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**Speech to the Milwaukee Rotary Club**  
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A noted expert on crime trends and their societal impact, James Q. Wilson, has stressed the importance of distinguishing between economic factors and cultural factors that impact our society. He has said: "If we predict that behavior is driven by economic incentives, and if we alter those incentives and behavior does not change or changes contrary to our predictions, then we have to say that something else is working there. And that something else is the combination of class, values, beliefs, mindsets—in short, culture."

In other words, if you keep doing what you do, you'll keep getting what you've got.

At the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise, we believe that market principles should be applied to the social economy. The marketplace is results-oriented and it expects a return. In the social economy certification equals qualification.

It is the spirit of entrepreneurship that drives our economy. In the marketplace, workable solutions are embraced wherever they exist. If a teenaged computer hacker develops software that has capacities beyond those of well-trained computer specialists, he is rewarded. We look for cures in the roots and herbs of the rainforests of Brazil and New Guinea. We must look for non-conventional solutions in non-traditional places. We do not hesitate to do that in our business economy.

Some of our most important discoveries have come about because someone did not focus on the source of the discovery, but looked at the content of what was produced. Regardless of their certifications, education, or "legitimacy" of social service providers, if their "solutions" have not had a measurably positive impact on a problem that neighborhood-based efforts have effectively addressed, we must remove the blindfolds of bias and embrace the strategies that work.

Neither political party has been able to address the problems of our social economy. For instance, in the 1960s we assumed that the problem was social injustice--racial discrimination. We passed civil rights laws and the voting rights act. We assumed that lack of economic resources was the problem, and we spent \$9 trillion over the past 40 years in poverty programs. We assumed that the problem was lack of political participation. Now people of color run major cities throughout the nation. What are the consequences of these major policy approaches? Sadly, conditions facing many low-income people are worse than they were 40 years ago.

Violence in urban centers, particularly among youth, has increased. Out of wedlock births have dramatically increased, particularly in the black community. The black community often functions as the barometer of the nation's moral and social health. In 1962, 85% of all black families had a man and woman raising a family. Today, only about 47% of homes have a married man and woman raising children. There have been major declines among some of the country's weakest members.

We cannot look at our problems through an ideological prism. We must look for a different approach. I found a metaphor in the the Biblical story of Joseph. When the good Pharaoh had a problem his “experts” could not solve, he looked for help to nontraditional sources. He found Joseph, who was in prison, who had a reputation of accomplishing things that conventional experts could not do. Joseph did things in defiance of reality. Even in the face of the oppressive circumstances, he became a good steward. He had a reputation of taking care of his land, and his harvests were the best harvests. The cattle were the healthiest and most productive. He had the reputation of being a good steward and he could interpret dreams. So when Pharaoh looked for someone to address a problem that his experts could not solve, he did what venture capitalists do today which is look for innovation regardless of where it exists or in what form it exists. His was a market approach.

What we do at the Center is look for the Josephs in the communities suffering the problem. Like a venture capitalist, we find someone like Sister Fattah in Philadelphia who was able to take 15 gang members and invite them into her home and after a year they stopped gang banging and served as a beacon for 500 others.

We go into the troubled areas and look for two types of Josephs, those that are in poverty but not of it, raising children who are not dropping out of school or doing drugs. We also look for those Josephs that fell prey to these things but through God’s grace became transformed. They are witnesses to others that transformation is possible without changing the environment.

Let me introduce you to just two of the Milwaukee Josephs. The Latino Community Center on the south side provides programs serving community members of all ages. LCC street outreach and gang prevention workers go out on the streets where the kids are to connect them to positive programs. The Latino Community Center implements our Violence-Free Zone initiative in South Division High School. When teachers were asked about safety in the halls and common areas of the school in the annual Climate Survey, there was a 56 percentage point increase in positive responses after the Violence-Free Zone had been in the school for one year.

The Running Rebels Community Organization operates our VFZ site at Marshall High School. Weapons and drug/related incidents were reduced from 84 to 4—a drop of 95%--after the VFZ was introduced at Marshall High School. There was a 75% reduction in school days lost to suspensions, and 36% fewer students had to be suspended. Running Rebels has been quietly working to transform young people on Milwaukee’s north side for more than 20 years.

The two organizations, Running Rebels and Latino Community Center, are teaming up together to reduce youth violence at four other Milwaukee High Schools. They do this by carefully selecting, screening, and training young adults from the same communities to work in the schools as “Youth Advisors.” They act as hall monitors, mentors, and conflict resolvers, and they have special sessions with high-risk kids referred to them by the school staff. They develop strong relationships with the students.

