

REMIX1

a follow up report
revised June 16, 2004

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1. About this report

This report is intended to summarize the planning, process and outcome of REMIX1 on Wednesday, May 26 at TCAN, and to address what the organizers learned and may apply in the future. We did not set out to write this report to advance a particular view, remedy or consensus opinion, but to try and share our perspective on this event in the hopes that a process of dialogue will be maintained during difficult times for the TCAN community.

2. Why REMIX?

REMIX1 was conceived as a way to get people with different perspectives and opinions to communicate directly, respectfully and honestly. We undertook this movement as a way to help maintain and repair the personal and community relationships that helped give rise to TCAN, that are a feature of a healthy community, and that will be needed in the future.

We understand that dialogue is not a solution. Dialogue is not the same thing as action. But constructive dialogue is a necessary feature of a negotiated resolution to conflict. Skillful communication based on dialogue can advance one's interests, achieve real goals, and allows the parties involved to reach imaginative solutions.

The organizers of REMIX1 believe that in the TCAN debate there has been a great deal of miscommunication because of the high degree of personal investment in this issue. One feature of this miscommunication has been people speaking or writing with "you" statements, rather than "I" statements. A "you" statement ascribes beliefs, motivations or opinions to the listener, which are founded on assumptions and are frequently not true. A "you" statement makes

agreement more difficult to achieve, because it makes the reader or listener defensive and focused on separation.

An “I” statement lets the reader or listener understand what one truly believes, thinks and feels. It is authentic and personal. One person’s “I” statement can be very different from another person’s, but that difference can be expressed in a way that enlightens, rather than estranges.

Among all the bitterness and hard feelings surrounding the TCAN conflict, an important goal of ours was just to get people together who had not spoken or met for weeks or months. Many people had never met in person or at all.

Many people had chiefly communicated with each other through email – often in hostile terms. We believe that email, while rapid, is frequently a very destructive form of communication for people with differences of opinion, perception or experience. As a medium, email often exacerbates problems or introduces them. Interpersonal communication is a complex balance of tone and content that relies on many cues between participants. Strangers meeting in person or on the phone tend to communicate effectively. Acquaintances corresponding through email frequently miscommunicate. This is due in part to the intensity of feeling about TCAN and the depth of commitment to a particular view – but it is also the result of the limitations of email, an impersonal, detached and tenuous medium. So REMIX1 was the Anti-Email.

This was an independent event. It was not the intention of the organizers to promote a specific outcome to the controversy through this event, nor to advance one point of view.

3. Designing REMIX1

We designed REMIX1 to have a structure that would support dialogue and give all participants an opportunity to speak and to listen. From experience we knew that a small group discussion format provides the best chance for everyone to listen, engage and speak respectfully. Groups of 8-10 people, led by a moderator and structured around specific questions, would offer a framework for healthy communication over a time period of about an hour.

We recruited and briefed enough moderators for each group to provide a total of ten moderators, including the two organizers. We would have preferred enough moderators to ensure that each group included no more than 8 participants, but we were not successful in this. We met with the moderators, provided instructions and direction, and gave each a page of notes to help with the flow of their group and ensure that the structure of the event was followed.

To allow time to meet and mingle, we surrounded the discussion period with loosely structured activities including food, a few art projects, a “guest book,” and background music. We believed that a social element was important in just providing people with a neutral environment to think, talk and meet.

We introduced the discussion period with introductory remarks, a brief reading and instructions to the group. Participants were randomly assigned to groups upon check-in.

The organizers spent a modest amount (about \$250) for out-of-pocket expenses including food and supplies, with the intention of asking people for a small donation to cover costs.

The event was scheduled on a night when TCAN was available, when the organizers were available, and before people got involved with their summer schedules and end of school-year activities. There was a scheduled activity at Java Jim's later the same evening, a scheduling conflict that we tried to resolve as best we could through communication and outreach.

4. The questions

Within the groups, we posed three questions to each person, with preparation time and about 3 minutes per person to address the first, 2 minutes for the second and 1 minute for the last question.

