

## **F.E.A.R.S. (Part One)**

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There is a new threat to our communities, and it turns out to be the most evil, low-down, dirty, no good varmint of the lot. We are all familiar with the NIMBYs (Not In My Back Yard) and the NOPEs (Not On Planet Earth). I've come up with the BANANAs (Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anything) and the CAVEs (Citizens Against Virtually Everything). The new threat is the most powerful and dangerous yet. They are what I call FEARS: Fire-up Everyone Against Reasonable Solutions.

They are cousins of CAVEs, but they don't simply oppose new community initiatives like CAVEs do. FEARS rail and rage against ideas and people with tirades of false information and outright lies. They base everything on emotion, not facts or information, and they singularly focus on driving everyone they can reach into a frenzy of irrationality and rage that is not just intended to defeat an initiative, but to utterly destroy it so it may never be discussed or considered again.

I experienced it as a politician when I received a death threat, not to me but to my sons, when there was a shortage of vaccines several years ago. I still remember the voice on my phone: "If my kid gets sick because there isn't enough vaccine then I'm going to hurt your kids." I'm not looking for sympathy. I'm just pointing out that I experienced the insanity. It was truly insane.

Yet it grows ever more common. The opposition's job is to criticize policy, but the rhetoric these days is intended to incite frenzied, irrational, and violent behaviour. Donald Trump is a perfect example of ridiculous comments intended to deliberately stir up anger in people. That growing anger leads to irrationality, and then to violence from both sides, as the hateful rhetoric grows. He isn't looking to discuss ideas, or to talk about change, or to sell solutions. He is only selling anger. The cost of that anger to communities and society is high, yet people keep buying it.

People seem to like the energy that comes with rage and anger. They seem to be drawn to the feeling that their situation isn't their fault, and to the belief that they have a right to be angry and to focus their rage on someone else. It takes a lot of hard work to stay calm, and to focus on reasonable solutions. It is much easier to believe that all leaders and politicians are evil and corrupt. It is much easier to believe that everyone has an ulterior motive and is trying to hurt you. It is much easier to fire off an email to a young administrator in a small community that says, "Die, bitch," as I saw once over an issue that was really nothing more than a discussion about the community's future.

Those who seek solutions are often quiet after they see unreserved displays of anger and rage at public meetings. They see people getting personally attacked with slander and lies, so they stay in their seats and hope someone else stands up. Fear, and the FEARS that spread it, win when that happens. What they are doing is social terrorism. They want you to be afraid, and to be quiet. They want the rage to take over the room, but that only happens when no one speaks rationally anymore. That is social terrorism, and terrorism cannot be allowed to win. Anger and rage can't be allowed to win over rational thought.

The only way to beat it is with a vigorous plan that doesn't allow the social terrorists-the FEARS-to get a footing. It means recognizing the potential for fear and the FEARS to strike at any time, and having a communications strategy early in the process that can minimize the fear they try to spread. We have

often explained to clients that such a communications strategy will resemble a war footing. We need to keep the solution-oriented voices of reason armed and brave, and ready to take on those playground-type bullies who feed on fear. We need to draw others back into reasonable, considerate debate.

I don't know that we can guarantee beating them every time, but we know how dangerous it is when FEARS aren't taken seriously in the beginning. The FEARS are dangerous and frightening, I know. If we let the fear and hate they create and propagate grow and take us over, then they win. And if they are allowed to win, our communities suffer, our humanity suffers, and all progress is lost. Don't let fear paralyze you and your community. Don't let the FEARS take hold.

*This syndicated content is provided by Doug Griffiths, best-selling author and chief community builder at 13 Ways, a company with a mission to push communities to face their challenges to find their unique path to success. For more information visit [www.13ways.ca](http://www.13ways.ca), or we can start the conversation at [info@13ways.ca](mailto:info@13ways.ca).*