

2 - The Core Problem

The most pressing problem we face as a nation is that, on a day-to-day and week-to-week basis, each of us doesn't do what is necessary to keep America strong and thus free.

Talk is Cheap

We don't take the time from our *pursuits of happiness* to do the small things that prevent simple acts from becoming incidents, and incidents from becoming trends, and trends from becoming almost irreversible national issues like the ones noted in the previous chapter. We don't seize the moment. We simply don't spend enough time on our country. America is not on our list of priorities and the results show. And please don't think this is a patriotic message – it's not. It's a message of *survival*.

Oh, most of us would say we "love America", that we care about this country. Many of us get a nice feeling when we hear Lee Greenwood's "Proud to be an American" or when an American athlete or team does well in an international competition, or when we hear a moving rendition of the National Anthem at a sporting event or Ray Charles' rendition of America the Beautiful. But saying we care is often about as far as we go. David Viscott, a nationally renown psychiatrist and radio talk show host, cautioned callers questioning whether a particular person really loved them or not to "trust what people do and not what they say". And for the most part, we don't act like we care about this country. We pledge our allegiance, but we don't often show our allegiance!

Brian Shul is a Vietnam-era USAF fighter pilot with 212 combat missions. He was shot down near the end of the war and was so badly burned that he was given next to no chance to live. He did live, went on to fly SR-71s and completed a twenty year career in the Air Force. He has written four books on aviation and runs a photo studio. In a [speech](#) he made in Chico California in the aftermath of the September 11th attack on the U.S., he said:

"These murdering fanatics came into our land, lived amongst our people, flew on our planes, crashed them into our buildings, and killed thousands of our citizens. And nowhere along their gruesome path were they questioned or stopped. The joke is on us. We allowed this country to become soft.

We shouldn't really be too surprised that this could happen. Did we really think that we could keep electing officials who put self above nation and this would make us stronger? Did we really think that a strong economy adequately replaced a strong intelligence community? Did we imagine that a President who practically gave away the store on his watch, was insuring national security? While our country was mired in the wasted excess of a White House sex scandal, the drums of war beat loudly in foreign lands, and we were deaf. Our response was to give the man two terms in office, and even then barely half the American public exercised their right to vote. We have only ourselves to blame. Our elected officials are merely a reflection of our own values and what we deem important."

He is right on target!

Repairing Large Cracks is Costly

What about times of national crisis and wars? During those times it is easy to focus our attention, to galvanize our energies and to act on behalf of the country. But when problems have become serious enough for a war, the price we must pay to maintain our freedoms is extraordinary — lost lives, broken families, unfulfilled dreams, enemies made, worthy goals delayed and life-long psychological problems. *The daughter of a firefighter lost in the [September 11th attack](#) was asked what was the hardest for her was. She said knowing that she'll never be able to call anyone "dad".*

While the September 11th attack on the United States may not have been preventable, it is clear that many government agencies, elected officials, corporations and citizens did, or neglected to do, things that enabled this cowardly and horrific attack.

Freedoms not Guaranteed

The freedoms and way of life we enjoy in this country are not guaranteed. Nowhere in the stars is it written that America will be free. It took a tremendous determination, risk and sacrifice to get to where we are today. Keeping this country free takes constant attention and sacrifice. If we don't give enough of it, future generations will have to give proportionally more to undo the damage of our neglect and lack of attention. You know what this is all about? The old MIDAS muffler slogan, "Pay me now or pay me later."

Click PLAY to hear the mother of U.S. soldier sent to Iraq as part of Desert Storm read a letter from her son.

Examples of Our Inaction (A.K.A. How the cracks get started and grow)

Here are some examples of our inaction and lack of caring:

1. How many of us vote, and for those who do, how knowledgeable are we of who or what we have voted for?
2. What do we do when friends tell racial or ethnic jokes or brag about their drug use?
3. What do we do when someone asks borrow a copy of our computer software?
4. What do we do when we see someone empty their ashtray in a parking lot?
5. What do we do about gangs that kill innocent bystanders, intimidate their neighbors and create untenable educational environments?
6. What do we do to remedy a legal system that allows a criminal who hurt himself while

trying to escape to sue and receive an outrageous damage award?

7. What do we do to stop the flow of thousands of illegal (not legal!) aliens who pour into our country and individuals who enter with visas but never leave?
8. How many corporations and individuals go out of their way to avoid jury duty.— Yes, jury DUTY, the responsibility part of freedom?
9. How often does a company take action against an employee who commits a crime against that company or even let someone go or fire them when their efforts are substandard? No, an employee is only fired when they turn the company in for fraud or illegal actions.

A few years back, there was a news story about students at a large Texas university who ran up \$5 million of phone charges on someone else's "calling card." The long distance company said if the money was paid back, no charges would be pressed!

10. And let's not overlook sports and entertainment. How many chances has baseball given to former baseball players (and drug addicts) Steve Howe and Daryl Strawberry and has the entertainment industry given to the Robert Downey Jr.?
11. How many of us boycott products and services that are advertised in a misleading way?
12. And how often do we give credit to, and support, others who do take action on behalf of the country. The Giraffe Project is a group that does just that — they publicize individuals who stick their neck out for the rest of us.