1. what you feel about the TCAN situation
2. what you want to happen with TCAN
3. what you have learned tonight

The objective was not to persuade, debate or argue, but to listen and learn from one another, without interruption and with the attention of all members of a group.

5. The groups

The groups were not designed to have a certain composition or representativeness; by randomizing the group assignments we hoped for an even distribution of all who attended. As it happened, some groups were larger and some smaller; some people left early and a few came late. Some groups were dominated by people with a particular point of view; some were more diverse.

Most moderators and those participants from whom we got feedback reported that the design worked well to the extent that people listened, spoke and mainly stayed on topic.

After the groups, a moderator or another member of each group summarized what was said, heard and learned. Moderators went into varying levels of detail. Some edited their comments for purposes of presentation to the larger group.

6. The outcome

People were generally considerate of each other, and observant of the rules that were established. People interacted with one another respectfully, even when there were strongly divergent views. There were many instances of intense, emotional and sincere expression of personal sorrow and pain over both the events at TCAN and the ensuing interactions between people.

It was the organizers' intention to make clear that constructive engagement was possible and productive, even around contentious issues. It was not our intention to resolve the outstanding issues but to help make resolution more likely.

Our primary intention was to reach people on a personal level: to convey to every participant that it was within their power to speak for themselves, to listen to other members of the community, to learn something new; to experience diversity of perspective and opinion; to help each other by listening to each other. To the extent that people carried this message forward, REMIX1 was successful. Therefore its success is mixed.

Some have said that the majority of REMIX participants brought and offered a specific point of view about the problem and solutions at TCAN: that the Board should reform to hold immediate elections and that all members should have a vote. From our observation and discussions this is probably true. It was not the purpose of REMIX to propose solutions or build consensus, but to repair and establish the relationships that are needed for TCAN and the larger community to move forward, in whatever direction.

7. What we learned

A lot of people value the opportunity to talk about TCAN events in a neutral setting with a range of views.

People are willing and able to listen to those with whom they disagree.

It is problematic to aim for a balance between too much structure and program, and too little. REMIX1 was not to everyone's taste, but almost everyone there was willing to engage.

A professionally moderated, independently sponsored event may have certain benefits that should be weighed against the virtue of solving problems within the TCAN community.

8. Future of REMIX

Future events such as REMIX are essential, in the opinion of the organizers, if the community is to have an outlet to discuss and debate in a non-confrontational setting. We strongly believe in the power of ideas that can be generated and considered in a climate of trust and respect. We hope to provide a series of events and venues that are built around constructive dialogue.

We fully understand that talk – whether at REMIX or elsewhere – does not take place in a vacuum. There are events, actions and developments in play that will have their own momentum, and which inevitably will overshadow the process of dialogue.

Yet we believe that talk is essential. While events take place, any possible solution that must accommodate conflicting interests must develop out of negotiation, understanding, empathy and shared interests. Most people have an interest in the outcome of dialog, even if they do not have an interest or facility in dialog itself.

Most probably we will pursue REMIX through a professionally moderated setting, or through a regular, less structured venue, or some combination. Greater training and preparation for moderators is very important.

Future events will be scheduled to provide for maximum participation and, we hope, with the active cooperation of all interested people. We welcome the suggestions and participation of all.

Comments are welcome about this report: remix@natick.info. Please indicate whether your comments may be made public.

Joshua Ostroff and Gail Weston-Roberts
June 16, 2004

Appendix

A. Participant comments

Note: none of these comments apply to the event as a whole. These comments are not intended to reflect REMIX1. Please do not quote from, excerpt, or cite these comments without including or referencing this disclaimer.

The following comments are not representative; they are an effort to share the verbatim comments of REMIX1 participants as captured in notes taken by moderators. Some comments are from moderators' summaries provided after REMIX1. We apologize for any comments that are not reflected here. We have attempted to capture the range of expression, but have almost certainly lost a great deal of nuance and emphasis.

