

THE SCIENCE OF CONFLICT

BRAIN SCIENCE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON PEACE
BUILDING IN THE AGE OF DONALD TRUMP



BY ROBYN SHORT

**Peace cannot be achieved through violence; it
can only be attained through understanding.**

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

ON NOV. 8, DONALD TRUMP BECAME THE PRESUMED PRESIDENT-ELECT OF THE

United States. Barring an unprecedented reversal of the Electoral College on Dec. 18, Donald Trump will become the 45th U.S. president. He will go down in history as the fifth president to take office without having won the popular vote of the American people. George W. Bush is the only other president in modern history to have won the election without the popular vote, which he lost to Al Gore by 543,816 votes in 2000.¹ And as of the writing of this paper, Donald Trump has lost the popular vote to Hillary Clinton by an astounding 2.3 million.² While there is precedence established for the presidential victor to have not won the popular vote, this clearly does not happen frequently. And in the case of this election, with the gap being so wide and the rumors of foreign interference in the U.S. election having been confirmed by the director of the National Security Agency,³ this election, like the campaign that preceded it, serves as an example of a vast schism within the American people that will likely take many years beyond Trump's presidency to heal.

How did we become so divided? And, what will it take for the American people to unite? Those are the defining questions of 2016. The short and simplistic answer the media frequently reports is that the left was not listening to the right. The post-election message is that the "liberal elites" have shunned American conservatives — people who by and large feel left out and alienated by "the establishment." Therefore, with that reasoning, unifying the American people will require a return to a mythical era of greatness in which blue-collar jobs were in abundance; crime was at a minimum; and racial, ethnic and religious conflict was nonexistent or at least not prevalent enough to be a bother for the masses. It is a return to a time that has actually never existed. This is the message Donald Trump was selling on the campaign trail, and it is the message that millions of American bought.

To answer the above-posed questions — How did we become so divided? And, what will it take for the American people to unite? — this paper will look to science, more specifically brain science, to find answers by understanding more about the human condition and how we humans respond to threats, both real and imagined.

CONFLICT IN THE AGE OF TRUMP

What is conflict? The *Merriam-Webster* dictionary defines it as: “competitive or opposing action of incompatibles.”⁴ In the age of Trump, conflict has turned violent, a form of elevated conflict that is defined by Johan Galtung of the International Peace Research Institute in Oslo as an act or circumstance in which “human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential.”⁵ In other words, violence occurs when humans are exposed to circumstances that suppress their potential. When this definition of violence is applied to the policies and actions Trump promised on the campaign trail, it is clear that violence will be the hallmark of his presidency.

Trump’s campaign promises to build a wall on the southern border of the United States and strong arm Mexico into paying for it, his claim that Mexican immigrants are rapist and killers, along with his promise to require people of the Islamic faith to register in a national database are all acts of violence by Galtung’s definition and have served to encourage and embolden individual acts of violence post-election. Myriad acts of violence have been documented that range from hate crimes — within 10 days of the election 867 hates crimes had been confirmed⁶ — to administration appointments such as the following:

- **Senator Jeff Sessions for the position of Attorney General.**⁷ Jeff Sessions has been a staunch opponent of immigration throughout his two decades in the Senate and was denied a judgeship because his colleagues believed him to be too racist to perform the duties of a judge.⁸ This appointment to Attorney General is likely to set back the progress that has been made in criminal justice and civil rights, most notably as an act of violence directed toward African-Americans and other Americans of color.
- **Betsy DeVoe for Secretary of Department of Education.**⁹ DeVoe, a conservative Christian billionaire, “pours money and support into anti-evolution Christian schools and organizations.”¹⁰ DeVoe is also known as a staunch supporter of charter schools and voucher programs, which divert public funding away from public education. This is likely to have the ripple effect of reducing the quality of education available to children who attend public schools, especially those children in low-income areas who rely almost exclusively on public education.¹¹ Public education is a human right as outlined by the United Nations’ “Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”¹² When there is disparity in publicly funded education, this is a form of violence that harms those who experience the lesser education.
- **Steve Bannon as Chief Strategist.**¹³ Bannon is known primarily as the executive chair of *Breitbart News*, an online media outlet widely known for its scorn for Muslim people, immigrant people and African-American civil rights activists, and therefore a go-to media outlet of choice for members of the white supremacist movement often referred to as the “alt-right.” According to a *New York Times* article, Bannon has, since 2012, “systematically courted a series of politicians, especially those who share his dark, populist worldview: at home, a corrupt ruling class preying on working Americans; globally, ‘the Judeo-Christian West’ in a ‘war against Islamic fascism.’” He is a celebrated figure among white supremacists and members of the Ku Klux Klan.¹⁴
- **Lt. Gen. Michael T. Flynn as National Security Adviser.**¹⁵ Flynn, a known Islamophobic, falsely believes that Sharia law is spreading in the United States. According to a *New York Times* article, he frequently asserts false information about Islamic militancy. “His dubious assertions are so common that when he ran the Defense Intelligence

