

TRUMP AND THE DARK SIDE OF IMAGE CHANGE

By Jim Troxel, 2018

1 No question has vexed and perplexed as many people in the last several months as, “How did Donald Trump win the 2016 American presidential election?” Leaving aside the arcane system of the Electoral College, Mr. Trump garnered a lot more votes than many people, myself included, imagined. How did he pull that off? With his vile treatment of fellow candidates, his derogatory put-downs of nearly any non-White, his contempt for facts and science, his bully-isms, bigotry, sexist behavior, and on and on, there was no way this guy was ever going to win the election. Hillary was a shoe-in.

2 Or so many of us thought.

3 So, we are left with trying to explain how so many well-meaning American voters went to polling places and cast their lot in with someone who will go down in history as being the worst president of the United States.

4 How indeed?

5 Might I suggest that we, as students of image change, might use that theory to help us examine the Trump victory as a “teachable moment” in order to not only gain some insights into how Trump succeeded, but also how image change operates? Perhaps in doing so we might become more effective image-changers ourselves.

6 Obviously, Trump didn’t use the term “image change,” but this paper seeks to show how his understanding of the power of images and their

capacity to influence change led to his becoming president.

A vivid imagination compels the whole body to obey it. Aristotle

7 The first part is about the power of image change, how it operates in other disciplines’ and how to tailor messages to create powerful image change, by showing how Trump tailored his messages. The second part elaborates on how image change directly aims at addressing one of the most powerful negative self-images one finds in society today – the Victim Image - and show how Trump used image change to tap into this societal depression. The last part demonstrates how embedded within the positive use of image change one finds an understanding of humanness that is predicated on the belief of the inherent power each individual has within themselves. In contrast Trump persuaded people to believe that relief from today’s ills would be found in powers outside of themselves thus relying on an image of dependency.

8 It’s not the task of this article to examine the moral weaknesses of the American people or their systems of election. Nor is it to tout whatever virtues or vices Donald Trump might have as president. This article is to show how Trump was an effective image maker of the dark side that harnessed negative image results. By its nature image change does not have any moral content, much less superiority. It is values-neutral. Messages can bring about positive as well as negative image change results. Image change and its tools CAN be used in whatever way the image change practitioner wants them to be.

I. How Image Change Happens

9 Let’s start our quest in the realm of fantasy to see how images work by catapulting ourselves - in time and space - to Hogwarts, the school where Harry Potter learned the secrets of wizardry. Indeed, perhaps

wizardry is not too far removed from the power of images. Fans of Harry Potter will recall a scene¹ where his friend, Ron, was despondent over his seeming lack of ability to play Quidditch, the wizarding national

¹ In the book and movie, *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince*.

sport. As the Keeper, like a goalie in soccer or hockey, Ron's task was to guard his team's goals and stop the other team from scoring. Because he was dejected over his inability to be a good Keeper, Ron drank what he thought was Harry's Luck Potion to make him more proficient on the field. It wasn't Harry's Luck Potion that he drank; but he THOUGHT that he had (in fact, Harry conceded to Hermione, there was no such thing as a Luck Potion). But Ron's belief that he had been given an extra dose of luck empowered him to perform great athletic feats. His abilities were not enhanced at all; but his belief in his abilities were over the top. Ron scored a shut out that day and his team won. Nothing changed Ron; but, nonetheless, he had been transformed by a power he thought that came from outside himself but was within him all the time. It was his self-image.

10 Stories like this abound in literature and the arts and in reality as well. In George Bernard Shaw's classic play, *Pygmalion*², upon which the musical production *My Fair Lady* is based, a London street urchin flower girl, Eliza Doolittle, is transformed into an upper class "fair lady." How did Eliza transform from a 'squashed cabbage leaf' and 'gutter snipe' into a 'duchess'? By the exertion of the powerful Dr. Higgins and his linguistic pedagogy? Not so much, methinks. But more so by Eliza's eventual change in her self-perception as a lady. Higgins taught her how to speak like a lady; but it was Higgins' partner, Pickering, who treated her like a lady and in so doing gave her the interior belief (image) that she could be a lady. In her own (Shaw's) words, "The difference between a flower girl and a lady is not how she behaves, but how she's treated." Which, in turn, altered her self-image.

11 In a recent popular novel and movie, *The Girl on the Train*,³ the title character, Rachel, had difficulty facing her failed marriage due to her inability to become pregnant. She became prone to alcohol-induced blackouts during which she engaged in self-destructive and violent behavior. On one such occasion she caused a scene at the home of her husband's boss and his wife Martha leading to Tom, Rachel's husband,

being fired. Later on, Rachel sees Martha on the train and apologizes for her behavior, but her memory of the occasion did not match Martha's version. Martha tells her that Tom was fired for having sexual relations with co-workers and that she had not caused a scene at her home. Rachel realized that Tom planted false images in her head on several occasions following a drinking binge. She realized that Tom had gotten her to believe that the problems in her life were self-induced, when in fact, he had masterfully "brainwashed" Rachel into thinking she was the problem to all her ills and their failed marriage. But Martha had set her straight and helped her to realize that instead it was Tom who had been victimizing her all along by delivering to her false messages about her life. Martha set Rachel free to realize she was in control of her life and Rachel began to invent a new self-image of herself.