We urge that people read them for the range of views expressed, but not to subject these comments to analysis and quantification. That was not the intent of REMIX1.

All comments were put into a worksheet file and randomized – there is no order to the comments as presented here. Consequently, the context may be difficult to understand.

- *Recognition of Michael's role in TCAN's creation and development*
- *There is more to the story than we have been told*
- *Community of like-minded people*
- *TCAN financially stable and funded; Board has business responsibilities*
- *Need to hear the voices of ordinary people*
- *Experience with growing companies-founders hire CEO*
- *Agree with elected board need for mediation with Michael*
- *Talk-not email*
- *Nepotism? Resents grades of membership*
- *Discussion was orderly and respectful*
- *Growth brings change*
- *People are here - evidence that we want to make it work*
- *Another volunteer in the group vehemently disagreed. Said she was respected, felt welcomed, etc. Her main concern is that Michael comes back. Had not been back to TCAN since MM was fired, and expressed her pain at being back in the building for the first time in a while.*
- *TCAN should select board membership, keep membership involved*
- *In the end, a general consensus was reached [among this discussion group]: the verdict on MM has been passed by the Board and things are not likely to change; the community needs to move on, meaning that the arts must continue, and the feuds between friends and groups in town need to stop. People were, at this point, very rational and calm and expressed gratitude that they were able to agree and help one another. Were glad REMIX had happened.*
- *Stolen-inflammatory rhetoric*
- *Passion for center never seen this interest in such an issue*
- *What caused situation: Michael's personality, Board's action*

- *TCAN has grown from its infancy stage, need for change is normal.*
- *Validated that loyalty can cloud things*
- *As grass roots members, our group was united in its wish that there would be one TCAN*
- *Question the process*
- *I don't care about the politics, I just want my arts center back*
- *There was support for the use of mediation in the current impasse.*
- *Everyone is distressed by the situation. People feel the loss of the resource and feeling of community. Most had no idea there were such difficulties and that attending one event or another feels like "taking sides."*
- *It's all news to me: I'm not a TCAN member*
- *90% people would have done what Board did*
- *TCAN: the "baby" grew up now we have to confront change*
- *Both the Board and Michael need to be honored for what they have accomplished. They must now be asked to compromise on some of their positions for the survival of TCAN.*
- *Cycle off directors*
- *Volunteers really need voice in governance*
- *Process: membership and volunteers not considered in process of dismissal*
- *Board election by membership*
- *Why was Michael dismissed; Board's moral authority; not knowing all facts*
- *TCAN community important*
- *Reach out to members*
- *Term limits; rotating board membership*
- *Incredible loyalty, but it can get in the way*
- *With passion anything is possible*
- *Stockholder vote*
- *One man's venture - not enough information*
- *People learned that we are not actual members of TCAN according to the way TCAN is structured*
- *Most members expressed the view that the board was (1) out of touch with the members (2) unlike any other boards of similar organizations. (3) should be elected for limited terms or have other built-in safeguards to ensure their responsiveness. Dissatisfaction with the "governance" style was virtually universal in our group.*
- *Must have division of power*
- *Members want to have input in process*
- *Soldier blindly following-know both sides? Know why we're where we are?*
- *TCAN spirit is by no means gone*
- *Not enough information*
- *Opportunity - this provides so many things to so many people*
- *Similar processes continue to be hopeful for organizational change and growth*
- *Need accountability*
- *Michael has done a great job of growing TCAN and serving as artistic director and visionary. He belongs in the organization "doing what he does best." There was less than a clear endorsement of his management skills.*
- *Elections, term limits for Board members, bring back MM*
- *Apply energy to production, programming, marketing*
- *Magnitude of the problem*
- *Not knowing all the facts relating to Michael being fired.*
- *Incredible sadness and need for healing*