CNE has found that in trying to reduce youth violence, repressive measures such as police, curfews, and camera don’t really work. Sanctions on parents don’t work. Our Youth Advisors

are able to change the behavior of at-risk young people because they develop their trust and confidence. They do not judge them. They summon them to responsibility.

As one of our Youth Advisors told me, “I am just a little guy. Predatory youth do not fear me physically. But because of the relationships we develop, the thing they fear most is disappointing me.” That is how our Youth Advisors change their behavior.

What is important is not the numbers of police or Youth Advisors in a school, but who these individuals are and how they can reach and influence the small numbers of young people that are responsible for the violence and destruction.

A few years ago, the U.S. Department of Education asked the Secret Service to conduct a study of the 36 or so youth school killers across the country to see if they could develop a “profile” to predict who would become killers. They studied them and found no common characteristics to create a profile. What they did find, however, was that in every case, the youths had told someone else what they were going to do.

Our guys call that the “buzz”. We adults are not able to tap into the buzz. But the Youth Advisors are. Kids will confide in them without feeling that they are snitching. Our Youth Advisors act as big brothers or sisters, not police.

Our strategy is an inside strategy that inspires young people to improve their lives by offering them legitimate role models that offers witnesses that individual transformation is possible in spite of the challenges they face within their families and communities. Even though they have been injured and damaged all their lives, that they can succeed.

The Center for Neighborhood Enterprise provides overall guidance and management of the Violence-Free Zone initiative. We want measurable results, and we have achieved them (see handout) in all of our sites. We measure attendance, suspension rates, violent incidents, and individual improvements by the students that are given extra attention as requested by the school staff. We also calculate costs saved in security, police, fire, and ambulance calls.

The numbers we are achieving in Milwaukee are the same kind of outcomes we are getting from Atlanta, Baltimore, Dallas, Washington, DC, and Prince George’s County, Maryland.

Who are the true experts of social revitalization? Unfortunately, as a nation, we are prone to place our trust in irrelevant authority. Just as commercials lead consumers to believe that sports stars are experts on nutrition or footwear, there are those who would have us believe that the MBAs and sociologists in distant universities can provide expert advice in salvaging our inner-city neighborhoods. But the solutions to the problems of our nations’ Harlems will never be found in the Harvards of this nation.

The grassroots leaders like those at the Latino Community Center and the Running Rebels Community Organization are the embodiment of “social entrepreneurs” who have the vision, creativity and commitment to forge innovative, workable solutions to the societal crises that permeate, not only our nation’s inner cities but rural and suburban communities as well. Their

bold entrepreneurship is in need of one thing: support from venture capitalists of the corporate arena who recognize their potential and are willing to invest to strengthen the organizational structure and management skills and capital that are necessary to expand and export their remarkably effective outreach.

Our Violence-Free Zone initiative is now in six Milwaukee high schools and young people are being transformed. It would be my hope that at the end of each semester, you in the business community would see fit to bring the two kids and their families from each school that have made the most transformation to a facility like this and honor them.

America needs a rebirth. There needs to be modern day reformation and the only thing that is going to save us is a moral brushfire. And I really think that the seeds of the solutions lie in these communities with organizations like the Running Rebels and Latino Community Center. But they need validation. According to the Bible, Egypt prospered for 400 years until there lived a Pharaoh who knew not Joseph.

The strategies that will drive this rebirth will not come from the halls of Congress but from the streets of Milwaukee. And the principles will not come from the citadels of academia. Nor will we find remedies coming from the poverty Pentagon or race grievance merchants. It's only when the good pharaohs join in partnership with the good Josephs of America will this rebirth occur.

People sometimes ask us, but these are just a few young men and women who are working in just a few cities, and the problem of youth violence is so enormous. How will you accommodate that?

In the market economy, infrastructure always accommodates innovation. Henry Ford built a car, and he did not do it by committee or collaboration. The naysayers said there were no roads, no gas stations, or no places to fix tires. But he understood that if you invent something, others will find a way to accommodate it. Once the car was proved to work, the concept spread and changed a nation. But it started with one man and one good idea.

We are a little bit in the position of the Little League baseball team facing a score of 14 to 0. Someone asked one of the players, but aren't you worried? The youngster answered, "Just wait till we get up to bat."

The odds are often against our grassroots leaders. But they are just waiting for their turn at bat.