

Welcome to the Follett Talks



Agenda for Today's Follett Talk

- Introduction to the Host (who is also the presenter today)
- Today's Follett Talk: "Democracy is a Verb"
- The Mission and Programs of the new Mary Parker Follett Foundation
- Q&A
- Open Discussion
- **Please mute your microphone until it is time for you to speak.**

About Today's Host (and Presenter)

Matthew Shapiro

- Founding Director, The Mary Parker Follett Foundation
- Born & raised in Brooklyn, NY; most of adult life in the western US, and past 32 years in Boise, Idaho
- 16-year-old daughter

Careers (Outside of Follett)

- Renewable energy 1990-2002
- K-12 education 2003-2012
- Renewable energy (large scale storage) 2009-Today

Lifelong Mission

- Foster capacities needed for conscious evolution of society & culture from the local level upwards
 - Various initiatives and projects from 1995 through today, primarily local, bridging theory with action



My History with Follett

- 1996** *The New State* required reading for a team at the Asilomar Conversation on Social Systems Design
- 1997-** Started corresponding with Albie Davis and other Follett fans
- 1998** Under the Idaho Systems Institute, worked successfully to get *The New State* re-published (Penn State Press)
- 2002** (First) Mary Parker Follett Foundation evolved out of the Idaho Systems Institute; organized first Follett Conversation on Creative Democracy in 2002
- 2009** Mary Parker Follett Network formed online; by 2025, grew to over 600 members worldwide
- 2025** Time to launch a new organization to advance Follett's legacy and engage in capacity building for participatory democracy.



DEMOCRACY IS A VERB

**MARY PARKER FOLLETT'S INSIGHTS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS
FOR COMMUNITIES, SOCIETIES, AND THE WORLD TODAY**

Matthew Shapiro

The Mary Parker Follett Foundation

Follett Talk No. 1

November 8, 2025



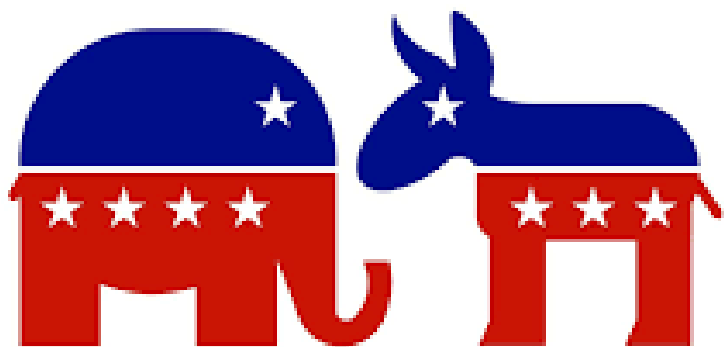
Op-Ed: Local Elections Are Already Partisan



By Dorothy Moon, IDGOP Chairwoman
November 6, 2025

“Let’s be honest: there’s no such thing as a ‘nonpartisan’ race anymore...It’s time for the Legislature to end the farce of nonpartisan elections...”

“County commissions are partisan. County sheriffs are partisan. The attorney general and secretary of state are partisan offices. So why not mayors? Why not city council members? Why not school board trustees?”



We have not yet tried democracy. Party or "interests" govern us with some fiction of the "consent of the governed" which we say means democracy. We have not even a conception of what democracy means. That conception is yet to be forged out of the crude ore of life.

Mary Parker Follett



Many good things *are* happening...

**citizen
assemblies**

**dialogue &
deliberation orgs
& projects**

third parties

**easier voting
(for some)**

**...but do they
add up to
democracy?**

**more civics
education**

**de-polarization
groups & projects**

**new AI tools &
online platforms**

**Is there a “democracy movement”?
If so, can it really move us toward democracy?**

Learning Democracy

You cannot establish democratic control by legislation...there is only one way to get democratic control – by people learning how to evolve collective ideas.

