiting a Leadership Role in the Community through its 'Green Team'

Efforts, Dedicates this tree to the City of South Lake Tahoe, our 2011 Conference Host." It is an honor South Lake Tahoe was selected as the first city of this grant project which will now become an annual tradition for annual state conference host cities.

The following is some background information on the CCAC and the city clerk profession:

City Clerks Association of California

Our Mission

The CCAC was founded in 1977 with the objective of promoting the city clerk profession throughout the state of California.

Objectives

The Objectives of the CCAC are to:

* Provide Leadership and Management Training Opportunities in Concert with Our Diverse Society.

* Enhance Levels of Service Responsive to the Growing Demands Within our Organizations.

* Foster Pro-Active Programs to Promote Effective Legislation.

* Promote Networking System Among Members.

What does a city clerk do?

The city clerk is the local official for elections, local legislation, the Public Records Act, the Political Reform Act, and the Brown Act (open meeting laws). Before and after the city council takes action, the city clerk ensures that actions are in compliance with all federal, state and local statutes and regulations and that all actions are properly executed, recorded, and archived. The statutes of the state of California prescribe the basic functions and duties of the city clerk, and the Government Code and Election Code provide

precise and specific responsibilities and procedures to follow. The office of the city clerk is a service department within the municipal government upon which the city council, all city departments, and the general public rely for information regarding the operations and legislative history of the city. The city clerk serves as the liaison between the public and city council and provides related municipal services.

Susan Alessi is city clerk for South Lake Tahoe.

Opinion: Advocating for class-size reduction

By Bob Miller

I am speaking out today for a cause I believe in deeply.

More than 20 years ago, when I took office as governor, I made reducing class sizes in Nevada elementary schools the chief goal of my new administration.

I believed then and believe now that nothing is more important than giving children in primary grades the best start in school we can. That means having them in classrooms where they receive more individual instruction in reading, writing and math. In short, it means classes with fewer students per teacher.

The first phase of class-size reduction was put in place for kindergartners and first-graders in the 1990-91 school year. In 1991, the Nevada Legislature appropriated funds to reduce pupil-teacher ratios in the first and second grades and

selected kindergartens to 16-1.

It is important to remember that in late 1991, the state faced a massive budget shortfall, and we severely cut back on state spending and programs. But we preserved class-size reduction, because it was a cornerstone of our commitment to helping every child in Nevada succeed in school.

Bob Miller was governor of Nevada from 1989 to 1999.

Read the whole story

Editorial: Killing is not the answer to world peace

Can the death (killing) of one man change a world?

Time will answer that question.

Clearly, the confirmation of Osama bin Laden having taken his last breath May 1 in Pakistan will reverberate throughout the world.

Bin Laden, 54, was the mastermind behind 9-11 nearly 10 years ago.

“Justice has been done” is what President Obama told the world when he took to the airwaves about 8:40pm Sunday night.

Crowds gathered outside the White House – cheering, singing the national anthem.

Bin Laden, as some have said, was the face of terrorism. His image will not be erased for years to come. One has to wonder whose face might become the poster child for terrorism as the

world moves forward.

Terrorism should never be tolerated. Differences among people will always exist. Hijacking planes, flying them into buildings and killing more than 3,000 innocent people is such an incredibly heinous crime that no explanation for why it happened will ever be acceptable.

The United States government is not perfect. No religion is perfect. No person is perfect.

But does violence and killing really solve anything?

Does this one death justify the killing of thousands on Sept. 11, 2001? Obama, and apparently the United States government as a whole, say “yes”.

But this murder with the blood on the hands of the United States does not change the philosophy of bin Laden’s followers.

It is simplistic to believe negotiating and compromise will foster amicable relationships. But it has also been proved that invading countries that never had weapons of mass destruction is a senseless waste of American lives. The money and other resources spent in Iraq and Afghanistan are secondary to the thousands of soldiers and civilians who have lost their lives.

An eye for eye – is that what the United State has come to?

Lake Tahoe News is not a supporter of terrorism at any level. It is also not a supporter of violence.

