

My (newest) favorite quote is John Dewey's profound statement:

"Conflict is the gadfly of thought. It stirs us to observation and memory. It instigates invention. It shocks us out of sheep-like passivity and sets us at noting and contriving... conflict is a *sine quo non* of reflection and ingenuity".

Actually, I stumbled upon those words for the first time in Dowling's Brookhaven computer lab, just before I went in to the "interview" for consideration of the doctoral program. We were asked to create a writing sample and I supposed it was to display some basic literacy skills and the ability to think organically. I met someone I knew in the lab, frantically tapping on the computer keyboard, completing the same requirement. I remember very well looking at the question and musing, "A 250 word limit is barely a page."

The writing task, though I do not remember it verbatim, asked more or less to explain how you as a leader would tackle complicated community/school/financial difficulties while *minimizing conflict*. Somehow that last part irked me and that is when I came upon the Dewey quote, serendipitously confirming my core belief that conflict is not necessarily something to automatically diminish or extinguish. The person I knew was seated next to me and I noticed the plethora that was being generated. Was it the same assignment? After they left the writing piece was left open after printing and I could not help myself from peaking at the word count: 850! Yikes, is it presumptuous to think that its contents were a noble attempt at diminishing the conflict but that 250 words just could do it?

So what is the conflict? It was the internal conflict that began inside of me as I wondered if I was "right" to follow the 250 word requirement with Dewey's sentiment as my central theme. It was that exact conflict, that silly little moment, would determine the way I would be throughout the program. In the words of Polonius in Shakespeare's Hamlet: "to thine own self be true".

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