Imagination is the beginning of creation. You imagine what you desire, you will what you imagine, and at last you create what you will.
George Bernard Shaw

12 These three examples remind us of how images function, particularly in the lives of individuals. The idea of "image change" has been harvested by the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) from Kenneth Boulding, in his book, *The Image*. Here are his key points:⁴

"What I have been talking about is ... my Image of the world ... what I believe to be true; my subjective knowledge. It is this Image that largely governs my behavior... The first proposition of this work, therefore, is that behavior depends on the image... What, however, determines the image?... The image is built up as a result of all past experiences of the possessor of the image... Every time a message reaches him/her, her/his image is likely to be changed in some degree it; and as the image is changed, behavior patterns will be changed

² The title refers to a Greek mythological character who is featured in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In the original story, Pygmalion was a sculptor (Henry Higgins) who fell in love with a statue he had carved (Eliza Doolittle).

³ Written by Paula Hawkins. 2015, NY: Riverhead Books.

⁴ From Chapter I, *The Image*. Kenneth E. Boulding, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press (Ann Arbor Paperback). 1956.

likewise... The meaning of a message is the change that it produces in the image.⁵

13 “When a message hits an image one of three things can happen.

1. In the first place, the image may remain unaffected. ...

2. ... It may change the image in some rather regular and well-defined way that might be described as simple addition. ...

3. ... a third type of change of the image that might be described as a revolutionary change. Sometimes a message hits some sort of nucleus or supporting structure in the image, and the whole thing changes in a quite radical way...

4. One should perhaps add a fourth possible impact of the messages on the image. The image has a certain dimension, or quality, of certainty or uncertainty, probability or improbability, clarity or vagueness. Our image of the world is not uniformly certain, uniformly probable, or uniformly clear.

a. Messages, therefore, may have the effect not only of adding to or of reorganizing the image. They may also have the effect of clarifying it, that is, of making something which previously was regarded as less certain more certain, or something which was previously seen in a vague way, clearer ...

b. Messages may also have the contrary effect. They may introduce doubt or uncertainty into the image.⁶

14 Boulding referred to “image” as subjective knowledge. A useful synonym is “perception.” One’s perceptions of themselves, of others, of the world around them influences (controls, determines) their behavior. This is like the experience of having to wait in line during your lunch break when the five minutes in line felt like an eternity because a clerk took, seemingly, hours with each person in front of you. Yet, an hour flies by when you watch your favorite TV show. Welcome to the world of perception. This is our ability to experience objective reality and put our own unique

⁵ The synopsis of this is:

- 1) Everyone operates out of images;
- 2) Images govern behavior;
- 3) Images are created by messages that can be designed and communicated;
- 4) Images can change; and

interpretation on the unfolding event because of the values that we hold.

I’ll see it when I believe it.
Physicist Jeremy Hayward

15 In a wonderful book every golfer should read called *Golf Science*⁷ by Mark Smith, he explains how the power of perception can affect the way golfers perform. In a series of studies golfers who played well did so by imagining the size of the hole to be bigger than the players who played poorly. These studies suggest there is a relationship between golf performance and the perception (image) of the size of the hole. That is, between image and behavior.

16 This same idea of the image (or perception) determining one’s behavior has parallels in other fields, using different terminology but pointing to a similar reality. In Robert Rosenthal’s book, *Pygmalion in the Classroom: Teacher Expectations and Pupils’ Intellectual Development*,⁸ it is evident that what people expect from one another (our image of other people) often turns out to be what they actually get. Though Rosenthal’s studies - where some teachers were told they had a classroom full of one level of students than they were actually given - came under criticism for its scientific methodology, his conclusions have been born out in other studies. His findings – geared for teachers, managers and other leaders - can be summarized as follows:

- *When we expect more favorable things of people, we create a more positive interpersonal climate for them.*
- *We teach more to those from whom we expect more.*
- *We give more opportunity to those for whom we have more favorable expectations.*
- *Managers give more positive reinforcement to high-expectation employees. They praise them more for good work and criticize them less for making mistakes. Consequently, confidence of the employees grows.*

5) Changed images lead to changed behavior.

⁶ Boulding, *Ibid*.

⁷ *Golf Science: Optimum Performance from Tee to Green*, Mark F. Smith, 2013, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

⁸ NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968.

17 The Pygmalion effect involves a belief about another person held so strongly and persistently that it can become reality. The person believed in becomes the person whom he or she is believed to be. Rosenthal's work with teacher expectations is known as the self-fulfilling prophecy.

18 Even in scientific research, researchers' expectations can become the cause of their results. The sociologist Robert Merton said the self-fulfilling phenomenon occurs when "a false definition of the situation evokes a new behavior which makes the

original conception come true."⁹ To transfer that to the language of image change, what one's image of the situation is, is often exactly what one sees. In other words, people's expectations will become a self-fulfilling prophecy, partly because they will act in a manner that is consistent with that "prophecy" and cause it to "be fulfilled." Indeed, images are a powerful determinant of behavior, even to the "objective" scientist. Sometimes, what we look for is often what we see. This is especially true if it easier to see it than to see something else that is present.

II. How to Package Messages that Effectively Change Images

19 Over the years the ICA has created and documented effective "messaging techniques" that affect image change. In its training program, "The Power of Image," participants learn the image change theory and the practices of how to package powerful messages. Many have written on the subject and developed an extensive library on the topic of imaginal messaging tools.¹⁰

*People only see what they are
prepared to see.*
Ralph Waldo Emerson

20 Chip and Dan Heath in their book, *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die*,¹¹ offer a set of tools and tips on how to make messages (ideas) stick. For them an effective message that brings about change in one's images needs to contain a combination of six characteristics: Simple, Unexpected, Concrete, Emotional, Told with Stories, and Credible. Here's a short description of these six in their own words:

THE SIX ATTRIBUTES OF A MESSAGE THAT CAN IMPACT AN IMAGE

21 **SIMPLICITY** *Find and Share the CORE - Don't bury the lead; "It's the economy stupid." Be ruthless in simplifying without dumbing down. What's the one thing you are trying to communicate? What's*

the singular message you are trying to convey? To strip an idea down to its core, be masters of exclusion, which runs counter to the notion of inclusivity, but is a death knell to communication. Relentlessly prioritize. Saying something short is not the idea; sound bites are not the ideal; Proverbs are the ideal. The Golden Rule is the ultimate model for simplicity: a one-sentence statement so profound that an individual could spend a lifetime learning to follow it.

