Chapter 10

Listening to the City:
Eleven Years Later—Rebuilding the World Trade Center—New York City—
ODR Helps Determine the 9/11 World Trade Center Memorial

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ABSTRACT

On September 11, 2001, the United States of America incurred one of the most devastating acts of terrorism in its 200+ year existence. For approximately a week, the entire country was in shock. For those who lived in and around Manhattan or were otherwise there that week, the experience was unprecedented. During that week, people in Manhattan experienced a city that was numb with awe. As the cleanup of the World Trade Center site in downtown Manhattan in the financial section went forward, the planning had already begun with respect to rebuilding the site and its immediate environs. This chapter is the explanation and elucidation of not just the resulting reconstruction but also the innovative process by which a diverse group of stakeholders and the government designed the rebuilding. This chapter describes a sociological experiment. The questions asked during this experiment are very specific: 1) Can a small percentage of interested parties truly represent the opinions of the majority of between 30 million and 300 million people? and 2) Can a group of people without huge access to capital or significant political power truly influence the end results of such a tremendously large project with worldwide interest?

INTRODUCTION

On September 11, 2001, the United States of America incurred one of the most devastating acts of terrorism in its 200+ year existence. On that day, a group of Saudi Arabian Terrorists hijacked 4 commercial jetliners with the intent to destroy several of the country’s most iconic landmarks. Two of those jet liners flew into the Twin Towers in the World Trade Center in New York City. One of those planes hit the Pentagon in Washington, DC. The fourth and final jetliner never reached its target, because the passengers attacked the terrorists, causing
the terrorists to crash the plane into the ground in Shanksville, PA. The Terrorist’s actions resulted in the complete collapse of the Twin Towers buildings and the decimation of the entire 16 acre area, including the 7 buildings that were standing there. In addition, there was damage to the Pentagon in Arlington, VA and loss of lives along with the death of all people on board the last plane which crashed in Shanksville, PA., as a result of the actions of the passengers on that plane. In all, just under 3000 people (actual number was 2,983 victims counting passengers and pilots, people in the buildings and those individuals lost in the crash in Shanksville, PA. on September 11, 2001, as well as the 6 people who lost their lives in the February 1993 World Trade Center Bombing) (“National September 11 Memorial & Museum”, 2013).

For approximately a week, the entire country was in shock. Those people who lived in and around Manhattan had the opportunity to be in Manhattan during that week. The experience was unprecedented. During that week, people in Manhattan experienced a City that was numb with awe. People on the sidewalk, rather than passing each other by and ignoring each other or yelling insults at each other (The norm in Manhattan on any given day), instead, actually took time to stop, to say hello and in essence to truly “smell the roses” as well as the ashes, realizing that despite the treachery and horror of the catastrophe, they were still alive. They also realized, that they had witnessed an event of such cataclysmic proportions that their entire view on life had been fundamentally altered (9/11 Memorial, 2014).

The emotions that were displayed and experienced ran the gamut of the human condition. Surely there was “shock and awe;” deep sadness; horror; anger; feelings of retri-

bution; and not least of all, amazement that they were still here and living on this Earth.

As is typical of most natural and unnatural disasters, many people who normally would have been in those two skyscrapers, for some reason or another, decided, sometimes for the thinnest or most obscure reasons, not to go to work that day. Others were unaccountably late. And incredibly, the timing of the impact was such that the planes hit the Twin Tower buildings perhaps 25 minutes earlier than they would have liked to have hit, in order for the collapse and resulting horror to have the maximum number of people exposed to the deadly conditions, and to inflict the maximum human cost. If the planes had hit just 30 minutes later, the number of people inside the offices and passing though the underground rail links would have been in the midst of the heaviest morning commuting rush and three times higher or more than it was just at the moment of actual impact (9/11 Memorial, 2014).

Perhaps this phenomenon was one of the miracles that were realized after the fact. Yet, even considering how much worse it could have been, the act of terrorism was certainly one of the single biggest disaster of all times for the City of New York, and the people of the City and surrounding environs looked upon it as such, particularly in light of the fact that it was an act of Foreign Terrorism. All of them suffered deeply, in one way or another. Thus it took the surviving people who work and live in New York City, a good week to come to grips with the dichotomy that they were actually still alive, while remembering that almost 3000 people were killed (9/11 Memorial, 2014).

By the time the majority of the people started to come out of the malaise imposed by the horror of the recent events; the Govern-