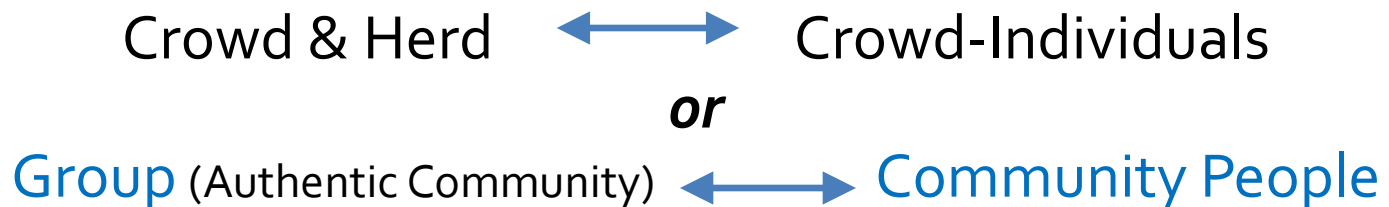
To learn how to evolve the social will day by day with my neighbors and fellow-workers is what the world is demanding of me today. This is getting into the inner workshop of democracy.

The New State, 1918

Follett on The Individual & Society

We have long been trying to understand the relation of the individual to society; we are only just beginning to see that there is no "individual," that there is no "society." (The New State, 1918)

- Individual and society are inseparable, inter-dependent, and co-evolving
- The mode of the individual and the mode of association reflect each other. Which are we to be?



- The true individual is released through the authentic community, and vice versa; neither is above the other.

Follett on Difference and Diversity

- Difference is our source of strength and creativity
- Always seek the “**plus values**”: the integration of difference is *not* like addition;
 $1 + 1 = 3$
- equality → **plusquality**
- equivalence → **plusvalence**
- Not a matter of “balancing” but rather **integrating**

What people often mean by getting rid of conflict is getting rid of diversity, and it is of the utmost importance that these should not be considered the same. We may wish to abolish conflict but we cannot get rid of diversity. **We must face life as it is and understand that diversity is its most essential feature.**

Power-Over vs. Power-With

- Follett challenged the notion of power as a limited commodity that can be given, taken, or even shared
- “Power begins...with the organization of reflex arcs. Then these are organized into a system—more power. Then the organization of these systems comprise the organism—more power...**Power is the legitimate, the inevitable, outcome of the essential life-process.**”

**Genuine power
is power-with;
pseudo-power,
power-over.**

The Law of the Situation

One person should not give orders to another person, but both should agree to take their orders from the situation.

“The Giving of Orders” (1925)