22 **UNEXPECTEDNESS** *Surprise and Interest – get and hold people's ATTENTION – Violate people's expectations; catching them off balance helps them become curious about your message and they want to follow it to find out more. "A bag of popcorn is as unhealthy as a whole day's worth of fatty foods!" That communicates more than saying "a bag of popcorn has 37 grams of fat." Using surprise increases alertness and causes focus to grab people's attention.*

*By deliberately changing the internal
image of reality, people can change
the world.*
Willis Harman

23 **CONCRETENESS** *Not fuzzy but specific to help people understand and REMEMBER – People remember what they can see visual images and*

⁹ *Social Theory and Social Structure*. 1949. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.

¹⁰ To review the library of ICA material on the topic of Image Change, go to the ICA Global Archives section at: <https://wedgeblade.net/wordpress/imagineducation/>

¹¹ 2007. NY, Random House

rounded-off numbers are easier to remember. Our brains are wired to remember concrete data, not abstractions often found in mission statements that use words like synergies, strategies, etc. Encode abstract truths in visual images: "A bird in hand is worth two in the bush."

24 **EMOTIONS** Association and Identity – make people CARE – usually done best by showing people what's in it for them, how will they benefit. Humans are wired to feel emotions for people more so than abstractions, so fundraisers often try to illustrate their need by describing a particular individual in need rather than a whole population in need.

25 **STORIES** Simulation and Inspiration – Gets people to ACT – Stories of real people having done real things. Research show that mentally rehearsing a situation helps people perform better when they encounter that situation in the real world; rehearsing stories of similar circumstances help first responders when the real situation arises. Hearing stories acts as a kind of mental flight simulator, preparing us to respond more quickly and effectively when similar circumstances appear.

26 **CREDIBILITY** Facts and numbers help people BELIEVE, but sometimes hard numbers get people off track; e.g., instead of saying your iPhone has five hours of battery life, say, it is has enough battery to watch your TV on a nonstop flight between SF and NY. In the 1980 presidential debate, Regan, instead of citing economic statistics, simply asked the people, "Before you vote, ask yourself if you are better off today than you were four years ago?"

27 To communicate information and knowledge to change individual behavior one should package the messages with these six characteristics in mind. Trump instinctively understood this. He knew that if he could provide people with messages that offered an alternative view of the way people look at the situation they found themselves, he could tap into deep seated frustration that would motivate people to vote for him. Here's how.

HOW TRUMP PACKAGED HIS MESSAGES USING THE SIX ATTRIBUTES

28 **SIMPLICITY** Trump repeatedly called Obamacare "the big lie" and mocked the healthcare policy for its rocky rollout and buggy website. "It is a disaster. And remember the \$5 billion website? Five billion we spent on a website. And to this day it doesn't work. A \$5 billion website. I have so many websites I have all over the place. I hire people, they do a website, it'll cost me \$3," he said. Trump also said the healthcare legislation should be repealed and "replaced with something much better for everybody ... and much less expensive."

29 As one reviews Trump's litany of one liners, you can see how they are very short and to the point, such as "Make America Great Again, Crooked Hillary, The NYT is failing, It's a rigged system, The media is dishonest, I will build a great wall, Drain the Swamp, Fake News." Detractors say they are too simplistic; and although that is true, simplifying one's message is how to make it STICK. The key here for Trump and effective image changers is to keep it simple; one-liners are powerful. Most politicians are wont to drone on and on about policy this or that. Effective communicators know to keep it simple.¹²

30 **UNEXPECTED** Trump was unbearably unexpected. He announced his candidacy with the promise "to build a great, great wall on our southern border" and "have Mexico pay for that wall," and has repeated the call with conviction and consistency. His name calling of his opponents was also another example of his use of the Unexpected. *Crooked Hillary, Pocahontas, Jeff Flakey, Al Frankenstein, Little Marco, Lyin' Ted, Low Energy Jeb, Crazy Bernie, Crying Chuck, Rocket Man*. Mean-spirited – yes. Memorable – also yes. Once in office he surprised us all with his morning tweets. He frequently followed a bad news story with an announcement of his own that helped drown out the negative news story and divert attention away from it. The Unexpected catches people's imagination. It catches them off-guard; and they remember these moments far longer than things they would expect a

¹² A study by the *Boston Globe* revealed that Trump speaks the language of a fourth grader. Simplicity is the etymology of (er,

tool) of effective messages. Whatever its source, it works. <https://www.esquire.com/news-politics/news/a39031/trump-fourth-grade-level/>

politician to say. If they have a touch of humor, all the better.

31 **CONCRETE** As a candidate, Trump said he would fix the country's aging infrastructure system. He touted his own success as a real-estate developer to explain how he could rebuild roads, bridges, and airports far more cheaply than they are currently being constructed. *"Rebuild the country's infrastructure; nobody can do that like me, believe me,"* he said. *"It will be done on time, on budget, way below costs, way below what anyone ever thought. I look at these roads being built all over the country, and I say, 'I could build these things for one third.' We have to rebuild our infrastructure: our bridges, our roadways, our airports. You come into LaGuardia Airport, it's like we're in a third-world country."* Politicians like to talk in generalities; it avoids them having to be penned down to specifics. Not Trump. He knew the way to people's perceptions was by being as specific and Concrete as possible. Clearly, Trump is not a "policy-wonk."

