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There are some occasions that don't come along very often, opportunities to bring about some very major changes and I think this is such an opportunity. It's not the only one, there have been some in the past, and I'd like to talk about one or two of these from the past because I find it very helpful as I think about all the obstacles that we encounter trying to bring about the kinds of changes that we're talking about today. Sometimes a number of us, Adam and some others, sit and chat after a conference somewhere when things seem very difficult and indeed they almost seem hopeless. I always find it useful to think back to some other so-called hopeless situation that turned out not to be hopeless even though no one could've, at the time, predicted that it would've come out the way it eventually did.

One such ordeal that I had something to do with was the whole question of collective bargaining for teachers. Now today in all parts of the country teachers are the most unionized work force. Teachers are 94% unionized in the United States. There is no other part of the work force that's as unionized and yet, in 1960, teachers were relatively ununionized. In those days I would go from school to school in New York City and you might think that teachers wanted collective bargaining. Well, they didn't. I'm not even talking about whether school boards wanted collective bargaining or whether principals wanted it or whether administrators wanted it or anybody else wanted it, the question is did teachers want it? The answer is no, they didn't. Most teachers felt that collective bargaining would contradict their professionalism. That's how they felt even in a place like New York City where almost all the teachers came from union families.

Their mothers and fathers were members of unions, and because they were members of unions they had some money to help their kids go through college. As I went from school to school arguing that teachers ought to have a union and that we ought to have a right to negotiate, first of all very few would come to a meeting. I remember that Brooklyn Tech. had 425 teachers and when I went to a meeting there, there were only six teachers at the meeting. Nobody else was interested. And when I talked to the teachers about the need to have a union, their answer was very interesting. They said, "Hey, we think unions are great. My Mom, My Dad, they're members of unions and that's why they had enough money to send me through college. But I don't want to be in a union because if I'm in a union it shows that I really haven't progressed beyond my parents. They didn't send me to college so that I can be a union member. They sent me to college so I could be above, ahead of, beyond, where they were." You know, that was a serious problem. And that was not the South, not Mississippi. I'm talking about New York City, a place where people are generally pro-union. They weren't against being in a union because they believed it would represent a set-back.

That wasn't the only problem we had. In 1960, there were 106 teacher organizations in New York City. There was one for each division, each religion, each race, and for each grievance. There was a group called the Sixth and Seventh Grade Woman's Teachers Association of Benzenhurst. Something had happened at some point and they started an organization. No, no joke. There was also a group that tried to bring them all together called the Joint Committee of Teacher Organizations. Our organization was one of the 106. Now, believe it or not, in those days, in New York City,

teachers believed that you were better off if you did not have one organization for all the teachers because if you had one organization it would neglect their specific concern or issue. They said one organization is not really going to listen to me. And they also felt that a small organization would be more responsive to their particular needs. And so, when I went to schools to talk to teachers they'd say, "well, we only have 300 members in our organization so we can be effective." I would say, "What? In a city with 50,000 teachers you're going to be effective with just a handful of teachers?" They said, "sure, look at how expensive it is to give something to everybody. As a small group we're going to just ask for something for ourselves, it's alot cheaper." That's the kind of thing that we had to fight.

There was an historic opportunity, as it turned out, in 1960-61.

Everything that happened there could've happened a different way. It could've happened that the teachers would vote against collective bargaining. Now, if New York City teachers had voted against collective bargaining, what would have happened to collective bargaining for teachers and other employees in the rest of the country? That would've been it! They would've said, "Hey, right here in the labor center of the world, where they have a right to have an election, the teachers themselves turned it down." That would've been the end of it.

Now once the teachers voted and we were elected, we weren't experienced . . . no one was experienced in this field. No one had ever negotiated for public employees. There were lots of unanswered questions: Did we have a right to a written agreement? Did the government have a right to enter into such an agreement? Does government have the right to enter

into more than a one year contract, given the fact that budgets are only for one year and school boards change? Does government have the right to say that an impartial arbitrator will resolve a grievance which may result in the expenditure of taxpayers money? Is it legal? Is it constitutional? Can it be done?

We didn't know. As we went into collective bargaining, we didn't know the answers to these question. We didn't know if we would have a written agreement or a grievance procedure or anything else. There are certain times when grabbing an opportunity can make a tremendous difference for everybody. Had we gone into negotiations and settled for a memorandum of understanding, a resolution of the board, things short of a contract, had we settled on an agreement that had no arbitration in it because we would have accepted the idea that the government cannot submit itself to impartial arbitration--whatever we did at that point would've been the precedent for the rest of the country. Fortunately, what we did turned out to be pretty good and set a pattern which created very good and very genuine collective bargaining over time. It's also important to note that it took about 15 years before most teachers accepted the concept. And there are still debates today in Texas and Mississippi and elsewhere as to whether collective bargaining is the right thing for teachers. It's not over yet! It's over for the majority, but it's still not over for some.