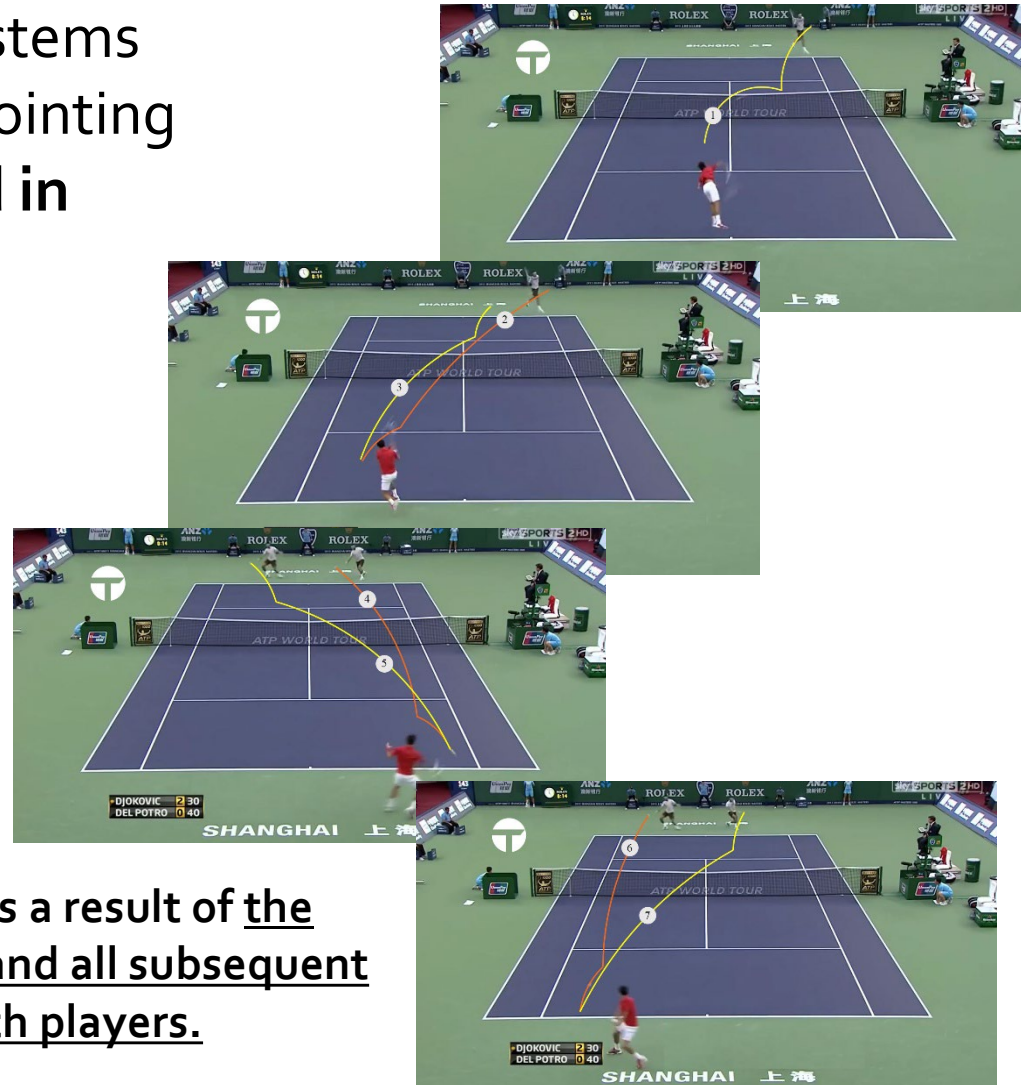
- Rather than rely on authority or expertise, hierarchy or obedience, **actions should be driven by the needs of the situation**, as studied and understood by all involved.
- Leader and follower should both follow the law of the situation.

Circular Response

Follett was one of the first systems thinkers of the modern era, pointing out that **all things are nested in recursive relationships.**

“While I am behaving, the environment is changing because of my behaving, and my behavior is a response to the new situation which I, in part, have created.”

The 7th return is a result of the original serve and all subsequent returns, by both players.



Ever-Evolving

- Nothing is ever “done”
- Artificially seeking or imposing “the end” forecloses on fresh possibilities and ignores changing conditions
- Always be open to the next possibility (it’s coming anyway)

It is upon those who can fearlessly embrace the doctrine of “becoming” that the life of the future waits.

Mary Parker Follett



No experience can ever be repeated, and in this fact, we find all the tragedy of life and at the same time its glory - its irrepressible movement.