32 **EMOTIONAL** Trump spoke at length about a controversial trade deal, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, as well as NAFTA. In speeches he repeatedly asserted that countries such as China, Japan, and Mexico were *"killing us economically"* because the US had not stood up for itself. This appealed to people's sense that others were the problem to their economic condition and challenged Americans to stand up for itself. The key here is he linked, more so than other candidates, to what matters to the people. One could argue he was only doing this to rile people up; but that was part of his strategy. He knew that if you have one's heart, their vote will follow. One could say that only Bernie Sanders remotely understood this as well.

33 **STORIES** Find great generals -- like the next Gen. Patton or Gen. MacArthur -- and do not allow them to go onto television news shows to explain their military strategy: *"I don't want my generals being interviewed, I want my generals kicking a--."* Trump likes generals who are rough, foul-mouthed and beloved by their troops. So he talked about the generals he liked. He provided images through the stories he told about them. He reminded people of the kind of quality he was looking for supporting. Telling stories is not a new idea; but Trump used it more effectively than the other candidates did. The issue is

not whether one believes in those stories and their meaning, but whether one uses stories to impart messages to one's audience.

34 **CREDIBLE** Trump was loose with statistics, but he used them all the time. For example, he said, *"Last quarter, it was just announced, our gross domestic product — a sign of strength, right? But not for us: It was below zero. Whoever heard of this? It's never below zero. Our labor participation rate was the worst since 1978."* He also said the US unemployment rate of 5.5% was misleading, as it did not include people who had given up looking for work, saying, *"... our real unemployment is anywhere from 18% to 20%. Don't believe the 5.5%. Don't believe it. That's right, a lot of people up there can't get jobs. They can't get jobs because there are no jobs. Because China has our jobs. And Mexico has our jobs. They all have our jobs."* Loose with facts; yes, that's Trump. But he dared to use them; and before anyone had a chance to refute them, the media and people's attention span were on to the next topic.

35 One of the interesting things to note is that Trump's use of Twitter provides him an excellent vehicle to distribute his messages. Twitter requires the author to be short and to the point, lest the reader's mind strays. By dropping in unexpected memorable images ("Rocket Man," e.g.) he captures the reader's attention.

Man's mind, once stretched by a new idea, never regains its original dimensions.

Oliver Wendell Holmes

36 The main point here is that Trump did not win with grandiose policy statements or detailed plans on his website. He kept his messages short, emotional and on point. In so doing, he convinced enough people that he was the right person that they voted for him despite all his obvious weaknesses. You may not like to hear it, but Trump was a powerful image creator. He beamed out message after message that stuck in the imaginations of Americans. He shaped people's images of himself; and they identified with those images to the point of going into the ballot booth and putting an X next to Trump.

37 Causing doubt, you'll recall from Boulding, is also one of the possible impacts of messages on images. And, Trump is a master at causing doubt. You'll recall his claim that Obama wasn't born in America, an obvious racist slur; but it led many to question the legitimacy of his presidency and cast blame on him for their predicament, exacerbating their feeling

victimized. His rhetoric around "fake news" led by his associate Kellyanne "alternative facts" Conway provided an avenue for this base to distrust what the media had to say about him. The messages of doubt helped to solidify his base's belief in him as they shared those same doubts. This is another messaging tactic in Trump's arsenal.¹³

III. The Victim Image

38 Let's look deeper into the nature of image change to explore whether or not there is some evidence of it being true to the higher elements of human nature and behavior. One clue is to examine more deeply the concept of the "victim image." To do so will require us to go on a bit of a circuitous route, so bear with me.

39 The practice of image change was originally developed while the ICA and its staff were resident in the Fifth City community on Chicago's Westside economically depressed community. The Institute began a "comprehensive community development" initiative in collaboration with local residents which included the development of a preschool where an approach using image change called "Imaginal Education" was written into the curriculum. In the preschool and the community, ICA staff learned from their experiences some basic principles about what it meant to address the issues that the community was facing.

40 Part of approach the Institute used was to seek for the depth human problem blocking the socio-economic development of the area. Later, as the methods for strategic planning began to be formulated, the term "underlying contradiction" was coined to capture essentially this same idea. We

learned three valuable lessons in our community research. First, we learned that every human being operates out of a primordial self-image, or self-talk, or spring of action that provides that person with a self-understanding. This insight was largely shaped by our encounter with the work of Boulding as we have already discussed. Secondly, what the staff learned in Fifth City in the 1960's was what we termed the "victim image," which other community organizers would term the "dependency mind-set" and a sense of "self-depreciation." Essentially what was discovered was that the people of the depressed communities had fallen victim to the belief that society had passed them by and the sense that one had been relegated to being a second-class human being. Institutional racism helped buttress this self-image leaving the residents of the inner city with a sense of being victim to social forces beyond their control.

41 The Fifth City project was fundamentally aimed at addressing this "victim image." Nowhere is that seen as clearly as with the Preschool. And within the curriculum that was developed there, nowhere can one see the imaginal educators at work than with the songs that the children learned and sang in the classroom. Here is a sampling of imaginal education at its finest:

¹³ "Sowing doubt" is a major piece of the tactical system used by the tobacco and oil and gas industries to plant disinformation

into the science of cancer and climate change research. This topic is a subject of its own thesis for another day.

CHICAGO IS A WONDERFUL PLACE

Tune: Washington Square

Chicago is a wonderful place,
The West Side's where we live;
Chicago is a wonderful place,
The West Side's where we live.

So sing all you people, life is here to love;
So sing all you people, life is here to live.