Well, the reason I started by talking about that is because, as you know, you are now in the same position with respect to new powers for teachers and with respect to the creation of a profession. You, in Rochester, are in the position that New York City teachers were in the early 1960's with

respect to collective bargaining. Now, I don't know who selected the New York City teachers to carry on that role. Many of them didn't know what role they were carrying. When they were told in a meeting, like this, meeting, well now we have a bargaining election and you've got to go get the votes, many of them said, "Who told you to get it now? We're not ready for it. Some 45,000 people crossed our lines. We don't have any money. We don't really have an organization. We don't have anything." But they created the confrontations and everything else that lead to it. And then, after that time, there was a question of whether the rest of the teachers would pick up the opportunity or whether the ball would be dropped. You are in the same situation now with respect to a new development for teachers and to the profession. The whole country is looking at you because you have a great contract, you have benefits you couldn't have gotten if you were out on strike for 3 years. You got it because there's a promise of a new sort of relationship between labor management and a new sort of involvement for teachers. It was really a result of an atmosphere that was created by Adam, your leadership, that said "Hey! We're sticking our necks out. We're willing to do things differently. And, because we're willing to do things differently, it's going to be hard enough to do it, but in order to make it possible for us to do it, help us out in what the terms of the agreement is and what the benefits are because this is a heavy number. We're asking people to do things that other teachers in the country are not doing." And so now, you're in the newspapers all across the country and TV shows and magazine articles and everything else. It's very much like the bargaining election that was about to take place in New York City and if you carry off something in a right way and a good way you're going to create a new life

for teachers all across the country, and for yourselves too! But its going to be easier for the others. It was harder for those in New York City because they couldn't point to anybody else that had done it before. Everything that we did there we had to do out of our own blood and sweat and guts. People who came later would say, "Hey! They have it in New York City why can't we have it?" Or they have it in Philadelphia, or they have it in Boston or they have it in Rochester, but the first group that did it had to work a hell of alot harder at it because there weren't any guidelines. There were no manuals. There was no sample contract that anybody had negotiated before. There wasn't even a procedure as to who meets in a union. How do you develop your demands? All these things that are now done as a matter of almost routine weren't there before and that's the position that you are in now with respect to a whole series of these issues.

The whole question of whether you can do it depends on how well you've put yourself together internally. Whether you liked it or not, whether you're absolutely certain or not, it's alot like, wondering whether you should have gone out on strike or whether you shouldn't have; but once you're out you had better stick together. Maybe we shouldn't have gone for collective bargaining, maybe it was a stupid thing, but once the election date was set we were going to get it. At that point there's no sense in arguing anymore, should we have done it or shouldn't we have done it, at that point the only thing to do is to win the election. Well, maybe you're questioning whether you should be here now and whether you

should've gotten these benefits or not, maybe you should've settled for less and had a normal contract and had not gotten into this whole thing. But that's all gone now, you're here and those discussions are just not important anymore. You're here, you're on the hook. You've gotten a great contract and the whole country is looking at you because you've gotten in as a result, basically of certain general promises, not a promise that exactly this and that would happen, but a promise of a new relationship and the involvement of teachers in the restructuring and rebuilding of a school system. And now, the thing to do, is to make it work. If you make it work, you will create a model for teachers across the country who will follow just as teachers followed New York City in collective bargaining and it will be easier for them. But if a few years from now people can say, "We heard all sorts of general commitments, but nothing changed", then they'll decide that what we really need is not teacher involvement, but what we need is some other system of creating change. They'll promote tax credits, weakening of tenure or something else. We all know that people are generally unhappy, not just in Rochester, but all across the country they aren't happy with schools and change in the air. Look at it! Tuition tax credits have been passed in Iowa. In Minnesota they have a law which has just gone into effect that says that a kid can go to any public school in the state. Chicago has just enacted a law which provides that, every school have its own parent Board of Education to hire and fire the principals who no longer have any tenure. How is the parent board of education for the school chosen? Any group of parents who walk in between 3 and 5 o'clock on a certain day pick the school's Board of Education. How'd you like to work in a school where your principal has to worry every day whether he