Agency, subordinates came up with a name for the phenomenon: They called them 'Flynn facts.'"¹⁶ And he his shady ties with oppressive governments have led the Trump transition team to worry about his possibility of successfully passing a Senate confirmation hearing. Flynn's known Islamophobia presents a real threat to all people of Islamic faith.

These four people alone, all of whom will wield significant influence with the soon-to-be president, have the potential to wage significant violence on the American people — a violence less subtle than the 867 documented hate crimes, but violence that has widespread and enduring impact. To date, Trump has not backed down from his campaign promises: to reinstate the unconstitutional stop and frisk policies with a focus of implementing them in inner cities, Trump's code word for low-income communities with high populations of African-Americans;¹⁷ to require Muslim immigrants to register in a specific "Muslim database"; or to build a wall to prevent Mexican immigrants from crossing the boarder illegally. To understand how Americans came to find all these acts of violence as acceptable, we must understand brain science, specifically the science of fear.

THE SCIENCE OF FEAR

Many Americans have spent the weeks since Nov. 8 trying to understand how someone as professionally and temperamentally unqualified to hold the office of the presidency could have been elected to it. R. Douglas Fields, Ph.D., a neuroscientist and an adjunct professor at the University of Maryland, College Park, wrote in an article published in *Scientific American*, "Trump's Victory and the Neuroscience of Rage," that, "Pollsters, politicians, much of the press and public are dismayed by Donald Trump's surprising victory in the presidential election, but not neuroscientists. The bewilderment arises from an attempt to comprehend the election result

rationally, but rage, not reason, is what drove people to put Trump in the White House."¹⁸ Neuroscientists have long known that emotions play a critical role in how humans make decisions. Humans are an intensely emotive species. Why? Because the human brain is wired for survival, and it achieves this in two key ways, both of which are directly related to the limbic system of the brain, an area where much emotional generation and processing occurs:

1. The **emotion fear activates the amygdalae**, almond shaped glands that release the hormone adrenaline, which play a crucial role in the fight, flight or freeze response to anything the brain perceives as a life-threatening situation. The amygdalae's job is to provide the human with the energy resources to escape danger, thus ensuring the survival of the human species.¹⁹
2. The **emotion love activates the hypothalamus**, an area of the brain that releases the hormone oxytocin, also known as the "tend and befriend" hormone. The hypothalamus' job is to support the human in making connections with other humans, developing group bonds and intimate bonds, thus ensuring the survival of the species by establishing pro-social connections, some of which will lead to procreation.²⁰

While some of this emotional processing occurs at a conscious level, much of it occurs below the level of conscious cognition. Fields notes that, "When faced with very complex situations, it is our deep brain threat assessment circuitry, not only our cerebral cortex, that most often moves us to action."²¹ This is an important call out. The cerebral cortex is an area of the brain that is responsible for high-level cognition, including memory function; language functions; and the development and

processing of abstraction, creativity, judgment, emotion and attention.²² But, Fields points out that, "... language arises from neural circuitry in the cerebral cortex, so the brain's subcortical threat detection system does not communicate with words, but rather by using multicolored emotions. Each emotional feeling communicates clearly to our conscious awareness the specific type of threat confronting us: hunger, fear, loneliness, alienation, jealousy, frustration — a rainbow of infinite colors, but every one a brilliantly distinct hue of meaning."²³