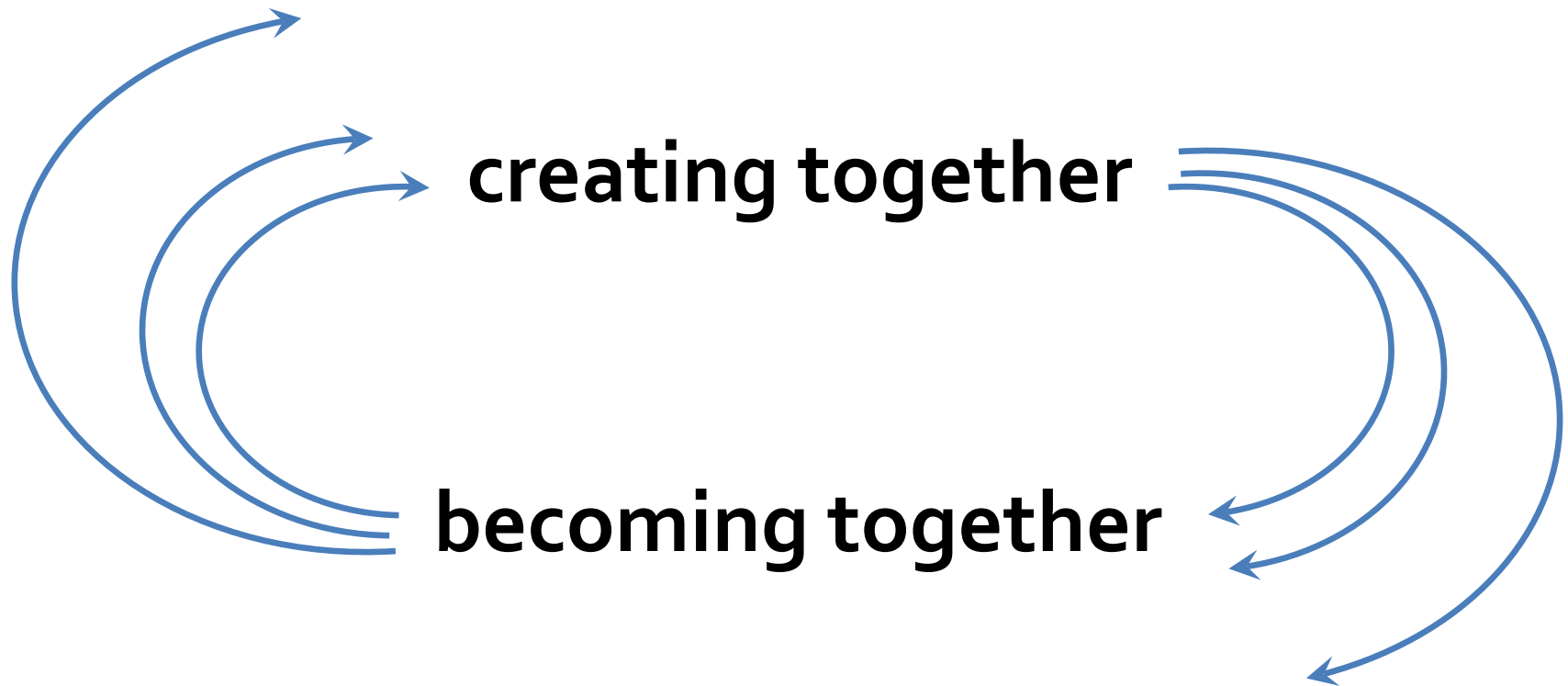
Conflict

Between the driving wheel of the locomotive and the track it is necessary to haul the train. **All polishing is done by friction.** The music of the violin we get by friction...That is what I wish to consider here, whether we can set conflict to work and make it do something for us.

Creative Experience (1924)

There are three ways of dealing with difference: domination, compromise, and integration. By domination only one side gets what it wants; by compromise neither side gets what it wants; **by integration we find a way by which both sides get what they wish.**

Follett in Simplest Terms?



demos = “the people”

cratos = “power”

“The people” doesn’t exist without
continuous creative relation.

“Power” doesn’t exist until it is grown, through
continuous creative relation between and
among people.

***Democracy is the mutually supporting
creation of “the people” and of “power.”***

***If what we have doesn’t do that,
it isn’t democracy.***

Implications of Follett's Insights for Democracy Today and Tomorrow

- What most people have been calling “democracy” leaves a vast amount of collective and individual potential on the table.
- We need to shift from the static and passive conception of democracy to an active, co-creative definition of democracy as a way of life.
- Creative democracy goes hand-in-hand with the capacity to consciously evolve society and culture in a more positive direction; it is critical for our future.
- Democracy can only be learned through personal experience.
- It will take generations of learning to shift from static to creative democracy.
- We should have started long ago, but the opportunity is always now.