It all comes down to us — in a democracy we can chose to be, or not to be, in charge — if *we the people* don't take charge, then the special interest groups step in to fill the void and the cracks get bigger.

If there is any doubt as to whether the cracks are getting bigger and that each of us needs to be more involved, check out this 11 minute musical [collage from 9-11!](#) It is a beautiful and moving piece of work.

The problems in this country are our responsibility. We have allowed them to become as large as they are and by allowing them, we condone them. If we don't care, who will? If we don't love this country, who will love America? Two lines from the song America (a.k.a. — My Country 'tis of Thee) have always seemed so poignant and provide all the motivation any of us should need to be responsible citizens.

*"Sweet land of liberty ...
.. Land where my fathers died"*



is such a messy business, and there are many who want no part of it, but rush to bask in the security blanket of its victory.

I spent an entire military career fighting Communism, and was very proud to do so. We won that war, we beat one of the worst scourges to humankind the world has known. But it took a great effort, over many years of sustained vigilance and much sacrifice by so many whose names you will never know. And perhaps our nation, so weary from so long a cold war, relaxed too much and felt the world was a safer place with the demise of the Soviet Union. We indulged ourselves in our own lives, and gave little thought to the threats to our national security.

You know, normally my talks are laced with numerous jokes as I share my stories, but I have very few jokes to tell this afternoon. These murdering fanatics came into our land, lived amongst our people, flew on our planes, crashed them into our buildings, and killed thousands of our citizens. And nowhere along their gruesome path were they questioned or stopped. The joke is on us. We allowed this country to become soft.

We shouldn't really be too surprised that this could happen. Did we really think that we could keep electing officials who put self above nation and this would make us stronger? Did we really think that a strong economy adequately replaced a strong intelligence community? Did we imagine that a President who practically gave away the store on his watch, was insuring national security? While our country was mired in the wasted excess of a White House sex scandal, the drums of war beat loudly in foreign lands, and we were deaf. Our response was to give the man two terms in office, and even then barely half the American public exercised their right to vote. We have only ourselves to blame. Our elected officials are merely a reflection of our own values and what we deem important.

Did we not realize that America had become a laughing stock around the world? We had lost credibility, even amongst our allies. To our enemies we had no resolve. We made a lot of money, watched a lot of TV, and understood little about what was happening beyond our shores. We were, simply, an easy target.

But we are a country awakened now. We have been attacked in our homeland. We have now felt the reality of what an unstable and dangerous world it truly is. And still, in the face of this unprecedented carnage in our most prominent city, there are those who choose to take this opportunity to protest, and even burn the flag.

If I were the regents or alumni of certain large universities in this county, I would be embarrassed to be producing students of such ignorance and naïve notions. Like mindless sheep, they march with painted faces and trite sayings on signs, blissfully ignorant of the world they live in, and the system that protects them, hoping maybe to make the evening news. Perhaps if they had spent more time in class they would have learned that those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it. They might have learned that all it takes for evil to succeed in the world, is for good people to stand by and do nothing. If they had simply

gone back in history as recently as the Viet Nam War, they would have learned that an enemy that knows it can never defeat us militarily, will persist as long as there is dissention and disruption in our land. Their ignorance can be understood, as their young empty minds have been filled with the re-written history tripe that tenured leftist professors can spew out with no fear of removal. But the unwitting aid they provide the enemy, in disrupting the national resolve, is unforgivable. I think this is wonderful country, though, that gives everyone their voice of dissention. I am all for people expressing their views publicly because it makes it much easier for us to identify the truly foolish, and to know who cannot be counted on in times of crisis. These are the weak and cowardly who, when the enemy is crashing through the front door, will cower in the back room, counting on better men than themselves to make and keep them free. Well, the enemy is at our front door, and isn't it interesting those who cry loudest and most often for their rights, are usually those least willing to defend it.

I heard a student on TV the other day say that this war just wasn't in his plans and he would simply head to Canada if a draft occurred. Just wasn't in his plans. I wonder what plans the young men at the beaches of Normandy had that they never got to live. I wonder if it was in the plans of 19-year-old boys in Viet Nam to lie dying in a jungle far from home. I guess the men and women at Pearl Harbor one morning had their plans slightly rearranged too. Gee, I hope we haven't inconvenienced this student. Those people in the World Trade Center have no more plans. It is up to us to have a plan now. And it isn't going to be easy. Who ever said it would? Just what part of our history spoke of how easy it was to form a free nation? It has never been easy and has always required vigilance and sacrifice, and sometimes war, to preserved this union. If it were easy, everyone would have done it. But no one else has, and we stand alone as the most unique country on earth.

And isn't it amazing that we have spent a generation stamping God out of our schools and government, and now as a nation, have collectively turned to God in memorial services, prayer vigils and churches around this country.