As noted previously in this paper, it has been widely reported that millions of people in this country feel left out. They are angry about their economic status. They are fearful that they do not have the economic resources to make ends meet; to acquire adequate health insurance; or to ensure a stable retirement. They perceive that their way of life is under attack, which makes them feel as though they are under attack. They feel alienated from politicians and disenfranchised by a chronically dysfunctional government.²⁴ And they believe the messages sent by every conservative Republican politician who competed in the 2016 presidential primary that they are under a near-constant threat of Islamic terrorism — even though statistics do not support that claim. White nationalists commit far more acts of terrorism in the United States than any other group.^{25, 26}

The political message coming from the far right, and from the Trump campaign in particular, did not position consumers of those messages to be functioning in a rational mind. The prefrontal lobe, the area of the brain tasked with making rational, logical and analytical decisions,²⁷ is not the area of the brain that is activated by fear-mongering media and politicians — at least not in the people who choose to believe the fear-mongering messages. Fear and rage, not reason, is what drove millions of Americans to the polls to vote for Donald Trump. The emotions of anger and fear hijacked their amygdalae and prepared them to fight. And Donald

Trump was the candidate who showed up time and time again with his fists in the air claiming to be their warrior while he rambled on and on, often with minimal coherency, about the dangerous and destructive path of present-day America.

Fear is a powerful weapon. And Trump used this weapon against Americans in a brilliant and terrifying strategy to unify one population of Americans in a fierce battle against another population of Americans. He was careless with facts, and used false statements repeatedly to ramp up the emotional impact of his claims. In fact, the global politics and policy news magazine *Politico* conducted a five-day analysis of both Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton and found that "Trump averaged about one falsehood every three minutes and 15 seconds over nearly five hours of remarks."²⁸ The article goes on to explain, "Trump's mishandling of facts and propensity for exaggeration so greatly exceed Clinton's as to make the comparison almost ludicrous."²⁹ With these lies, he masterfully hit the amygdala triggers of millions of people, and when he hit on the right ones, he hit them over and over and over again, until he finally had many people claiming they would be willing to wage a civil war if he lost the election.³⁰ He incited their fears even more by claiming he could only lose if the election was rigged.

The following are the amygdala triggers that are common to all humans:³¹

- **Not being respected:** Trump convinced his followers that he understood them and their anger. When in actuality, it was Trump who incited their anger with his false statements.
- **Being treated unfairly:** He scapegoated undocumented workers as reasons for why Americans had unfairly lost their jobs. He claimed that people who had crossed into the United States

illegally were the source of high crimes, especially violent crimes. He incited fear, and promised to resolve the problem by building a wall.

- **Being unappreciated:** He waged a war against Hillary Clinton, claiming her experience and decades-long career in politics made her incapable of understanding real Americans. He incited their sense of being unappreciated by bragging of his outsider status and pointing the blame at career politicians.
- **Not being listened to:** He claimed the media was liberal, and therefore unwilling to acknowledge the needs of conservative Americans. He incited their rage and then claimed to be the only person truly listening to them.
- **Having identity challenged:** He used identity-based values as a strategic weapon, conjuring up nostalgia for a white America that seemingly existed in the not-so-distant past, and positioned people of color as the “other.”

Trump was consistent and unrelenting in hitting these triggers and then assured his audiences that he alone could fix these problems.³² In Field’s *Scientific American* article: “Trump’s Victory and the Neuroscience of Rage,” he explains:

As a social species, our individual survival is utterly dependent upon being a member of a group or tribe, and the brain circuitry that allows us to instantly classify anyone into either “us” or “them” is located in our prefrontal cortex. These circuits interact with the limbic system provoking rage and violent aggression to maintain social order, protect our own tribe, and slaughter another tribe if

necessary for our self-preservation. The core of fear and anger gripping many people today stems from this neural circuitry of defensive aggression and rage to protect one’s own tribe. This is true for supporters of both candidates, whether it be working class men feeling their livelihood taken away, women feeling denied opportunity and respect, political parties threatened by their competing parties, or races of people feeling displaced, rejected, excluded, or individuals denied their fair share of our nation’s wealth.

Trump did not appeal to people on a rational level. He cultivated their anger, stoked it and then consistently and relentlessly rallied them around a multitude of shared fears. Keeping their limbic systems on high alert, he began to build his tribe — a tribe in which millions of Americans felt they belonged. Like any good marketer, Trump brilliantly manipulated the emotions of millions of Americans.

