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Barrett: Let's cultivate a call-in culture

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We are living in a period of rapid and sustained change. Technology is fueling perpetual disruption in the global economy and transforming how we communicate with each other. In the process we are being overwhelmed with information. Human migration has also created greater diversity in societies around the world, particularly the U.S. Times like these hold tremendous promise for positive change. However, change also breeds fear, which can contribute to anger and despair.

I believe these feelings of unease make us receptive to calling people out, expressing our distress in ways that shame and alienate others. The anonymity of social media and the many prominent examples of vitriol we see on a daily basis only help normalize it. Consequently, we have developed a pervasive culture of calling out with little regard for the long-term consequences.

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While there have been several recent examples in which our collective calling out has been effective in getting leaders to care about important issues such as gun control or sexual harassment, this should not be the only approach we employ to voice concerns. Raising grievances publicly in a way that is meant to shame, alienate and silence an individual is usually counterproductive to bringing about lasting positive change and providing redress for those who have been wronged.

In communities that are characterized by caring, which I believe most groups we live in desire to be, calling out can be particularly traumatic for the target of the public attack and the person doing the calling out. And these negative effects reach well beyond those directly involved. It takes a toll on the entire community by ramping up the level of anxiety, alienating us from each other and distracting us from critical tasks like providing for the basic health, safety, and educational

needs of the community. So it is time we take a more effective approach to voicing our concerns instead of further distancing us from one another, a process I refer to as calling people in.

Calling-in is a process of raising concerns and grievances with compassion, humility and an invitation for everyone involved to become part of the solution. Two examples of how this approach has been implemented on a large scale are restorative justice programs and truth and reconciliation panels. These illustrate that even after the most heinous acts and necessary disruption, there comes a time to heal in which we must build something new together. I believe that time for us is now.

The following are some strategies you can employ to resist the immediate allure of the call out for the long term advantages of calling people in. The most important action we can take is to practice empathy, understanding with feeling the perspectives of others. Another related strategy is to engage in acts of compassion. Compassion has two parts, deep sympathy for the suffering of others which begins with our ability to understand their experience (empathy) and a desire to alleviate their suffering (action).

To learn how to start a daily practice of empathy and compassion check out the Greater Good Science Center at <https://greatergood.berkeley.edu>. The final strategy I will suggest, and this will be the most difficult for many of us, is to invite everyone to be part of the solution. Treating all people, even those with whom we disagree, as if they matter and have value. This requires that we engage with humility and a willingness to change our minds occasionally.

In closing I will leave you with a Vulcan greeting from Star Trek that sums this up nicely, “Greetings! I am glad to see that we are different. May we together become greater than the sum of both of us.”

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