**How to Win Other People Over**

Would you ever stand in the way of a rocket going into space? Do you want to hold your country back, or help it move forward?

These are important questions. They’re examples of how the milieu creates the meaning.

Milieu is the social conditions and events that provide a backdrop in which someone acts or lives. Tapping into the right milieu is the secret to winning people over and getting big things done.

In the movie *Hidden Figures* three African-American women are broken down on the side of a lonely road in rural Virginia. The year is 1961. The three women work as “computers” at NASA doing calculations to put a rocket into space.

Unable to start their car, three black women in Virginia are understandably nervous when a police cruiser drives up. The officer, billy club in hand, approaches. He’s condescending and downright hostile until the moment Katherine says, “We’re on our way to work at NASA.  Yes sir, getting our rockets into space.”

The officer’s entire countenance changes. He moves from hostile to helpful. He fires up his siren and gives the ladies a police escort to Langley.

Why the change in attitude?

The officer’s hostility quelled because he wanted to be part of something bigger than himself. He didn’t want to be the guy who caused his country to lose the space race.

The scene may be fictionalized, but the overarching story is true.

John F. Kennedy set a big audacious goal, put a man on the moon. He rallied the country around beating the Russians. The ladies in *Hidden Figures* used that lens to their advantage.

The social context of the times was terrifying for African-Americans. The officer’s social programming was likely racist, thus his immediate reaction to the ladies, was hostile. Instead of reacting, the NASA computers skillfully changed the frame through which they were viewed. They tapped into a different milieu.

How can you use this concept in your own work?

In an ideal world you’re Kennedy. You set the tone, you create the big audacious goal and you remind people of it every day. You provide the context and meaning for the work.

But we don’t all live in an ideal world. Maybe you’re living with hostility or prejudice. Or maybe you’re dealing with apathy and ignorance. In real life, the three women computers, Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughn and Mary Jackson, were diminished and harassed. Yet, they prevailed.

Instead of playing small, they played big. Instead of succumbing to the social expectations of the times, they set their sights on a different reality.

They positioned themselves in the service of something of important to people in power. It’s an important lesson.

If you want to win people over, cast yourself as a vital force for advancing a cause they care about. Watching the three women in *Hidden Figures* walk the line between deferential and engaging is both painful and inspirational.

It’s painful to think about genius having to be subservient in order to serve. Yet the true story is inspirational. Johnson, Vaughn Jackson and others advanced scientific discovery, and they moved the needle socially for the generations who came behind them.

The milieu is always moving. We are the ones who create it, and we are the people who decide which aspect of the milieu we want to tap into.

You can help launch the rocket. Or you can be the one who accepted the barriers.

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