The brain is wired for survival. And, as noted previously in this paper, the human species survives in a multitude of ways — the most important of which is identifying and responding quickly to threats (and perceived threats). Connecting with one another in pro-social ways is necessary in order to preserve the species, but from an evolutionary perspective, fear does in fact trump connection and collaboration. And yet, it is only through connection and collaboration that we are able to ensure a future in which all people are able to feel secure and experience dignity. Unity, not division, perpetuates the species and elevates the human experience.

THE SCIENCE OF PEACE

Peace is human security and the ability to live a life of dignity that is free of fear. Peace cannot co-exist with violence. Peace is an act of the collective. Peace does not pit one group against the other, but recognizes the interconnectedness of humanity. When one person suffers, the collective suffers. Peace is not born of fear, but rather of love, connection and collaboration. Where there is true and sustaining peace, all humans are being influenced in such a way that their actual somatic and mental realizations allow them to achieve their potential. Peace requires that there is social parity and that all people, regardless of their differences, have equal access to resources and opportunity. Equal access to resources and opportunities require that any gaps or obstacles associated with them have been considered and addressed in such a way that equal access truly means just that. And just as there is a science to conflict, fear and violence, there is a science to peace.

While the amygdala is the guardian of the emotion of fear and activates the “fight, flight or freeze” response to perceived threats, the hypothalamus is associated with oxytocin — the pro-social, “tend and befriend” hormone that encourages trust, increases loyalty and promotes attachment and bonding. Oxytocin is primarily in the hypothalamus. From there, it is either released into the blood stream via the pituitary gland or to other parts of the brain and spinal cord where it attaches to oxytocin receptors thereby influencing behavior and physiology.³³

Research shows that oxytocin may have a dual purpose and dual pathways. When an individual is experiencing periods of low stress, oxytocin physiologically reinforces good social bonds with feelings of well-being. However, when a person is experiencing periods of high stress and high levels of the stress hormone cortisol are present, oxytocin can

encourage pro-social behavior such as seeking out the positive attention and affection of others.³⁴

The hormone oxytocin — and the catalysts for its emission in the body — supports the notion that the human brain is wired for connectivity. Actual or anticipated social contact can cause bursts of oxytocin emission. However, the brain may also respond to the stress associated with periods of social deficits with bursts of oxytocin emissions in order to produce physiological changes that then encourage the individual to behave in more pro-social ways — i.e., a physiological nudge to make positive contact with other people. In this manner, oxytocin actually affords the potentially stressful experiences to become an opportunity for expressing kindness and joy.³⁵

Research has found oxytocin to be an incredible resource for powerfully increasing trust. Numerous studies have found that participants who are given pretend money and then encouraged to invest that money with a stranger will, on average, invest only one-fourth to one-third of their money. However, after a few sniffs of oxytocin, their trust levels increase significantly and their investment amount jumps to 80 percent or more.³⁶ There is a reciprocal relationship between oxytocin and empathy: Oxytocin increases an individual’s capacity for empathy, and empathy increases the emission of oxytocin in the body. Therefore, from a peace-building perspective, it is beneficial to exercise empathy in relationship to others because both the act and the hormone serve to strengthen social bonds.

According to Daniel Goleman, author of *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Make You Smarter Than IQ*, explains the three types of empathy in an article posted to his website:³⁷

- 1. Cognitive empathy:** Cognitive empathy is knowing how another person feels, or

“perspective-taking.” This form of empathy is highly effective at motivating people to apply their best efforts. While at first blush all forms of empathy may appear to be pro-social, cognitive empathy does have a dark side. Individuals who are purely self-motivated (such as interrogators, narcissists and sociopaths) can be masters at this form of empathy and utilize it for purely selfish reasons.

2. Emotional empathy: Emotional empathy is truly feeling the emotion along with another individual. Emotional empathy is due to the activation of mirror neurons, which help individuals to be attuned to another person’s inner emotional world. While emotional empathy does promote bonding and attachment and can positively affect trust and loyalty, one downside is that it can become overwhelming to the person extending empathy, causing burnout and then ultimately detachment as a coping mechanism. Emotional empathy must be paired with a healthy ability to self-regulate one’s own emotions and high attention to self-care.

3. Empathetic empathy: Empathetic empathy, also referred to as empathic or compassionate empathy, involves the capability of understanding a person’s predicament and feeling with them along with the willingness to help if necessary. This form of empathy is what the emotion of love looks like in action.

