

THE NEW COVENANT PROCESS

AMERICA'S OPPORTUNITY TO ESTABLISH A CRITICAL CONSENSUS FOR THE 90S AND BEYOND

by Stephan A. Schwartz

The premiere resource of this, or any other country, is the collaborative power of the hearts and minds of its people. It is more important than technology, more important than natural resources. The human resource is the key to a country's success and America, after 12 years of Republican executive administration, suffers from the degradation of its human infrastructure to a degree that is even more alarming than the deterioration of its physical infrastructure. The New Covenant Process is a 100-day program to assess the damage, propose solutions that have proven they work, publicize these insights, and create a sense of individual involvement in a shared national purpose among people from all parts of the political spectrum. The model for the process finds its genesis in the town hall meetings begun by Governor Clinton during the New Hampshire primary, as well as one of the few previous successful nationwide efforts at social change when, in the 1970s, the American military was transformed from a conscription institution to a volunteer one. The New Covenant Process draws on the same national citizen dynamics that proved so successful in getting Ross Perot qualified in all 50 states with a speed undreamed of by most political observers. Clearly, the people's willingness to craft a New Covenant is present, and accounted for.

The New Covenant Process is needed to identify and express the critical consensus within our nation on human resource issues, *as well as juxtaposing them with minority positions for comparison*. The process should produce a viable argument for this critical consensus -- something that has working utility. It should educate not through polemics, but through identifying solidly based research insights and practical application experiences, which have relevance to public policy formulation. The process should honor innovative principles, methods, and skills that enhance human interaction

Publication History: In *Blueprint for Presidential Transition*. Section. IV - Citizen Participation and Public Consensus. (The Blue Print for Presidential Transition Project: Los Angeles, 30 October 1992). An edited version appeared under the same title in *The New Paradigm Digest*. Vol. 1. No. 4. Winter 1992. pp. 63-64

© copyright 1992 by Stephan A. Schwartz

and leadership fostering the optimal development of America's human resources.

The need here is not so much for more research as it is seeing the patterns to be found in the work that has already been done. Policy makers, and their staffs, need to become aware of what we have already learned from the past decades of human resource exploration. These insights hold significance for the mainstream of our culture, and the process must act as a bridge to make them more accessible. At the same time, the process should, with objectivity and fairness, present approaches and solutions which have not worked, or which cannot withstand scrutiny, no matter how popular they may be. Finally, the temptation in creating such a process is to conduct its work at a certain level of abstraction; this should be resisted. The New Covenant Process should be strongly oriented to the practical, and it should focus on how the private and public sectors can cooperate.

The project should be grass-roots, staffed by volunteers, working in conjunction with a relatively small paid staff coordinating directly with a joint White House/Congressional *ad hoc* management team of sufficient stature to command attention and respect.

A definite life span is an important element in the process's formulation. The New Covenant Process should have a sense of urgency and a tight time-line to avoid a sense of permanent bureaucracy and discourage fief wars, even as it encourages consensus building through a powerful, but temporary, shared experience (much as disaster relief efforts or political campaigns engender those feelings). A closure date 100 days from implementation should be incorporated into the enabling documents, and be a part of all publicity. An additional 60 days of preparation for implementation (beginning immediately after the election) should be included to allow for recruitment of paid staff and the laying of the groundwork to successfully coordinate a volunteer effort. Programs defined within the period of The New Covenant Process would be transformed into public law and policy within the next year of the Clinton/Gore Administration.

The following are some of the most significant and viable goals:

GOALS:

- 1) To create an historically unique high profile public sense of shared national purpose attentive to the dynamics of a nation which will be majority non-white and, thus, by definition, multi-cultural by the year 2040.

- 2) To make each individual feel that he or she has had a public involvement in the creation of America's emerging critical consensus; involvement being the key to commitment to common goals.
- 3) To create a data base on innovative human resource programs; a database accessible for the remainder of the Clinton/Gore Administration to scholars, policy makers and practitioners from the federal to local level.
- 4) Identification of innovative programs with well-grounded support data and creation of a data base on the relevant leaders implementing those programs.
- 5) Identification of public priorities through the discourse of national debate.
- 6) Recognition at national level of what works.
- 7) Development of implementation strategies and dialogue with relevant agencies, corporations, and other organizations.
- 8) Identification of models of service/altruism and definition of their effectiveness
- 9) Establishment of a climate of leadership which will allow the collaborative power of under-utilized human resources to address the increasingly international problems and opportunities which challenge our national progress.

A three phase 100-day approach for the New Covenant Process:

PHASE ONE: Definition of Agenda

- Data acquisition and analysis
- Survey of literature and people
- Research and creation of a national database on all relevant studies, and research in the human capacities arena.
- Evaluation of innovative but speculative approaches

PHASE TWO: Popular Input

- Regional Meetings
- Presentation of proven prototypes
- Evaluation and conclusions

PHASE THREE: Development of Implementation

- Assignment to public agencies and organizations, as well as private sector, foundations, and charitable entities.

In carrying out its work, the process must be seen to be, and must in substance actually be, a citizen's effort to present a new social agenda with practical applications. This can be done through the regularly timed regional meetings, which solicit active involvement by those individuals, and institutions, which self-define themselves as falling within the human resources arena. The issues raised need to be publicly aired and debated. A few examples: Rates of crime and recidivism have been linked to issues of nutrition and psychophysiologic self-regulation. But how strong is that linkage? What have we learned? Self-esteem training programs seem to be valuable. Do we know how valuable? How accessible are they? Developing greater cross-cultural understanding is an increasingly critical factor in domestic as well as foreign relations. What are some possibilities? The physical limits of human functioning, as demonstrated by placebo medical research are far greater than most of us believe. What are the limits? How can they be applied in a practical way? What would happen if specific training for such capacities were included in school curricula? What would this cost? The same questions apply to creativity research. The mind-body connection seems to play a significant role in healing? What could its role be in terms of national health policy?

Human resource programs make sense at any level at which they are examined. They are cost-effective, and productive; they reduce violence and disorder, they allow people more empowerment, and they produce a higher quality life standard. They make for a better, more functional society. But these realizations are of limited utility to our country unless they are translated and embraced by the commonweal. Too often socially aware groups settle for "the process" of raising an issue; democracy is about winning. The entry requirement is casting a vision sufficiently compelling to enlist citizen support. By evaluating and assembling the relevant research and experiential material, and through the stimulation of dialogues across

the country, the process can help the public and private sectors achieve the critical consensus that creates successful public policy. If the Process is to have more impact than the weight of its findings on a library shelf, it must define this critical consensus in such a way that the hearts and minds of America's citizens are moved to make human capacity considerations a national priority.