- *Face of organization is not everything*
- *Two are or used to be volunteers under MM. One expressed very strong frustration about that experience - she felt she was not respected, her opinions were not valued, and that she was made to feel dispensable as a member of TCAN. Said many other volunteers had felt the same way, precipitating their leaving TCAN (not necessarily related to current situation, but she felt very strongly, and was rather upset). Felt this hurt TCAN and drove people away, and her concern was that TCAN come back together as a community, regardless of what happens with MM.*
- *Michael should have a role*
- *The Board should serve with term limits*
- *Don't know the details - there is more to the story - want information*
- *Sad about dissension*
- *It was noted that if they cannot compromise, and there is no TCAN that is sustainable, we all suffer... the members, the community, the artists and musicians... It was recognized that as the membership we should not "allow: them to fail to compromise. We all have a stake in their willingness to reunite the TCAN community.*
- *Everyone agreed there were not the resources to support two TCANs. The current situation was considered "unsustainable."*
- *Need New structure*
- *Talk, not email*
- *Suggestion-TCAN annual meeting with Board*
- *Magnitude of interest and passion*
- *Can TCAN heal?*
- *Support second performing venue*
- *Mediation*
- *Magnitude of problem-look at this group*
- *Many new volunteers are appearing now that Michael is gone*
- *Tired of arguing*
- *Board retreat coming in June*
- *Term limits*
- *A woman who is a local artist expressed her pain and discomfort with the current situation. She feels great conflict because, while MM helped her career and in many ways helped her personally (develop confidence as a performer, etc.) she now feels like performing at TCAN is a betrayal of Michael. Said the "spirit" is gone from TCAN - many agreed. She, like many others, wants the community to come back together and for the arts to move on.*
- *A few of the group members said they supported Michael being fired because, through their experiences with TCAN (a few had been heavily involved; other, not as much) they felt he was ill suited as an executive. One man described his experiences in the business world; he described how, in all situations he's witnessed, the people who usually found an organization and get it off the ground are never then put in charge of running it. He described TCAN as having been in its "infancy"... and now that it is in its "teenage years" it is time for MM to "step back and let it develop into its own creature." Many agreed; the general feeling in the group (except for one) seemed to be that MM should be incorporated into TCAN in some other role, if at all, but he should not be in charge because he is ill-suited for such responsibilities.*
- *The face of the organization is not everything*
- *Recognition of Board's hard work in creating the bricks and mortar of this building*

- *Acceptance of new rules*
- *Children dancers are still here*
- *The Board did this*
- *Problem with process by which Michael was fired.*
- *Volunteers really need a voice*
- *There is some feeling that TCAN Board should be elected by the members.*
- *Problem with the process of Michael's dismissal*
- *Members and volunteers not being considered.*
- *There are more than two sides to every story*
- *Venue for youth amateurs*
- *Must Compromise*
- *TCAN community very important to all of us.*
- *Sadness at loss*
- *Time for people to come back*
- *Business and art are separate functions*
- *Many felt disturbed that MM would, after investing so much time and energy into TCAN, would turn around try to compete with it, or even "destroy it," as one person said. They find this behavior to be upsetting, insulting, and unfair to the community.*
- *Make public aware why he was terminated*
- *Questions Board selection process?*
- *All want: TCAN to survive and Michael to have role*
- *Election and term limits*
- *One night is not enough*

We reiterate that none of these comments apply to the event as a whole – they are from moderator’s notes and may reflect individual speakers or a small group consensus.

B. REMIX in context

REMIX1 was intended to enable every TCAN stakeholder to have a voice, and to have the opportunity to hear and be heard from on a personal level. When REMIX1 was announced, we invited any interested party to contact us to help organize or provide input. After the event, we extended an invitation to both the TCAN Board and the TCANites to provide feedback and input on the event. However, the authors take full responsibility for this report.

REMIX1 was and is separate from negotiations between members of the TCAN Board and the TCANite Outreach Committee, who have held a series of meetings. Of course, REMIX1 did not occur in a vacuum; some people came to the event with a point of view; some came to deliver a message; some came to listen and learn. Everyone had their own reasons for attending, many of them complex.