If ever there was a time for extending empathy, reaching across party lines, and opening our hearts to friends and family who share opposing views, that time is now. But how do we humans overcome our propensity toward violence? How do we cultivate propensity for peace and foster a culture of unity that embraces human security and dignity for all people?

A step toward peace-building in the age of Donald Trump is becoming aware that we must all make a conscious effort toward taking individual responsibility *for one another* rather than individual responsibility *for one’s self* only. We must take responsibility for how we allow others to influence us, including the media and political leaders who use neuromarketing tactics aimed at shaping human behavior through fear. However, this type of manipulation can only be effective when we are complicity participators in it. It has been mentioned numerous times in this paper that Donald Trump sold a message. A vast number of Americans bought the message. His fear-mongering campaign could not have worked if those he was selling it to had refused to buy it. Which means, we must take greater ownership and control of our personal agency and be conscious and deliberate in how we engage in the world around us. To do this, we must understand the tool we humans use to engage in the world around us — our brain.

CULTIVATING PEACE

Spiritual teacher and *New York Times* best-selling author Marianne Williamson wrote in her book, *A Return to Love*, “Love is what we are born with. Fear is what we learn.”³⁸ As lovely and eloquent as that is, from an evolutionary perspective, it is incorrect. The brain is wired for survival; therefore, fear and love are both essential to the survival of the human species. Fear is one of the most efficient ways in which the brain can alert the body to potential danger. Love — care, collaboration and connectedness — is the most sustaining way in which the brain can ensure the perpetuation of the species. Our challenge as humans is to be discerning in our use of each evolutionary mechanism.

To become masters of our own personal agency and guardians against fear-mongering tactics that are so prevalent in violent societies, we need to gain a deeper understanding of our emotional selves.

From a neuroscience perspective, there is a distinct difference between emotions and feelings. Emotions are physiological and can be objectively measured by blood flow, brain activity, facial microexpressions and body language. Feelings, on the other hand are how the individual expresses emotions.

Feelings are based off memory associations and reactions the individual has with a particular emotion. Feelings are subjective and are influenced by personal experiences, beliefs, personal temperament and memories. The emotion of fear may be expressed in the following feelings:

- Anger
- Hatred
- Disgust
- Anxiety
- Panic

While the emotion of love may be expressed by these feelings:

- Calm
- Happy
- Comfort
- Connected
- Safety

Mirror neurons play an important role in the expression of emotions. Mirror neurons are a class of brain cells that fire when an individual performs an action and also when the individual observes someone else performing the same action.³⁹ Because connectivity is paramount to human survival, humans are intensely social beings. Mirror neurons send messages to our limbic system allowing us to experience what others feel. They allow for the deepening of pro-social behavior because they give individuals the ability to

have intensely shared emotional experiences. Mirror neurons are the birthplace of empathy and suggest that deep within the human architecture is the framework for connectivity or “togetherness.” There would be no point of a mirror neuron system if humans were designed to live in isolation from one another.⁴⁰ A caveat to this is: Be careful whose neurons are being mirrored. Mirror neurons can help to explain the violent behavior at Trump rallies. A way of taking ownership of one’s emotional experiences and being intentional in one’s behavior is to hone one’s own emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence offers a framework for conducting one’s self in a manner that is conducive to participating in the building of a more peaceful society.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is a term coined by Peter Salavoy and John Mayer and popularized by psychologist Daniel Goleman. Emotional intelligence is defined as the ability to recognize, understand and manage one’s own emotions and feelings and also to recognize, understand and influence the emotions of others. Having a high emotional intelligence means that a person is aware that emotions have significant influence over behavior and can impact others — both positively and negatively. Therefore, one must learn how to manage his or her own emotions, as well as have the ability to regulate or manage the emotions of other people.⁴¹ Daniel Goleman explains EI as having the following three criteria:⁴²

1. Emotional awareness, including the ability to identify one’s own emotions, differentiate them from feelings, as well as identify the emotion and feelings of others
2. The ability to harness emotions and feelings and apply them to cognition and problems-solving

3. The ability to manage emotions and feelings, including the ability to regulate one's own emotions, and the ability to cheer up or calm down another person

In his book, *Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman provides five specific skills associated with EI, which are outlined below along with an explanation of the relevance of the skill to peace building.⁴³

1. Self-awareness — A self-reflexive state in which one is able to have ongoing attention to one's internal states. In this self-reflexive state, the mind observes, investigates and experiences itself, including the emotions and the feelings associated with them. Self-awareness requires that a person have the ability to acknowledge, identify and accept his or her own emotions and feelings.

