Self-Reliance Becomes a Movement

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By now, most of you know the cautionary tale of the old railroad barons, those filthy rich guys who, nearly a century ago, made the tragic mistake of thinking they were in the business of trains. Can you imagine how things might have gone differently for those complacent and ridiculously misguided yahoos had they realized they were actually in the people-moving business?

That's why I continue to get frustrated when people try to put narrow, self-important labels on our green building movement. Unlike the train business of 100 years ago, our movement is not self-defining. It is not limited in scope. And it is not linear.
Despite what you read to the contrary, our movement is not just about energy efficiency or improved bottom (and top) lines. Nor is it just about those horribly overused and hopelessly devalued phrases such as climate change, or conservation, or resource management. Hell, in the strictest sense, it is not even just about natural resources.

Every one of those phrases and a thousand others try to put our movement into a neat little box: A box that's way too limiting, way too narrowly defined, and way too small in scope. Not to mention way too politically polarizing.

What the green building movement really is is a people-protecting movement. A life-enhancing movement. That's something so much bigger, something this country once had in spades. It's a collective spirit we've somehow let slip through our fingers as we've continued to grow, to urbanize, and to compartmentalize our problems and their small solutions. America desperately needs to rekindle that spirit again.

That rekindling -- that's what the green building movement is about: Green building the "noun," to be sure. But maybe more importantly, the collaborative, people-centric act of green building as a "VERB."

A few generations ago, before we discovered such things as credit cards and floating debt, our parents, grandparents and those who came before us were remarkably resourceful people who worked with their hands, who helped their neighbors, and who didn't believe in wasting anything of value.

They were people who taught themselves and their children to do a little bit of everything because that's what it took to get by, and because that's what allowed them to use their hard-earned money on the more important things in life. Like a future.

Green building is not just about conserving resources, or recycling, or achieving Platinum certification. Rather, it's the universal ideals of independence and interdependence, of self-reliance and self-less collaboration that are at the core of our movement, and that have attracted such incredible support. From all professions and walks of life, from men and women all across the political spectrum, from the young and the old, from places up and down the economic food chain: People want to be part of our movement.

Because the things we are fighting for and believe in are not fueled by politics, nor are they vulnerable to political rhetoric. They are the things that will make this country stronger and better, and they lay the groundwork for a present that nurtures us and a future that honors the generations yet to come. That's the movement we should all be signed up for.

Read Rick's entry on Huff Post Green.

Rick Fedrizzi
President, CEO & Founding Chairman
U.S. Green Building Council

Member employees, USGBC staff, USGBC board

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