

The tweet behind the curtain

By Dafna Michaelson Jenet

<http://www.examiner.com/article/the-tweet-behind-the-curtain>



April 30, 2014

"The crematoria at Auschwitz did not begin with bricks, they began with words."

- Abe Foxman

I typed those words onto my iPad and my purpose at this event became clear. I have live-tweeted many events. Typically the events I live-tweet have to do with small business, entrepreneurship, [social media](#) and general community building - content that never really reaches the scope of being offensive. In fact, I have a very clear personal mission to share content that is positive in nature and serves to elevate the conversation. I am always careful about my choice of words, I aim not to offend and when I do discuss challenging issues I am careful to include information or access to ways these challenges may be solved. But even so I rarely knowingly cross a threshold that might involve offending a reader.

On this occasion I would be tweeting content that pushed that envelope and I knew might cause some to form negative opinions of me as I captured comments from people who fight for civil liberties in many different arenas. On this occasion I would be capturing the quotes and comments of legislators, government officials, and community activists. I would be sharing the words of people pushing agendas, agendas I support and believe in but may not communicate about as openly on social platforms. I was not sure what to expect but I was nervous and I knew that in many ways I would be coming out of the closet on some very firmly held beliefs. I am ashamed to say that it crossed my mind more than once that, as I do for many clients, I wished I could be tweeting from the organization's account and therefore have the ability to mostly be anonymous. But this time I was not being paid. This time I was tweeting about my own experience as a Leadership Fellow in this century old organization.

The Anti-Defamation League ([ADL](#)) was founded 101 years ago after a Jewish man was falsely accused and murdered by a mob for an act he didn't commit. The agency is best known for its work defending people against anti-Semitism but has evolved as an organization who understands that standing up for the [civil rights](#) of all is the ultimate way to defend against hate, bias and specifically anti-Semitism. As Americans, and in the greater world, there are those who disagree with the positions and platforms of the ADL. We are, after all, a nation composed of people from all walks of life who came here for freedom of speech, freedom of religion and the freedom to affect legislation. America's own history is full of civil rights failures and atrocities and as we grow and develop we continue to evolve as a people and create a world that makes sense from a civil liberties perspective. There are those out there who do not want to see these changes and who fear their impact on our society and who, as Americans, have a right to argue and defend their principles. What we don't have the right to do is discriminate, spread hatred, instill fear and incite violence. That is where the line gets crossed and that is where the ADL gets involved.

The conference was held in Washington DC the seat of the highest levels of debate on civil rights. The city is teeming with lobbyists from all sides of every platform and the streets were swarming with tourists from around the world standing on long lines to see the amazing historical sites recognizing the works and history of this great nation and her leaders even as rain fell steadily from the sky. Safely ensconced in the world of our hotel ballrooms we began to hear from those engaged in the daily fight for freedom and I began to tweet.

Utilizing hashtags to spread the message beyond the hotel and the conference attendees I was delighted as retweets began to flow. I watched as tweets about resources to train students to defend themselves against cyber bullying began to make the rounds of the education [twitter](#) community. More came in as I tweeted about giving parents resources to help safeguard their children online and to help them identify what to look out for. Each time I saw my phone light up I got a jolt of excitement. I knew I was helping people. I also knew I was still tweeting the easy stuff.

It was not until I sent my first tweet with the word Israel in the content that I earned the wrath of some members of the twitterverse and received a tweet from someone identifying himself as a "Grand Duke" with a vile challenge to my civil rights motives. As a Jewish woman, and a woman who cherishes her dual citizenship with Israel, where my family has lived for more than 14 generations, his title and words struck fear in my heart and gave me a moment of pause. Only a moment, I did not have time to pause. The session kept going and the content needed to be shared.

Many more hateful tweets would come into my stream before my conference live tweeting would conclude and it was not until the final session at the closing lunch that I truly felt confident in what I was doing tweeting content that had the possibility to divide and turn some against me simply for who I am.

Over the few days of our experience I had several conversations with individuals where I mentioned that my goal had once been to run for public office. I quickly followed that up with the clarifier that this was no longer my goal. In DC when you tell someone you want to run for office I imagine it must be like telling someone in LA that you want to be on the silver screen. Every next person you meet wants that

role. Yet, while I expected people to immediately move past my soiled dreams they did not. They pressed me. They wanted to know why I no longer wished to run. Well, I explained, it was simple; the longer I had been involved in politics the more I realized that my beliefs did not align with any one of the political parties or factions out there. I am an American who is also an Israeli and I am a woman who has strong beliefs on getting our children a solid education in the best possible environment for their learning style and I believe firmly that we are responsible for creating a society where we welcome people to become Americans and support access and equality for all, all. I did not feel the system would like to have me in it. When I told them that they said, "That's exactly why you should be."

On our last panel of the day we had the Monika Bickert, Head of Global Policy Management for Facebook and Jeffrey Rosen, President and CEO of the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia. The conversation was focused around the slippery slope between censorship and removal of content that is actually hateful and may incite others. As a privately held company Facebook has the right to enforce its policies however they deem fit but with 1.3 billion daily users their decisions have the capacity to impact the world more than free speech law. What Facebook has been doing has been to create a "compassionate resolution" program where they are working on helping individuals resolve content disputes without Facebook's involvement. Facebook is teaching people how to communicate in this new era. But what really struck me, and was my big wakeup call was when the Ms. Bickert from Facebook said that what has been most effective in the removal of questionable content is what Facebook now does first. When a page has been reported Facebook will give the page owner the right to have the content put back up if they will reveal their identity on the page. People who are trying to incite bullying, violence, terror will often hide behind anonymity and most do not choose to have the page unblocked in exchange for pulling back the curtain and taking ownership publicly.

As I typed the tweet capturing that information it suddenly occurred to me that I was doing the same thing. I was very comfortable sharing this content that I knew had the power to divide if I was behind the shelter of someone else's name but would I say the same in the harsh daylight of my own account hitting the twitter stream? Furthermore if I am not able to share my tweets that certainly come out with my own bias towards civil liberty and my belief and support for the State of Israel and the obliteration of anti-Semitism am I anything more than a coward? I must fight hard to create a world my children can be safe in no matter what they believe, who they are and who they choose to love and to do that I must stand up, speak out, be willing to hear the criticisms and not allow fear to swallow my resolve to do the work I need to do out in the open to create a world without hate.

For a transcript of my tweets from the 2014 Anti-Defamation League Leadership Summit click [here\(https://twitter.com/dafna_m/timelines/461679727338872832\)](https://twitter.com/dafna_m/timelines/461679727338872832). To see the tweets of others from the conference please search the hashtag: #ADLSummit2014 on Twitter and Facebook or visit this [tagboard. \(https://tagboard.com//ADLSummit2014/168941\)](https://tagboard.com//ADLSummit2014/168941)