Building peace in the age of Donald Trump calls on every person to be an active protector of human security and human dignity. Core to the human experience is the need to be seen, heard and acknowledged by others; to be recognized as a person with equal rights and, therefore, to be treated fairly; and to feel safe in the world. To create a space — home, organization, community, city, etc. — where these needs can be met, requires that those who choose to be peacemakers and peacekeepers are able to have an awareness of their own emotions and how those emotions are being expressed so as to be careful not to impose one's own desires onto another in an intentional or unintentional act of violence.

2. Self-managemen — The ability for an individual to manage or regulate emotions, feelings and behavior in a way that is both appropriate to the situation as well as the person's role in the situation. The goal of self-management is balance, not suppression. Every emotion and feeling has their value and significance and serves as instruments of learning and self-expression.

Donald Trump has demonstrated time and again his thin-skinned, narcissistic responses to criticism. We have witnessed his inability to manage his impulses when he becomes emotionally triggered or rattled. This is not the response of a peacemaker. It is the response of a violent man. Because peace is human security and human dignity, peacemakers must be able to regulate their emotions in such a way that their own emotions and feelings do not create violence for other people. For example, Donald Trump bellowing, "nasty woman," "wrong!" and "Because you'd be in jail!" into the microphone during the third town hall debate with Hillary Clinton are all examples of violent outbursts that demonstrate an inability to self-regulate. A person who is able to effectively self-manage or self-regulate recognizes when he or she needs to take accountability for the struggles, obstacles, challenges, etc. that he or she faces; the person may accurately recognize that these challenges may be born out of dysfunction in a system, organization, government or culture, but he/she can do so without seeking to remedy these challenges through violent means. Self-management is the ability to hold one's emotions separate from the situation, and to allow the emotion to inform behavior rather than dictate it.

3. Motivation — This is the harnessing of one's feelings such as enthusiasm and confidence in order to enhance achievement. Important elements of motivation are optimism and hope, both of which can be learned. Underlying both is an outlook psychologists refer to as self-efficacy, the belief that one has mastery over the events of one's life and can meet challenges as they are presented. Developing a competency of any kind strengthens one's sense of self-efficacy, empowering a person to become more able to take risks and seek out more demanding challenges.

Peace building in the age of Donald Trump is an exercise in holding space for possibility. Rather than caving in to what seems like an insurmountable assault

of violence against the American people — in policy and actual acts of individual violence that is occurring from American citizens — peacemakers must maintain motivation and commitment to being agents of positive change, even in the face of great adversity. Peace is the work of courageous risk takers and those who are able to hold out for hope when others only see the bleakness of the current reality.

4. Empathy — This is recognizing the emotions and feelings in others and offering assistance to help if help is needed or necessary. Not all people experience high-levels of empathy, but empathy can be learned.

Empathy may well be the most challenging skill in the EI tool kit because peace is only possible when all people experience human security and dignity. That means the perpetrators of violence must be heard, understood, listened to, treated fairly and able to live in a world in which they too feel safe. Empathy means that we refrain from name-calling and categorizing (i.e., “basket of deplorable”),⁴⁴ and instead seek to understand and extend an offer for help. Empathy is recognizing that those who do not have the skills or awareness to manage their own emotions and regulate themselves in a pro-social manner are not lesser human beings; they are less understood human beings. The peacemaker’s role is to seek to understand, seek opportunities for common ground and begin the process of healing a divide while nonviolently resisting injustices and violence.

5. Social skills — These are social competencies that make for effectiveness in dealings with others. Social abilities allow one to shape an encounter, to mobilize and inspire others, to thrive in relationships, to persuade and influence and to put others at ease.

Peacemakers must be brain sensitive communicators. They must cultivate an awareness that words are extraordinarily powerful and can be used as weapons or salves to heal wounds. Words that

disrespect another person or group of people; that indicate a lack of appreciation of a person or group of people; that position others in unfair or unjust ways; that demonstrate a lack of understanding; that demonstrate unrealistic expectations of others; and that challenge a person’s identity are likely to activate the amygdala of the person on the receiving end of the words.