Chicago is a wonderful place,
The West Side's where we live;
Chicago is a wonderful place,
The West Side's where we live. *(3 times)*

42 Can you see how these verses attack the victim image, giving alternative messages for the sense of self-depreciation or the notion that the children live in a depressed community? Can you see the ingredients of messages discussed earlier: Simple, Unexpected, Concrete, Emotional, Told with Stories, and Credible?

43 The third thing we learned, which came a little later, was that this same “victim image” was not something unique to just the depressed community

IV. The Power of Image Shift: Choosing Internal Control over External Excuse

44 About the same time as the ICA was discovering the power of the victim image in the inner city, psychologists Julian Rotter and Herbert Lefcourt were discovering the same phenomena but using different language.¹⁴ Their central idea is the concept “locus of control,” which holds the most pertinent parallels for practitioners of image change. When one’s freedom is restricted, it can be the result from either external limitations on freedom, such as being a prisoner in jail, or from internalized limitations, such as being “brainwashed” by parental teachings that one is a failure. This is how Rachel’s husband Tom “imprisoned” her in *The Girl on the Train*. The person has become a victim and often you hear the term victim-image to describe this predicament.

¹⁴ Psychologist Julian B. Rotter is credited for the creation of the social learning theory, which integrated learning theory with personality theory (*Social Learning and Clinical Psychology*, 1954). Psychologist Herbert M. Lefcourt expanded on Rotter’s theory twenty years later. Locus of control is the framework of

I LOVE FIFTH CITY

Tune: I Love the Flowers

I love Fifth City
I love the planet Earth.
I love this day and time,
I love the universe.
I'm always ready to see this world of ours.
I tell you man I like it here,
I tell you man I like it here . . . Yeah!!!

residents, but it was pervasive in all walks of life in modern society. Seeing it in such sharp relief as the inner city helped us see it more clearly, but then as we looked around elsewhere in the world, we could see it operating everywhere. No one was immune to the Victim Image, though perhaps the language used to describe it was different, as the next section describes.

Our understanding is correlative to our perception. Robert Delaunay

45 People with limited freedom, no matter what its source, have the following options: succumb to their circumstances, rebel against their circumstances, or transform their circumstances by taking a new relationship to them. Their response comes from staring reality in the face and coming to terms with it — or not. Some people whose freedoms have been controlled by external limitations can and have developed a sense of internal locus of control, that is, a sense of freedom. For example in some maximum-security prisons there are inmates with no possibility of parole but who have put together constructive lives that include such activities as volunteering as tutors for

Rotter's social-learning theory of personality. In 1976, Herbert M. Lefcourt defined the perceived locus of control: "...a generalized expectancy for internal as opposed to external control of reinforcements."

other inmates, attending twelve-step meetings and church, and working. These inmates find their freedom to respond in how they relate to the situation they find themselves in rather than the “trappings” of the situation itself.¹⁵

46 My favorite movie that captures the essence of this idea of the internal locus of control is *The Shawshank Redemption*. The two kinds of limitations are vividly displayed with the external being the conditions of Shawshank prison. The internal limitations become part of the dialogue surrounding how certain “lifers” become “institutionalized” so much by the prison that they were unable to survive once having been set free. Here’s the pivotal dialogue that expresses the central message of the movie when Andy had just been freed from spending a month in solitary confinement for playing a Mozart recording over the prison’s loudspeakers:¹⁶

Andy: That's the beauty of music. They can't get that from you... Haven't you ever felt that way about music?

Red: I played a mean harmonica as a younger man. Lost interest in it though. Didn't make much sense in here.

Andy: Here's where it makes the most sense. You need it so you don't forget.

Red: Forget?

Andy: Forget that... there are places in this world that aren't made out of stone. That there's something inside... that they can't get to, that they can't touch. That's yours.

Red: What're you talking about?

Andy: Hope. Remember Red, hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies. I guess it comes down to a simple choice: Get busy living, or get busy dying.

47 In other words, the victim image is a choice that one makes whether conscious of it or not. People who are internally victimized or sense themselves with restricted freedom have the same options: succumb,

¹⁵ Internal and external locus of control is not the same as inner and outer directed (introverts vs. extraverts).

¹⁶ From the movie, *The Shawshank Redemption*, 1994, based on the 1982 novella *Rita Heywood and Shawshank Redemption* by Steven King. The character Andy Dufresne was played by Tim Robbins and the character Ellis “Red” Redding played by Morgan Freeman.

rebel, or transform. Those who choose to transform realize that in spite of all they have experienced, they still have valuable contributions to make to society. By focusing on their internal capacity to have power over their relationship to the past and present (in other words, their ability to control what images they live out of), they are able to face the future with hope. They do not find their freedom externally, but rather in an internal locus of control.¹⁷

48 The psychotherapist Victor Frankl described this same phenomenon in his classic book, *Man’s Search for Meaning*.¹⁸ Frankl was a Jewish psychiatrist who spent three years during World War II living under unspeakable circumstances in several of the most notorious Nazi concentration camps. While imprisoned, Frankl realized he had one single freedom left: He had the power to determine his response to the horror unfolding around him. So he chose to imagine. He imagined his wife and the prospect of seeing her again. He imagined himself teaching students after the war about the lessons he had learned. Frankl survived and went on to chronicle his experiences and the wisdom he had drawn from them. “A human being is a deciding being,” he wrote. “Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”

49 The Victim Image is pervasive in our time. People everywhere sense themselves blocked in their ability to live full human lives. Image change is needed in every walk of life. It is needed to address the depression of suburban housewives, the loneliness of America’s workplaces, in the halls of justice and civil discourse, and in the isolation of the classroom.¹⁹

We don't see things as they are. We see them as we are. Anais Nin

50 Those who grasp their own internal locus of control (their own internal image of themselves and of

¹⁷ Rotter, 1966; Lefcourt, 1976.