In any communication, what is said and written is not the same as what is heard and read. That truism is one of the reasons why we felt an event such as REMIX was overdue, and why the seeds of REMIX were planted in March. So, while REMIX1 was intended to help people on a personal level, that was not the only context. In a politicized environment, almost everything has

a political utility. For example, the TCANite Outreach Committee report dated May 26 includes this language:

Again, the support of TCANites has been crucial to this effort, and we thank you. We believe that TCANites attending the upcoming "REMIX" meeting should understand, and carry the message that "healing" TCAN alone will not bring about the needed changes in its basic foundation of governance. We believe TCAN cannot permanently heal until the Board commits to change, and becomes formally answerable to and responsive to the community.

The full Outreach Committee May 26 report is on the internet at http://www.tcanites.org/info_files/2004-5-26-outreach.htm

Another message from Michael Moran to a TCANites email list on May 24 includes the following:

TCANites:

Please attend and get others to attend the "remix" event at the firehouse this Wednesday the 26th from 6 till 8 after which you can take in Ron Williams - an amazing singer who is featuring at the Cabaret Open Mike (hosted by Leslie Holmes).

The board's agenda is to use this meeting to gain volunteers. We want free and open elections for ALL board positions NOW. We want the board completely answerable to the membership. Others - who will be innocently drawn to the meeting need to hear our concerns and our stance.

Anything else you want - tell 'em.

For those of you who cannot bring yourselves to go into the building, I understand completely and we'll try to speak for you - we know you'll be with us in spirit.

There may well have been other communications by other people. That is part of the climate in which REMIX1 took place.

C. Author disclosure

Following the initial draft of this report, we have been asked to provide disclosure of our TCAN affiliations. For some, it is important to know some background about the authors in order to assess REMIX1 and this report. We are concerned that for some readers, this disclosure will color perceptions of this report and the attempts we have made to establish a safe middle ground for dialogue, but we would rather provide this information and let people come to their own conclusions.

Joshua Ostroff

I have lived in Natick for 17 years. I have been a supporter of TCAN since before its inception, and have known Michael Moran for about ten years. I have relationships with many people on all sides of the TCAN controversy. My wife has exhibited and organized visual art at TCAN. I am active in local government and various local web sites.

Since mid 2002, I have been a business partner of one member of the TCAN Board. I am currently a volunteer at TCAN, and very much want to see the Center thrive as a collaborative, welcoming part of our community. I am personally committed to ensuring TCAN's success. I have no direct financial interest in TCAN.

Since March 16, I have privately expressed my views about the origins of the TCAN conflict and the way it has been handled by Michael Moran, the TCANites and the TCAN Board. I have sought to foster dialogue far more than I have sought to express a personal point of view, however. I am aware that some have attributed positions or motives to me, as they have to others.

I believe that confrontational tactics in this situation are ultimately self-defeating. I would like to see more shared information about the reasons for change at TCAN. My bias concerning TCAN is against advocacy and politicization, and in favor of understanding and evolutionary change, because we must all act to preserve dignity and respect in order to work together at TCAN and beyond.

I am glad to further elaborate, and welcome opportunities for respectful dialogue. I do not think that this brief statement of disclosure fully captures the complex perspective that I bring to this issue, but I hope that it is useful to people reading this report.

Gail Weston-Roberts

My family moved to Natick last June; we chose Natick partly because we wanted to be able to enjoy the arts center. We joined in September; I began event volunteering in December; I signed up to do the TCAN fundraiser "Mystery Snack Theater" with my 15-year old daughter; we continued with the show after the director pulled out of TCAN in protest and did the show as a fundraiser for some good after-school programs; I stopped volunteering at TCAN since Michael was fired; I wrote out an abbreviated version of the by-laws the next day (since I was told I couldn't have a copy) and disseminated them to Michael and others; I attended the first TCANites meeting; I have written a couple letters on the TCANite site and to the Board since then. Oh, and I dragged my husband into this by asking him to help TCANites efforts by taking them through the "Getting to Yes" approach to conflict resolution and labor negotiation, which he does professionally for the federal government.