

It does not happen often. I get up to speak, start telling a story about my nonna of all people, rest her soul, my nonna, and in the thick of it, when the story is coming to a thematic and comedic climax.....

disrupted....

... last year, during United Way Week, at a congregation located in Vaughan Mills, that is right, in the mall area, speaking on issues of poverty in York Region to a group of over 150 residents and community leaders, I am, using examples from my nonna's favourite food, Kentucky Fried Chicken – long story but we think she had a crush on Colonel Saunders who resembled my nonno somewhat had a little soul patch going – anyway – weaving this and her favourite soap opera, the Young and the Restless....though she could not understand a word of English she caught all the storylines and convoluted love triangles and swore she had a lot in common with Mrs Chancellor....and I am slowly making my way to define poverty in York Region...because it is all connected...

He stands up. Long white beard, white pressed shirt, with suspenders:

“pukh, thup, chup.”

Everyone starts laughing and clapping.

“So simple, “he says, “....old Punjabi definition for poverty:

Pukh, thup, chup. No food, no roof, no voice

We should spend less time trying to define it and more trying to solve it.”

He is correct. I am loving this guy, even though he did disrupt my nonna story, rest her soul.

I compose myself, swoop back in, seamlessly, speaking to the social service infrastructure United Way supports, from programs to public education to system change...

disrupted...again

“**navaa**...” he says.

Tension in the room; the crowd is engaged....looking for the knockout punch...

“....**navaa**, not only the same old.”

I(gesture Italian what is up?)...

He obviously understands Italian too....because he responds....

He says: “**navaa** means ‘New’...

Mr Zanotti, you represent a leading change organization.

Do you have the courage to lead? Do you have the courage to disrupt?”

So I told them our story, one that I have waxed poetic on at our AGMs: of our 2007 roar year – giving voice to the defining issues of our region; of our 2008 listen year –where we committed to hearing the lived realities of residents across the sprawling amalgam of nine municipalities; then 2009 our Meeting House year – in faith groups and town halls and meetings like this, convening people on issue.

And as I am in the middle of a profound...I will pause for dramatic effect.... statement, I hear his friggin chair moving again.

“**Char pair o pair**...four steps, says a Punjabi saying...”

He says, “The first is easy, the second is necessary, the third is affirming and the fourth changes the game - it transform you.

Few take the fourth step Mr Zanotti.”

The rest of my speech was a blur, focused only on getting the hell thru it to go sit with this disruptive genius.

By the end of the night, three coffees later, I had a mentor. And as we chatted, all I kept saying was - **HANJI** - the Punjabi word for “yes”.

Since then, and this morning, especially, my friends, I have been and am in a disruptive mood, and I am asking you to join me.

Here is what I said verbatim, at last year’s AGM:

If 2007 was our roar year, 2008 our listen year, let 2009 be our meeting house year.

And here is how we will map this out over 2009:

During UW Week, we will release a follow up to what the Star dubbed a most provocative “...if addressed” report; and we did: Addressing our Strength, called ‘a landmark follow’ up by YRMG.

In October, I said, our board will approve our new community priorities with outcomes and target populations and evaluative indicators; and they did.

In December we will approve our new strategic directions, 2010-2013, setting seemingly unachievable targets on revenue growth, community impact and convening positive change – and we did.

And let us never forget, our sine qua non, another record campaign and strong investment for local services. And we did.

I said: And when we meet next year, at this same meeting, at some other symbolic and tough to find location, - I have delivered on that - we will speak of our successes:

- a record campaign (hanji),
- a bold Board willing to listen and engage (hanji)
- oh so committed volunteers (hanji)
- the strong voice of our labour partners (hanji)
- staff that bleed United Way pantone red for the people we serve (still the best in the business. I love working with each and every one of you so sorry if the feeling is not mutual), agency and community partners providing programming on the ground....(hanji)

Ladies and gentlemen, you have delivered the goods and another record year, each and every one of you.

So why the hell am I in a disruptive mood?

Because we are a leading organization – a change maker.

And we have an unprecedented opportunity to do something so radically powerful, so York Region, that we could accelerate our impact and growth -

...if we have the courage to lead, if we have the courage to disrupt.

char pair o pair...four steps, says a Punjabi saying...

The first is easy and empowering: we have found voice on speaking to the region's defining issues

The second is necessary for grounding: we have established mechanisms for listening, with intent, to voices in communities and neighbourhoods across the region.

The third is contemplative and affirming: we have strengthened our convening role, our capacity to bring stakeholders together.

So what the heck do you want now, Zanotti? ...the board and staff are all concerned – and where is he going with this?

The fourth step...game-changer...it transform you.

Navaa...

That is why we are here at Oakview Terrace, the destination of choice for new beginnings - the most weddings and proms of any single facility in Richmond Hill.

How many of you have been here for a wedding, to get married, for your prom????

A place of new beginnings...navaa...

United Way has a great mechanism for supporting people in need today – a strong network of partners providing a safety net, albeit stretched across our sprawling region.

United Way must develop a simply spectacular mechanism to invest in our region's strength, not needs, strength.

When we say, in our mission, "...We ascertain and address critical human needs by fostering innovative responsive"

Innovative: We need a mechanism to seize the opportunity of innovation – with great urgency and possibilities.

And we can do so by investing in our region's strengths:

- our youth: engaged, connected, wanting to make a global and local difference
- our well educated families and new Canadians making york region their home
- our culture of entrepreneurs – from developers to auto to tech, we remain home to an influential, intelligent and affluent culture of innovators and doers
- our strong and ever growing corporations, many already engaged in UWs at a philanthropic level
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This is why 2010 will be our navaa disrupt year – the fourth, most difficult, step.

When we announce, during United Way week in October, a transformative, game changing investment plan for UW going forward...a small start, but one that can scale.

One that unites not by an assembly line - corporate philanthropy and donor dollars **to** agency programs.

But one that converges – corporate, donor, resident and agency insight to create innovative solutions – one that dissolves sector boundaries to incubate new ideas.

Our strength investment will inspire and support diverse groups of problem solvers to incubatenavaa ideas.

And disrupt: solutions, opportunities, outside of our current and necessary programs that address our regions emerging social issues in a small scale, and can be scaled-up, over time.

This is not an either/or. This is an AND:

- support and strengthen the existing critical network of services and programs

AND

- foster new social innovation, leveraging the region's strength, by uniting, really uniting, outside of silos, diverse groups of problems solvers : social innovators, entrepreneurs.

Because we know the most difficult and important emerging social problems of our region, and the country and world, cannot be understood, let alone solved, by anyone sector on its own.

Friends, the Punjabi word for yes is HANJI. I do not know and will not provide the Punjabi word for no.

In keeping with the ceremonies often celebrated at this stunning Oakview Terrace, please respond after me...

Friends of United Way of York Region, do we have the courage to lead change on our most pressing social issues?

HANJI

Do we have the courage to disrupt our current mechanisms and seek new innovative solutions, across sectors and silos?

HANJI

Do we have the courage to take the fourth step – game-changing, transformative – together in 2010?

HANJI

Ladies and gentlemen, I now pronounce us the navaa United Way of York Region ...

One I remain humbled and honoured to serve.