¹⁸ 1959. NY: Washington Square Press.

¹⁹ I have previously written on how the victim image pervades organizations and communities and how using images in the ICA’s ToP Strategic Planning Process one can address it in those settings. See Troxel, 2005, in the Bibliography.

the world around them) can become agents of change in their own lives. If one thinks that life's outcomes are determined by forces beyond or outside one's self (fate, the system, "them," the government, and so forth), then one's response to life is passive. Those who grasp that they are their own change agents tend to be more proactive in their responses to life and the situations they find themselves. They become accountable for their actions because they sense they are able to respond to life's challenges. They avoid excuses for why things do not happen the way they want and instead take responsibility for the outcomes.

51 There are other powerful meta-images that guide one's behavior that are recognizable like self-depreciation. Similar in outward response but from an interior point of view the Victim is controlled by forces outside themselves while the persons of self-depreciation are controlled by their negative view of themselves. They have a view of themselves that guides them toward defeatist behavior, similar to those who view the world as being against them.

52 Some have called this the power of one's inner self-talk. Pamela Butler has written in her book, *Talking to Yourself*:²⁰

"There is a person with whom you spend more time than any other, a person who has more influence

V. Trump Plays To the Victim Image

54 So what does this have to do with how Donald Trump got elected? Trump exploited the Victim Image by aiming his messages at those who felt victimized by powers and forces beyond their ability to control. He called his base of supporters "The Forgotten Ones" appealing to their sense that they had fallen out of the economic success and political mainstream.²¹ He said people were without a job because of immigration or because domestic companies took their jobs overseas through the trade pacts. Whites who lost their employment to non-whites due to unfair employment practices. Small business owners were being strangled by federal regulations. They were good citizens losing out to unfair immigration practices. They were victims of

over your growth than anyone else. This ever-present companion is your own self. This self guides you, belittles you or supports you. You engage this person in an ever-constant dialogue – a dialogue through which you set goals for yourself, make decisions, feel pleased, dejected or despondent. In short, your behavior, your feelings, your sense of self-esteem and even your level of stress are influenced by your inner speech."

***"[Luke:] I can't believe it.
[Yoda:] That is why you fail."***

53 Alas, many people choose a negative self-talk. We've all encountered the cynic; but remember the old adage that a cynic is a visionary who has been disappointed. That is to say, they once held an image of the future that was more positive and meaningful than their present circumstances; but over time, in their attempts to change their situation, they were unsuccessful and turned cynical. Underneath their cynicism lies an image of the future that still attracts them. Their problem does not lie with their lack of an image of the future, but in their inability to implement it.

crimes perpetuated by foreigners in our country illegally. They were those – in short – who were bound by external factors beyond their control.

55 Trump's message – clear and simple: "I will remove those external factors that prohibit you from having a better life." And his messaging was clear, concise, short and to the point; or, to put it more succinctly, they were imaginal. Listen again to them and hear them from the standpoint of someone who feels victimized by forces outside their control:

- *It's a rigged system*
- *I am going to build a wall*
- *We're going to bring back the coal industry and those jobs with it*

²⁰ 1981. Briacliff Manor, NY: Scarborough House, Stein and Day.

²¹ And it didn't help Hillary Clinton when she stumbled and referred to them as "The Deplorables." A different image was being communicated and Ms. Clinton never recovered.

- *Don't believe the media; they are dishonest; it's all fake news*
- *I am going to slash 75% of those regulations*
- *We're going to stop them from coming in and taking our jobs*
- *China has our jobs; Mexico has our jobs*
- *There were good people on both sides in Charlottesville*
- *Trade wars are good, and easy to win*
- *The whole Russia investigation is a hoax.*

56 The message – over and over – “your problem is external to you and I will remove and address those barriers for you. You are a victim to forces outside yourself but I can fix them for you.” Who wouldn’t want to vote for a guy who would solve all your problems for you? Contrast this rhetoric to John F. Kennedy’s “Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.” Or to Barack Obama’s mantra,

“Yes, We Can!” Implicit within these statements is a very different world-view, an image that says you can shape the future and not be victimized by it.

57 Former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in an interview on NPR April 3, 2018, said it this way: “What Trump is doing is making America seem like a victim. Everything is somebody else's fault: Countries are taking advantage of us. The Mexicans are sending drug dealers. Countries are not paying their dues. The trading system is unfair. And by making Americans seem like victims all the time, it then is able to, again, make the divisions stronger in terms of who is with us, who is not with us, and it's totally anti-American foreign policy. And so I think it's very, very worrisome in terms of this victimhood. I don't see America as a victim. I see America as the most powerful country in the world that has a role to play, standing up for democratic ideals and human rights across the board”.²²

VI. The Imaginal Antidote to Trump – The Real World Wins in the End

58 To help us gain insight into how those who have fallen into the victim image can be secure in their certainty of Trump as their savior requires us to return to the original notion of image change and bring to the discussion another of Boulding’s insights about the existence of what he called “images of value.” Boulding says we give a relative “rating” of the various parts of our image of the world according to our “value scales,” the most important element in determining the impact messages have on our images. Here in his words is the statement on the impact of a message:

“If a message is perceived that is neither good nor bad, it may have little or no effect on the image. If it is perceived as bad or hostile to the image which is held, there will be resistance to accepting it.... Though, an often repeated message or a message which comes with unusual force or authority is able to penetrate the resistance and will be able to alter the image.... On the other hand, messages which are favorable to the existing image of the world are received easily... The stability or resistance to change of an image depends on its internal consistency and arrangement. There seems to be some kind of principle of minimization of internal strain at work

which makes some images stable and others unstable for purely internal reasons.”²³

One has not only an ability to perceive the world but an ability to alter one's perception of it; more simply, one can change things by the manner in which one looks at them.