has a majority vote of the people who walked in that day. What does that mean for his ability to carry out an educational program? I don't know if you read about Chelsie, Massachussetts where the school board decided, "We give up! We can't improve this thing. We are willing to contract this whole school system to John Silber and to Boston University for 10 years." And the Massachussetts legislature will take over that school system. By the way, when they take it over there's a question as to whether teachers would retain tenure, whether they would have any rights under their contract to negotiate under public employee law, or whether they will be recertified under the National Labor Relations Act. But for 10 years that whole school system and its personnel will be turned over to a private university and everything is questioned. Now these are the kind of things that are in the air. Almost all are negative, anti-teacher and anti-professional. There is no choice of standing still. We are really concerned with what's happening, and we don't have any magic answers. We can't tell you what's going to happen tomorrow any more than a doctor can guarantee that he's going to cure cancer or aids or the common cold next year. But we are your only hope because we know more about improving schools than anybody else and we are going to put ourselves together in such a way that we're going to find the answers as quickly as we can. It might be 2 years and it might be 30 years. We can't tell you. But nobody else is going to find it better or faster. And if you go anywhere else you're just stupid. It's like saying we're going to fire all the doctors because they haven't found answers to these things yet and we're going to bring in other people to find cures. Nobody would have any faith in that. But we have to put ourselves in a position where we really are

looking for answers and where the public notices we're looking for them and they have faith in us because of our efforts and our honesty in the whole enterprise. That's what we're going for! And if we don't do it ourselves, whatever the "it" is, somebody is going to do it to us. That's what's happening in all these other places. Now what you have, you've gotten a head start on this thing instead of people saying, "Do this" to them, they're saying "The Union is great. They're coming up with ideas. They're going to involve teachers." Instead of this being a downer where everybody is knocking the Union and the teachers, they're saying nice things about you.

What does this do to the Union? And it's not just an issue that you have, I've been talking about these things across the country and you are the leading group, but there are a lot of terrific things happening in Dade County, there are a number of schools in New York City that are really turning things around doing some great things. I just came from a middle school in Indiana that's 2 years ahead of anywhere else in terms of some of the things that ought to be done. Very, very exciting stuff. Nothing's ever been written up, they just did it themselves very quietly in Borden, Indiana and I didn't know about it until I was there. But everywhere I go I get questions: "Is this what a union is supposed to be about?" Doesn't this mean that we're getting too cooperative and too nice? Aren't we supposed to be fighting? Doesn't this mean we are going to be involved, maybe, in not only training teachers but ultimately having some responsibility for removing some who aren't so good? Is that our job or should we be defending teachers no matter what? Look at those of us

who are in schools, we are very good at handling grievances and we are the gutsy people who stand up to the principal and can take him on and that's why we've been selected. Now you want us to "make nice", to cooperate and start talking about professional programs which we don't know about, we haven't been trained, that's not my cup of tea."

Now part of this all comes from a picture of trade unions from the press. And the picture that we have of what trade unions are like is about as accurate as the picture you get of schools, when you just read about it from the press. It has a certain element of truth to it, but it doesn't give you a very good picture.

The fact is that most trade unions over our history have not been able to engage in the kind of adversarial relationship that we think as the traditional trade union relationship. Sure the United Workers, during the period when there were no Japanese cars and everybody wanted American cars, could shut the whole place down for weeks. If they weren't making cars, you weren't going to buy anything else. Today the United Auto Workers are building new plants and the union leaders are sitting with management leaders, not talking about how they can get an extra buck or win an extra grievance or keep somebody on who's not competent, but how they can produce a better automobile so there is a United Auto Workers three years from now and there is an auto industry. They realize that if they don't produce a better automobile together, they're gone. My mother used to work in the garment industry. I often asked her, What kind of a union do you have? She would say, well, we had a union meeting today and the union rep told us that the boss said he's got an offer to make 10,000 suits and if we're willing to make them for a certain price we have

work; otherwise, he can't make any money on it and he's not going to take the order. Do we want it or don't we? That was collective bargaining. It wasn't the kind of collective bargaining where you are going to a rich boss to get what you can; the boss was coming to you and saying , Hey here's the offer, take it or leave it! If you don't want it, I don't do it. I'll pick up my sewing machines and move elsewhere; because sewing machines are easier to move than auto plants.

I'm saying that a union has to advance the interest of its members.

Sometimes you advance the interest of your members by "punching somebody else in the nose", and sometimes you advance the interest of your members by improving the industry and by being cooperative. Knowing what advances the interest of your members at any given time is a matter of intelligence. To be a good union leader in the auto industry 20 years ago is different than today. By the way, I was the guy who invented "punching them in the nose" as far as teachers are concerned. I don't believe I did anything wrong in the 1960's, I really don't. In the 1960's when we carried on confrontational bargaining we got a lot out of it. That's how we built a great organization. Today it's idiotic because people are going to look for other choices. Today we would not win for our members that way. Look at one such place where they have confrontation: Chicago. They are talking about breaking the city up into 36 districts. All the teachers are going to be fired, and will have to stand in line to apply to the "new" school district. You've got to think of different ways of handling different situations.

