

Dial down that ego and start listening

It's been a week of meetings. Including the [social innovation summit](#) and [WherecampDC](#) - fascinating meetings not just for their content but also their attendees.

It's important to manage both upwards and sideways. Forget upwards, and you find your freedom to move and innovate restricted by politics or resources. Forget sideways, and all your assumptions about hordes of talented willing workers will be a nice dream that never quite happened. It's also important to see people as individuals, with human needs for belonging, reward, recognition. Forget that, and you're heading for a world of trouble. Politics kicks in, and people come into altruistic spaces assuming that there will always be willing volunteers, and that their causes will be enough to draw them in. And then they get a huge wake-up call that anyone in the tech communities could have quietly warned them about.

So. One message I took away from the innovation summit was “start listening, and dial down that ego”. I've been trying to do that since: every time I've bridled at a difficult behavior, or a disconnect between C-level and the people doing the work, or between peers or friends, I've caught myself, muttered that this isn't about me, listened, tried to understand and asked what there is in my gift to make it better. Which is theoretically what we all should do all the time, but we're all human. There are a lot of passionate people in the spaces I frequent, and it's not too surprising that tempers flare and misalignments of expectations and effort happen.

Which is why it was so wonderful to start the week building connections between people, and to end it at an [unconference](#): Wherecamp DC. There is no ego in an unconference: experts and newbies rub shoulders, drink beer together, and most importantly listen to each others' ideas, in a space where nothing is 'wrong' (although some things can be discussed at great length towards consensus, as happened in the noGIS layers-are-dead session). And when everyone listens and dials down their ego, amazing ideas happen. I'm still not sure about SoylentGIS (“GIS is made of people”), but the neurology of place and unplace was fascinating, as was the 3-degree-of-separation theories about the geoherd and its effects, GIS changing from land use planning to personal data and storytelling.