Tom Robbins

59 Trump was not an image-changer; he was an image-exploiter. None of his messaging was out to suggest that those who lived out of a self-image of being a victim was incorrect; in fact, he reinforced it. And, because as Boulding said, the principle of “minimization of internal strain” is the way humans listen to messages; if we already believe the message because it “fits” into our self-image, we want to embrace the message, and the messenger.

60 Put another way, it is easier for some people to hold on to being a victim because that image is easier to grasp than the alternative which requires a greater

²² Featured on “Fresh Air” hosted by Terry Gross. For a transcript of the entire interview click [here](#).

²³ Boulding, Ibid, pgs. 12-14.

sense of self-consciousness as to one's sense of responsibility for one's self. Or, as the mantra states, "lucidity is responsibility." If you know you can change your self-image, you are responsible for considering that as a real alternative. Taking that step of consciousness is hard for some people to do because it is easier to not take that step. Living in reality is not the easiest choice.

61 This is what is meant that image change is values-neutral. The method can be applied to any value set. So, just because you are proficient in the theory and tools of image change does not necessarily mean that you are leading your participants in the direction of being a self-directed human being.

62 This is where the notion of values comes into play. The ICA believes your external situation is not your problem. This statement has been the most oft discussed and has caused the most controversy of any of our values. And, for good reason. It punctuates the belief system of many of us to try to improve the lives of those who are "down and out." To change the conditions that oppress people. What more noble an undertaking; how dare you call it into question.

*Perception is merely reality filtered
through the prism of your soul.*
Christopher A. Ray

63 Former CEO of the ICA, Terry Bergdall, authored a text called "An Introduction to the Organizational Wisdom of ICA,"²⁴ in which he addressed this point:

"Life is full of limits that are beyond human control. These limitations, which we cannot change, are simply the given reality in which we live our lives. This reality, the external situation, is not our problem. It just "is." Problems arise with the relationships we take to the external situation. Awareness of this fact, and acting upon it, is a guiding principle undergirding ICA's work, especially as it enables communities, organizations, and individuals to "affirm the significance of their situation and to build responsible plans of action."

64 Let me be perfectly clear here. This ICA tenet does not in any way suggest that external factors that inhibit individuals, community, organizations and whole societies should not be addressed. Systemic racism exists and needs to be dealt with. Debilitating poverty around the world exists and should be addressed. Climate change too needs to be addressed. What is being suggested is that only when one sees themselves not victimized by these forces are they free to begin to address them. If in your mind they have power over you, you are not free to respond.

65 So one of the most fundamental remedies to bring about social change is not to try to remove the external barriers but rather to enable people, communities and organizations to see that they can relate to those barriers and treat them as something other than barriers to their freedom. Their freedom to act comes not from the removal of external barriers, but from taking a relationship of internal control over the limiting situation one finds themselves in. This realization, then, gives one the power and control to address those issues.

66 Real freedom, the freedom to act responsibly for oneself and one's world comes when one comes to terms with reality as it is. To say "Yes" to the hand you've been dealt. Or, in other words, a responsible person moves their "locus of control" from the outer world to their inner world, from things outside oneself to the way by which one relates to things outside themselves.

67 Maya Angelou said it this way in her book, *Letter to my Daughter*,²⁵

"You may not control all the events that happen to you, but you can decide not to be reduced by them. Try to be a rainbow in someone's cloud. Do not complain. Make every effort to change things you do not like. If you cannot make a change, change the way you have been thinking. You might find a new solution."

68 The statement "Your situation is not your problem" is one way to treat the illness of the victim image. There are many ways, of course, to provide messages that communicate the same thing, such as

²⁴ 2015. Available online at <http://www.ica-international.org/2015/07/31/ica-handbook/>

²⁵ 2008. NY: Random House

Angelou's statement above. The most effective ones are contextual; that is, they address the particular situation. Take for example the story in the New Testaments where Jesus meets a crippled man sitting next to a magical pool that when it is stirred by an angel the man tries to reach it first because then he would be healed. He'd been lying next the pool for many years. Jesus did not tell him that he'd carry him to the pool. Jesus did not say he would rid the pool of all the others who would beat him to it. No, Jesus, said, "Get up. Pick up your bed and walk." The story goes that "instantly the man recovered, picked up his bed and walked."²⁶ We'll leave it to the theologians to explain how all this happened, but the point is, the man heard the one word that saved his life; he no longer had any excuses.

69 Trump uses scapegoats (Muslims, Blacks, Latinos, immigrants, trade agreements) and demonizes them so people can use them as an excuse for why they have their problems. It is easier to believe that someone else is responsible for one's condition in life. Once those people are removed (once the external situation is changed), then one can have their life back. Image change uses no such fabrications. It relies on the way life is. It allows a person to look at the real situation they have on their hands and deal with it.

70 The positive side of image change is built upon reality, on facts, on science, not on "hopes to be," "wants to be," or "wishes it were different." As we strive to transform lives, we are empiricists. Trump, on the dark side, is not. Yes, he beamed messages that were simple, clear, concise and powerful and that stuck. He awoke those who were caught by the Victim Image; but his world is not the world of reality. He tries to twist reality to his images. Subjective knowledge cannot become objective fact. This is the dark side of image change. Once negative images are used, they begin to take on a life of their own, to be perceived as reality, largely because they are easier to believe. Trump takes a hint of truth and blows it out of portion to his own benefit, bending images of reality so that partial truths become entire truth to many. So, just because we may become proficient in our use and application of messaging techniques that produce a change in one's images, we have not necessarily put

someone on the path toward becoming a more enlightened human being.

