



Change can happen when every voice is heard

What happens when you bring together over 4000 people to discuss possible developmental choices for the World Trade Center site? Magic!!

Many stories to date have been written about the tragedy that took place on September 11th 2001 but few have featured the transformation that is taking place as a result of the community coming together to create a common voice. On July 20th 2002 America Speaks, a non-profit community voice organization, gathered 500 hundred facilitators and over 4000 New York City residents, politicians, business owners and victims of September 11th at New York's Javits Center to review proposed developmental plans, share dream and most importantly have an opportunity to be heard. The program, one of the largest of its kind, was called **Listening to the City**.

Listening to the City was a statement to how communities, if given the opportunity, can transform and get their voices heard. As one of the hand selected facilitators I would like to share with you my experience of how this process has changed the vision of lower Manhattan and given the people a voice.

In today's world of high technology information moves fast, an email went out the beginning of June asking for facilitators to help with a project that was going to give New Yorkers an opportunity to review development plans and share their visions around the World Trade Center site. Being a practitioner of large-scale change initiatives, I could not resist the challenge and opportunity to work on such a unique project with some of our countries most dynamic facilitators. Only 500 facilitators were selected out of over 1000 that applied. There was fair representation from every state in the Union as well as 6 other countries. Every one selected agreed to volunteer their time and cover their travel expense.

By the end of June I received an email stating that I was selected to participate in the Listening to the City project. I was going to be responsible for a table of 10 participants, some of which could be family member of victims. My goal was to collect a common voice and make sure that this voice was transcribed into a notebook computer sitting on the table. This information would be transmitted to a "theme hub" where a team (called the theme team) sorted the data and presented the common voice of the people. Seeing this operation in process was amazing, imagine 500 tables all transferring information.

I arrived on the 19th of July and went right into a training course to better understand what I was going to encounter the next day. We also had extensive training on how the information system was going to operate. I arrived the next day and began to meet my table participants. The meeting got underway about 9:30 and we worked until 4:30. It was when the themes began to be fed back to the audience the entire room's mood shifted. The community actually realized that they shared a common view and sent that message loud and strong to the political official of New York City. 1. Preserve the footprints as a "remarkable symbol", 2. Reconnect the neighborhoods, minimize commercial traffic and open the waterways, 3. Be bold in the design of new buildings, 4. See other ways to address and solve the household requirement, cancel the lease and start fresh, 5. Diversify use – reduce amount of office space; add schools, libraries and recreation centers; include affordable senior housing.

Seeing the combination of technology and community come together to create a new vision built on dreams, hope and love for a city and people that were harmed by such devastating circumstances, gave me hope for not just New York but our world as a whole. Image, communities around the world coming together to use the true democratic process of letting each voice be heard. What a different world this would be.

The greater Cleveland community can be proud of its representation. Fifty percent of the Ohio facilitators selected call Northeastern Ohio home and over 25% of all facilitators had ties to Cleveland's Case Western Reserves Weatherhead School of Management or The Gestalt Institute of Cleveland's Organization and Systems Development program. Included in these numbers is Carolyn Luckensmeyer, Executive Director of America Speaks. Carolyn did graduate work at Case Western Reserve and serves on the Faculty at the Gestalt Institute. As for myself, Eric Lutzo, I am the principal of Forward Thought. Our mission is to help organizations become more profitable, teams more productive and individuals more aware through coaching, personal and team assessment and facilitation. I received my MBA from Weatherhead and am a recent graduate of the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland's Organization and Systems Development program.

Eric Lutzo earned his Masters of Business Administration from Case Western Reserve University's Weatherhead School of Management. Eric is the founder of Forward Thought, a coaching and leadership development practice. (www.forwardthought.net)
Email: Eric@ForwardThought.net