Words can be catalysts to violence. The following are words and labels that have become common weapons in the age of Donald Trump reframed in a way that preserves human security and human dignity:

<u>AMYGDALA TRIGGER</u>	<u>NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION</u>
Label	Reframe: A person who ...
Bully	> <i>Is struggling to get needs met in a pro-social manner</i>
Liar	> <i>Is not ready to live in truth</i>
Misogynist	> <i>Has yet to learn the inherent value of all people</i>
Racist	> <i>Is struggling to believe in an abundance of resources</i>

Reframing words that label and categorize in such a way that the unmet need behind the behavior that is driving the label or category is put at the forefront of the dialogue, which enables the peacemaker to shape an encounter in a collaborative and compassionate way. Communicating in a nonviolent, compassionate and humane way can mobilize and inspire others to thrive in professional, political and personal relationships and to persuade influence and put others at ease while working through complex issues at the center of a conflict.

BRAIN SENSITIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION PRACTICES

Political conflict has the potential to provide a rich and potentially rewarding opportunities for growth, both in personal relationships and within the collective conscious of our nation. Understanding how to navigate conflict in such a way that is nonviolent and productive is critical to creating sustainable peace. The following are just a few conflict resolution techniques that hold

great promise in creating more peaceful relationships as it relates to the nonviolent, interest-based resolution of politically-driven conflict, both in personal relationships and at a policy level.

- **Mediation:** Mediation is a form of conflict resolution that invites an impartial third party into a conflict to facilitate a mutual agreement between or amongst all parties. Mediation is designed to empower the parties who participated in the creation of a conflict to also be the authors of its resolution. Interest-based mediation is designed to address the foundational causes of conflict, optimizing collaboration and agreement amongst all parties involved.
- **Restorative justice:** Restorative justice models seek to repair the harm that has been done to an individual or individuals as a result of another person or persons' behavior(s). Restorative justice models bring those who have been harmed by another's actions into a restorative process designed to reclaim as much normalcy as possible for the person who has been harmed, and allows the person who created the harm to take ownership and responsibility in the repair. Like mediation, it is a collaborative process that seeks to find solutions at a foundational level. Restorative justice seeks to heal the relationship rather than place focus on punishing behavior exclusive of the relationship.
- **Dialogue circles:** Dialogue circles are a space created for participants to talk about what is important to them via a facilitated dialogue by a professionally trained facilitator. Dialogue circles are an opportunity to develop trust while sharing in a journey that affects all effected by the conflict.

Brain sensitive approaches to conflict resolution are practices designed to enhance collaboration and allow for those involved in conflict to come together

nonviolently. These practices minimize the risks of an amygdala hijack and optimize the potential of the hypothalamus to elicit oxytocin, thereby increase opportunities for human connection, human bonding and the development of mutual trust.

CONCLUSION

Understanding the basics of neuroscience and having at least a rudimentary understanding of brain science is critical to creating lasting peace. In order to bring about lasting and positive change, one must understand the tools with which that change will be created. Neuroscience provides insight into why people behave the way they do in calm and in conflict and, therefore, insight into how one might assume greater control and responsibility for being peacemakers in their personal lives and in the nation. Understanding that humans have the ability to master their thoughts, and therefore their actions, and to shape their human development intentionally and through peaceful and collaborative means gives great promise to the possibilities of creating lasting peace — in their homes, schools, neighborhoods and communities, and in the nation.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



An international speaker, peace-building trainer and mediator with expertise in restorative justice and transformative mediation models, Robyn Short works with individuals, corporations and nonprofit organizations in discovering the root causes of their conflicts, so they may transform their relationships and create new and productive paths forward individually and as teams. She also works with community leaders and political and governmental leaders to develop grassroots efforts for building sustainable peace in areas of historic conflict. In this capacity, she has been featured in news outlets internationally.

Robyn is the author of three books and the founder and publisher of GoodMedia Press, an independent publishing house that's mission is to actively and passionately promote peace and social justice through the written word.

Robyn is currently a Liberal Studies doctoral candidate at Southern Methodist University. She holds a Master in Conflict Management and Dispute Resolution from Southern Methodist University and a Master of Liberal Studies from Southern Methodist University with a focus in 15th century European history. She received a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Auburn University.

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