I am also very disturbed to hear that there are people in this country, at this particular time, who feel it inappropriate to wear the flag on their lapel because they are on the news or in a public job, and school officials who want to remove pro-American stickers so as not to offend foreign students. Well I am offended that these people call themselves Americans. I am offended that innocent people were killed in a mass attack of unthinkable proportions. And I am offended at listening to TV broadcasters speak to me condescendingly, with a bias that screams of their drowning in a cesspool of political correctness. I pity the person who thinks they are going to remove this flag from my lapel.

This flag of ours is the symbol of all that is good about this country. America is an idea. It is an idea lived, and fought for, by a people. We are America, and this is our symbol. We are imperfect in many ways, but we continue to strive toward the ideal our forefathers laid down for us over 225 years ago. I could never imagine desecrating that symbol. Perhaps there are many people in this nation who have never been abroad, or in harms way, and seen the flag upon their return. Those poor souls can never know the deep pride and honor one feels to

see it wave, to know that there is still a good ol' USA. With all our warts we are still the greatest nation on earth, and the flag is the most powerful symbol of that greatness. When I was in grade school, we used to say the Pledge of Allegiance every morning. It is something I never forgot. I wonder how many children even know that pledge today.

This flag is our history, our dreams, our accomplishments, indelibly expressed in bright red, white, and blue. This flag was carried in our Revolutionary War, although it had many less stars. But it persevered and evolved throughout a war we had no right to believe we could win. But we did, and built a country around it. This flag, tattered and battle worn, waved proudly from the mast, as John Paul Jones showed the enemy what true resolve was. This banner was raised by the hands of brave men on a godforsaken island called Iwo Jima, and became a part of the most famous photo of the 20th Century. Those men are all dead now, but their legacy lives on in the Marine Memorial in Washington, DC. Those of you who have seen it will recall that inscribed within the stone monument are the words --- When Uncommon Valor, Was A Common Virtue --- I don't believe you'll see the words, "it was easy", anywhere on it. This flag has even been to the moon, planted there for all time by men with a vision, and the courage to see it through.

I personally know what it is to see the flag, and feel something deep inside that makes you feel you are a part of something much bigger than yourself. Laying in a hospital bed, I can vividly recall looking out the only window in the room and on Sundays, seeing that big garrison flag flying proudly in the breeze. It filled the entire window, and filled my heart with a motivation that helped me leave that bed, and enabled me to be standing here today.

And many years later, while fighting another terrorist over Libya, my backseater and I outraced Khaddafi's missiles in our SR-71 as we headed for the Mediterranean, and I can still clearly see that American flag patch on the shoulder of my space suit, staring at me in the rear view mirror as we headed west, and it was a good feeling. Now don't ask me why we had rear view mirrors in the world's fastest jet. I can assure you, no one was gaining on us that day.

I am so happy to see so many flags out here today. Long may it wave.

History will judge us. How we confront this chapter of American history will be important for the future of this great nation. This will be a war like none other we have endured. The combatants will not just be the soldier on the battlefield, but will be fought by us, the citizens. We are on the battlefield now; the war has been brought to us. We will determine the outcome of this war by how well we remain vigilant, how patient we are with tightened security, how well we support the economy, and most importantly, in the resolve we show the enemy. There are some things worth fighting for, and this country is one of them.

I pray for our leaders at this time. In the Pacific, during WW II, Admiral Bull Halsey said, "There are no great men, just great circumstances, and how they handle those circumstances will determine the outcome of history". Our future and the future of coming generations are in our hands. Wars are not won just on military fronts, but by the resolve of the people. We

must remain tenaciously strong in the pursuit of this enemy that threatens free people everywhere.

I am encouraged that we will win this war. Even before the first shot was finished being fired, there were brave Americans on Flight 93, fighting back. These people were the first true heroes of this conflict, and gave their lives to save their fellow countrymen.

This nation, this melting pot of humanity, this free republic, must be preserved. This idea that is America is important enough to be defended. Fought for. Even die for. The enemy fears what you have, for if their people ever become liberated into a free society, tyrannical dictatorships will cease and he will lose power.

How can they ever understand this country of ours, so self-indulgent and diverse, yet when attacked, so united in the defense of its principals. This is the greatest country in the world because brave people sacrificed to make it that way. We are a collective mix of greatness and greed, hi-tech and heartland. We are the country of Mickey Mouse and Mickey Mantle; from John Smith and Pocahontas to John Glenn and an Atlas booster; from Charles Lindbergh to Charley Brown; from Moby Dick to Microsoft; we are a nation that went from Kitty Hawk to Tranquility Base in less than 70 years; we are rock and roll, and the Bill of Rights; we are where everyone else wants to be, the greatest nation in the world.

The enemy does not understand the dichotomy of our society, but they should understand this; we will bandage our wounds, we will bury our dead; and then we will come for you...and we will destroy you and all you stand for.

I read this quote recently and would like to share it with you:

'We are pressed on every side, but not crushed,
Perplexed, but not in despair,
Persecuted, but not abandoned,
Struck down, but not destroyed.'

That is from II Corinthians. Not too long ago it would have been politically incorrect to quote from the Bible. I am so happy to be politically INCORRECT. And I am so proud to be an American.

Thank you all for coming out today and showing your support for your government, and your nation. You are the true patriots, you are the soldiers of this war, you are the strength of America."

BACK