71 Therefore image changers have a moral responsibility for how they deploy image tools and techniques. They can be used for good or evil, or for truth or lies. The task of responsible image change is to create critical thinkers, rather than knee-jerk responders to things that are already comfortable to hear.

72 In this day and age of social media, the task has become harder than a few short years ago. News websites dedicate far more time and resources to propagating questionable and often false claims than they do working to verify and/or debunk viral content and online rumors. Rather than acting as a source of accurate information, online media frequently promotes misinformation in an attempt to drive traffic and social engagement.²⁷

73 One study analyzed rumors on Twitter and found that a rumor that turns out to be true is often resolved within two hours of first emerging. But a rumor that proves false takes closer to 14 hours to be debunked.²⁸ Lies spread faster than truth; and no one knows this better than Trump. Or as Mark Twain has remarked, "A lie can travel halfway around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes." But the truth is the truth, even if no one believes it. A lie is a lie, even if everyone believes it. Look no further than the deniers of global warming to prove this point. And it sheds some light on how Donald Trump can lie and still be believed. He says things that his audience wants to hear because they do not want to believe that they are false.

74 Trump won because it was easier to vote for him than to take responsibility for the world.

75 Trump has exacerbated the dark side of image change. The tool kit of image change is powerful but if used for an unreal world can delude people into thinking that their fulfillment comes from outside themselves rather than from the innate freedom they already possess to affirm life as it already is. But as purveyors of the truth such as the image-shapers we are, we can provide society with an alternative

²⁶ John 5: 1-8

²⁷<http://mediashift.org/2015/02/how-lies-spread-faster-than-truth-a-study-of-viral-content/>

²⁸<https://firstdraftnews.com/recent-research-reveals-false-rumours-really-do-travel-faster-and-further-than-the-truth/>

approach, one that embraces life as it is, rather than pretend it is some other way. We have the power to

release the innate freedom and greatness of every human being to be their own change agents.

Conclusion – The Image of the Future is in our Hands

76 The focus of this article has not been on image change nor has it been on behavior change, though, that is the end game of our inquiry. The focus has been on exploring messages and the technology of messaging, for if it is true, as Boulding posits, that messages create images and images change behavior, then the practitioner of image change needs to be a student of how to package powerful and effective messages.

77 Which leads us back to the Trump and the central message of his campaign: “Make America Great Again.” Let’s unpack this message to explore the implicit image and behavior within it. The key word is “Again.”

78 What is implied with the use of the word “Again”? Probably there are many meanings hidden in that word but the one that most obviously jumps out is that the belief that America’s greatness lies in its past, not its future. Or, perhaps better stated, America’s future is in the recovery of its past greatness. What is meant by this? What images does this conjure up for those who see themselves victimized by the forces of the 21st Century? And what are those forces that victimized Americans fear? Immigration, foreign competition, unfair regulation, those of a different color, creed and religion, and others.

79 Yes, immigration built America, but those immigrants came from Europe, not Syria, Central America, Eretria. Yes, free trade is good for capitalism, but not when it takes jobs away from Americans. Yes, we believe the environment ought to be preserved but not at the expense of my not affording an SUV. Yes, we should be tolerant of others, but they shouldn’t be allowed to run our country, either.

The rise and fall of images of the future precedes the rise and fall of cultures.

Fred Polack

80 In that one single mantra, “Make American Great Again,” Trump galvanized the pent-up sentiment of millions of Americans who feel victimized by powers seemingly beyond their control. Americans have come to understand that progress is not inevitable.

We are products of the future we anticipate.

R. James Addington

81 What would you recommend to someone who might want to run for president against the incumbent? If the behavior change you wanted to realize was one of voting for an alternative world-view, what images would support that behavior, and then what messages would create that image?

82 We’re not answering that question with this article. It will be left for another time. But, the message here is, an image changer needs to “reverse engineer” as the technologists say, and walk back from the behavior they want to see realized through the images that motivate that behavior and then to the messages that support that image.

83 America now needs truth-tellers, people who will proclaim the world as it exists and not pretend we live in an alternate universe with alternative facts. Perhaps spending time with Trump helps make one see the necessity of telling truth to power, like former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson began to do after he was dismissed:

“A responsibility of every American citizen to each other is to preserve and protect our freedom by recognizing what truth is and is not, what a fact is and is not and begin by holding ourselves accountable to truthfulness and demand our pursuit of America’s future to be fact-based – not based on wishful thinking, not hoped-for outcomes made in shallow promises, but with a clear-eyed view of the facts as they are, and guided by the

truth that will set us free to seek solutions to our most daunting challenges.”²⁹

84 If Trump has taught us anything it is that the impacts in behavior, images and messages we are challenged to fashion in our work should be based on

an understanding that each and every individual has the innate power in their own hands to determine their own future. The future is not inevitable. It is to be created by those who know it can be created, which is every one of us.

Jim Troxel was a staff member of ICA from 1968 till 1996. Since 2014 he has been on the ICA Board of Directors and currently serves as its Chair. As co-founder of the International Association of Facilitators, he was a participant in the early development of the ICA’s Technology of Participation (ToP). He published two books on the application of ToP methods for the private and public sectors. He received his master’s degree in organizational transformation at DePaul University where he was an adjunct faculty member for twenty years. He is currently co-managing director of Development Capital Networks, LLC. He lives in Chicago, IL, with his wife Karen Snyder.

The author wishes to thank James Addington, Terry Bergdall, Elise Packard, Karen Snyder, and LiDona Wagner for reviewing drafts of this article, but wishes to state that the opinions expressed are not those of the reviewers, but of his own.

²⁹ Former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson speaking at the Virginia Military Institute, May 16, 2018.

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