The good news and the bad news about what you're doing is that it's like collective bargaining—but no one has ever done it before and so there is no rule book. There isn't a right and wrong way until after you do it (and then I'll come back and tell you . . .). You'll all know whether it was right or wrong after you've done it, but nobody will know in advance. So, I'm not here to say "Here is the right way." If I knew the right way I would certainly tell you, and if I knew it you'd already have it and others would have it. But I don't. Nobody knows. However, we do know the shortcomings of the current system. We have a system, and don't think this is only Rochester and don't think it's only because we have minority youngsters or only because we have poor children with special problems, The problem is really a national problem. If all poor folks and minorities were to catch up to where white folks are, we would still have a national educational disaster in this country. That's the first thing you must come to grips with. The national problem is that even white middle class kids can't write a simple letter when they graduate high school. They can't do very simple mathematical problems, they can't read a railroad timetable schedule, they can't read an editorial and understand what it's about, they can't find the Atlantic Ocean on the map, they don't know in which century something happened. What we're talking about is the overwhelming majority, not 51%, but 75-80% of all kids. Yes, there are some minorities among them, but most of those kids are white, middle class, American kids. The evidence is quite strong that the reason that this is happening is because we have the wrong basic analogy for education: that the kid is on a factory assembly line and

that the teachers are the workers who are screwing mathematics on and putting English into them or pouring something else into the kid. The phrase that's constantly used is, "I taught them, but they didn't learn" -whatever that means. It's an interesting phrase to analyze. We're doing all the work, we're doing all the talking and the singing and the dancing and the fact is that about 80% of the kids are tuned out at any one time and they're tuned out because most people can't sit for 5 hours a day. If I put my kid at home in a seat and told him to sit there and listen to me for 5 hours a day, somebody would come and arrest me. In school if the kid can't sit and listen for 5 hours a day, we take him out and put him in special education. So, we need a system guided by common sense approaches, namely that education is something that people do for themselves. Kids and adults get educated by doing things and not by just being present while somebody else is doing something. We have to think of students as workers. You're the manager of an auto factory and you know you can't watch all the workers, there are too many of them, you can't hire enough inspectors, just like there can't be enough assistant principals to watch all of us. They'll never find out all the things that we're doing, will they? And we'll never find out all of the things that the kids are doing! And therefore the only way that a principal can really manage a school is to figure out how to make the teachers want to do those things. Only if they want to do it is it going to get done. Any teacher can screw up on what any principal wants very easily. Just watch them when they come over and you do what they want you do and the rest of the time you do what you want to do. There's nothing new about that, but

the kids are doing the same with us. We have to think of how we can organize schools and classrooms in such a way that kids will want to do what we want them to do. That's not easy. That's the thinking that has to take place, otherwise it's just not going to work. How to go about it? I don't have an answer, but I'll start with one.

All of us, I think almost all of us, have severe limitations in how to think about these things. Why? Because I went to a school that is just like all the schools that are around today. I went to kindergarten, I went to first grade, I was given a seat, in those days we had ink wells, but basically it was the same kind of school as you have today. Most of us have been to the same kind of school and that means, you see people who go into any other industry, they didn't see that industry until after they went into it. So, if they worked for 2 or 3 different kinds of places they can have some imagination about how something could be different. It's hard for any of us . . . Look, you're in power you can do anything you want tomorrow. You know what? You don't know what to do. I don't know what to do because we started school in kindergarten and first grade, we went all through it, we went to college, and then we worked in the same kind of school we went to as kids, we have not seen anything different. So how do we start? Now this is going to sound silly, but I don't know of any other way than to start with little groups at schools. Anybody who wants to do it, 4-5-6 people. You've got to get some interesting articles about what's happening here and how somebody organized it differently, and why somebody thinks that kids aren't engaged, and you've got to just start expanding imagination, that's what you've got to start with. Look at Montessori programs or at your own School Without Walls. Look at some of

the other alternative schools. And, by the way, when you come up with new ideas, don't tell anybody that you're sure it's going to work. Chances are, that the first thing you try, the second and third will not work. You should view yourselves the way doctors view themselves, and express alot of skepticism. Just say tjat you're trying, but this is an intelligent thing to try. Don't promise the teachers, don't promise the kids, don't promise the parents, enter into it in the spirit of professional research and experimentation.

I want to congratulate you for embarking on this exciting endeavor. I also want you to know that through all the painful changes you should always keep in mind what would be likely to be happening right now in Rochester if you didn't do this. Look at cities where community groups, civil rights groups, boards of education, and industry groups are attacking teachers and their unions and are coming up with crazy notions of accountability and crazy notions of getting rid of rights and benefits that teachers had before. Don't think of what you're in now as a crazy sort of thing that Adam got you into and wouldn't it be nice if you didn't have to do this, think of what is happening in every city in America where they do not have a leader who's done something like this. Take a look at what's happening to the teachers and the unions of those cities. I'm sure that if you take a look and make that comparison, you'll not regret the fact that you're in this situation.