"I am sometimes told that mine is a counsel of perfection only to be realized AD the millennium, but we cannot take even the first step until we have chosen our path."

Why? What Could We Accomplish?

- Ending partisan and personality domination of political life
- More vibrant, strong, resilient communities
- Greater sense of self-determination AND collaboration across all levels of society
- Constructive use of conflict and the avoidance of violence
- Removing barriers to the most fulfilling lives for all
- Greater sense of individual social connection and unity (without uniformity)
- Opening up dialogue that allow people to find and create common ground, explore and create together
- True appreciation for diversity and difference across society
- Engaging people's energies to imagine, design, and evolve public institutions based on today's needs and aspirations for tomorrow
- Moving out of immediate "crisis" and freeing up to think and act long-term
- Holistic & systemic approaches to issues and opportunities
- Lasting peace (and not merely as the absence of war)
- **And so much more**

Where can we learn democracy? Wherever we face situations.

The basic “unit” of learning / doing democracy?

2 or more people

and

the opportunity to *effect* or
affect ways of meeting a need

through

integrating their desires and
integrating their ideas.

People need to **MAKE** things together.

Where?

- homes
- neighborhoods
- schools
- city halls
- workplaces
- place of worship
- social media (???)

They must then extend that to the very systems that affect the situations they face, outwards and upwards, with more and more people and through more and more integrations.

**It would be wise to
turn back to the
neighborhood group
and there begin the
a b c of a
constructive
brotherhood of
man...We shall never
know how to be one
of a nation until we
are one of a
neighborhood.**

Federalism From the Interpersonal to the Global

- Federation = the co-creation of community and will set in contexts of interdependence.
- Once experienced and appreciated in this way, federation be grown from the interpersonal level all the way up to the whole world.
- Follett maintained that the world, as it is comprised of *inter-dependent* nations, is in fact a *society*.

**A community
of nations
needs a
constitution,
not treaties.**

THE MARY PARKER FOLLETT FOUNDATION

The Mary Parker Follett Foundation

- A not-for-profit organization established August 2025
 - Applying for recognition as a 501(c)3 public charity in the near future
- Initial board members Matthew Shapiro, Lark Corbeil, and Margaret Major
- Online hub at <https://follettfdn.org>

The Mary Parker Follett Foundation

Mission

To advance the understanding and practice of democracy as a creative experience, and to support the intellectual and literary legacy of Mary Parker Follett.

The Mary Parker Follett Foundation

Program Area 1. Advancing the Practice of Democracy as a Creative Experience

- **Philosophy, Theory, and Collaboration**
 - *Follett Talks*
 - *Mary Parker Follett Conversation on Creative Democracy*
 - *Collaboratory on Democracy as a Way of Life*
- **Advocacy and Capacity-Building**
 - *From Static Civics to Living Civics*
 - *Declaration of Interdependence Contest for K-12 Schools*
 - *Beyond Parties, Between Elections*
 - *Renewing Our Institutions and Our Society through Participatory Design*

The Mary Parker Follett Foundation

Program Area 2. The Legacy of Mary Parker Follett

- **Extending Access to Follett's Literary and Intellectual Legacy**
 - *Follett References Project*
 - *Follett Documentary*
 - *Catalyzing re-issuance of Creative Experience*

The Mary Parker Follett Foundation

As a new organization...

- Focus on achievable and meaningful projects and service
- Build a track record
- Strengthen and expand the community of Follett fans
- Build a great board of directors and advisory group
- Develop relationships with other organizations

The future...

- Implement the activities that require more resources
- Grow an endowment and grant-making capabilities?

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shapiromatic.wordpress.com

Next Follett Talk

Saturday, November 22

Erika Clegg will present on **Power With, not Power Over**. The presentation will show how Follett's ideas find fresh life in modern organizations, building trust, resilience, and performance.