Killing people one does not agree with (even if for incredibly good reason) is not the way people in a country that believes in human rights should ever behave.

The United States has a penchant for switching teams. There was a time when bin Laden was the good guy according the

federal government; same with Augusto Pinochet in Chile.

Lake Tahoe News is no friend of these terrorists. But what *Lake Tahoe News* wants is for the citizens of the United States to become actively engaged in what the federal, state and local governments are doing. The government is the people. Does what the government at all these levels is doing represent you? If not, what are you going to do about it?

Opinion: Nevada's domestic partner register not enough

By John Cereso

It's been almost a year and a half since the Nevada Domestic Partnership Registry launched. In and of itself, this law provided gay and lesbian residents of Nevada with a tremendous step forward in terms of recognition of their relationships, but it isn't enough.

The federal government in 1996 passed the Defense of Marriage Act, and many states have either passed laws or amended their constitutions – as was the case in Nevada – that closely follow the federal law, which essentially says that only marriages between a man and a woman are recognized, even if validly performed in another state. (For the sake of simplicity, I'll often use the term DOMA – Defense of Marriage Act – when generally describing these types of restrictive laws.)

By and large, the domestic partnership ordinance in Nevada takes care of the state recognizing gay and lesbian relationships for state law purposes and limits DOMA's effect.

However, domestic partnerships fall far short of full marriage equality.

Under the Nevada Domestic Partnership law, registered partners can be denied access to health care benefits offered by employers, probably the most tangible spousal benefit. Employers and insurers are able to simply say “you’re not legally married, so we don’t have to cover you.”

Under federal law, more than 1,100 rights and benefits to marriage exist, none of which is available to gay and lesbian couples. Yes, you can do some complicated estate planning, but virtually all of the rights marriage conveys on a federal level are simply unavailable without full marriage rights.

John Cereso is a lawyer whose practice includes family law. He is a member of the National Lesbian and Gay Lawyers Association.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Smart move for rural Nev. to market to gays-lesbians

By Rick Velotta, Las Vegas Sun

Listening to Mya Lake Reyes, the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority’s director of diversity marketing and an expert on the LGBT travel market, talk about her compelling visual in her presentation about how to attract more gay and lesbian customers to a destination.

In the slide is a picture of six $100 bills.

“This is what’s important to you,” Reyes told her audience. “When you look at these hundreds, you don’t know whether they came from a black man, an Asian woman or a gay traveler. The important thing to you is that you get it. It all spends the same way, no matter who gave it to you.”

With travelers being far more protective of their hard-earned cash these days, making money has become a bigger challenge for the tourism industry. While things have been tough in Las Vegas, imagine how much harder it is in places like Gabbs, Pioche and Austin where they don’t have iconic magnets like the fountains at Bellagio and Celine Dion down the block.

That’s one of the reasons I was fascinated that Reyes’ presentation, “Straight Talk on the Gay Market,” was scheduled at the Nevada Commission on Tourism’s recent Rural Roundup in Mesquite.

How would marketing to lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgenders play in rural Nevada? Wouldn’t it be like in Star Trek when matter and antimatter come into contact with each other and the universe explodes?

Read the whole story

Opinion: Crossing state line to support Nevada leaving TRPA

Publisher’s note: ***State Sen. Ted Gaines, R-Roseville, released the following statement regarding Nevada Senate Bill 271 that***

would remove Nevada from the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Compact.

To the community,

Protecting our environment and the health of Lake Tahoe is of critical importance. However, this bi-state effort has failed in its directed purpose, often leaving Tahoe basin residents and businesses to suffer from stymied growth, crippling regulation and protracted litigation.



Ted Gaines

This gridlock has brought Tahoe's private business sector to a grinding halt. We need to put local residents before out-of-town attorneys. I commend the Nevada Legislature for recognizing the dysfunction, stepping up to the plate and taking action.

Lake Tahoe is not only an environmental beauty, but a critical part of California's economy. By ensuring the lake's future health along with recognizing the area's economic realities, we can assure our future generations that they will be able to continue to enjoy one of California's national treasures.

Ted Gaines