



# No mountain too high: Real estate leaders vow to fight for better communities

Award-winning teacher brings group together on commitment to leverage their influence for good

BY [CAROLINE FEENEY](#) [Managing Editor](#) | MAR 27

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In Palm Springs, the simplest of beauties can be found — like the creosote bush that blooms yellow petals and exhales the earthy aroma that's become known as “the smell of rain” in the Southwest on the rare occasion that water falls from an impeccable blue sky.

Sometimes untangling complex problems requires going back to basics, so on Tuesday morning — [day two of Inman Disconnect](#) — a group of real estate leaders steadily ascended the desert mountains, taking in the magnitude of them, so high you could reach out and touch the tops. With every uneven, invigorating step, a burden untethered for a clearer mind — a separation from the madness of a day-to-day existence that feels more like survival than living.

A wide plateau offered the hikers a chance to catch their breath and gather around in the most magnificent of classrooms — legs dangling free over the rocks, and no flickering fluorescents. Just the glowing warmth of the sun.

It helps, too, when the teacher is award-winning Seattle high school educator Nathan Bowling, who is the kind of teacher you never forget. The cohort of real estate brokers, tech executives and association leaders listened more than they talked, prompted by Bowling after breaking into group discussions to “share what they heard” rather than reiterate their own ideas off the bat.



The candid conversation was as stripped down as the surroundings with one participant shedding light on the hypocrisy of real estate associations that claim to promote homeownership but vote against taxes that would support schools and education, the single biggest key to the success or demise of their community’s future, the group echoed.



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The conversation centered on the inextricable connection between education, law enforcement, local government and real estate and how real estate professionals can use whatever leverage they have in a community

to bridge the communication gap between these key players.

The leaders decided on a principle to take back to the rest of the attendees at Disconnect to “**make our communities better** by using our influence as real estate leaders to give back and advocate and support education, marginalized communities and policy that will promote affordable housing in the long term.”

One example is Orange County broker Valerie Torelli, whose firm has given back over \$500,000 to the community over time and funds coding programs at local schools for students. She asked the group to think about all the ways their community could benefit from the money they spend now on internet leads every month.

Meanwhile, Bowling advised everyone not to underestimate Gen Z, who he interacts with on a daily basis. Was anyone surprised that these kids could organize a nationwide march on gun control? He wasn't. That is just the tip of the iceberg in what this generation is capable of, Bowling said. This firecracker bunch — unconcerned with the cultural divides that have polarized past generations — will be buying and selling homes in the near future. And if you can't relate or appeal to them, you're in trouble.

“It was kind of biblical,” Bowling said in recalling the experience in the mountains to the crowd at Inman Disconnect later in the afternoon, when attendees gathered for a recap of all the morning activities, spanning horseback riding and architectural tours. “What really struck me was that there's a passion in that group to give back. And to me as an educator, I think about Realtors being leaders of their communities.”

“So many of you don't see yourselves that way,” he said. “I'm reminded of my classroom where oftentimes I have a kid who's brilliant who's like ‘I'm not smart enough,’ and I say, ‘Damn, you are.’”

*[Catch our recap of Disconnect day one here.](#)*

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