

“... haunted by an ever-present longing for community ...  
an irresistible need for communication with each other.”

-William H. Willimon and Thomas H. Naylor  
*The Abandoned Generation: Rethinking Higher  
Education*

A **community** is a place where people are seriously concerned about each other's well-being and act on those feelings. On the other hand, a **village or tribe** is where everyone is concerned first about who are *them* (outsiders), and who are *us* (insiders), before they decide who deserves a smile and a hand.

A **civilization** is a place that creates safety for the stranger, with a minimum of meaningful, fair-handed rules, grounded in reality. Civil order keeps community from turning into ugly villages and individuals from burning out while trying to help each other. Civil order creates a workplace where boundaries are respected, and work gets done. A foundation of civilization helps grow villages beyond their limits and into communities. Civilization is sometimes counter-intuitive; it keeps our instinctive responses from turning into bigotry. On the other hand, a **bureaucracy** is a place where the rules become the goals.

**Community** is where the expectation is that if something is needed, someone can be found who will have the right answer. In community, we feel resourceful. It is where generosity is taken for granted and the sweetness of ordinary obligation provides structure and meaning. A community takes up the worst of the burdens of life on its own shoulders.

**Community** is where success is measured by different criteria from that of the bottom line. The corporate model can be a dangerous model to use in the public and nonprofit sectors; it can distract participants from truths that can't be counted.

**Community** moves at the speed of heartbeat and breath, of that of a slow stroll through a rose garden. It stops to feed the birds, pick up trash, close an open gate, and pull a blanket over the shoulders of a sleeping child. It stops, and asks, “How are you,” over and over again, and never gets tired of hearing the same stories, over and over again.

Creating and sustaining **community** is not without cost. The price is looking into the face of everyone you meet and saying “hello” as if you mean it. You have to pay attention to more than just your own stuff, your own needs, your own dreams, your own successes and failures, your own personal and professional space. It means compromise and putting up with the mediocrity of the crowd, sometimes. It means a loss of privacy; your pain is known; your joy is known; your self is known. It means that sometimes you are not going to win, because you have given up winning.

**Community** is the created family, the village without xenophobia, the "us and us" of public life, a constant reunion of the practical and the spiritual.

*Community is the bello to everyone, the gift that is on the recipient's terms, the shared work, forgiveness and celebration.*

# Five Rules for Building Community Relationships

1. A network is an array of useful relationships.
2. The art of networking is the art of exchanging useful ideas and information among individuals for mutual benefit.
3. The art of network building is the art of designing, building, and maintaining these networks of relationships.

## The Five Rules of Networking:

1. Be Useful to others on their terms and allow them to be useful to you.
2. Don't Be Boring. Abstain from loading others down with too much data, from exploiting them, and from not letting them be useful to you.
3. Listen. Think about what the other person is saying, not what you are going to say. Seek out people with whom you don't agree; listen to them.
4. Ask Questions and plan to be surprised by the answer.
5. Play the Wild Card! The least likely person can have the answer to your question and you can be useful to the least likely person.

*A weaver is someone who sees patterns and makes connections,  
and then creates their own patterns.*

# Who is in Your Own Networks?

**Personal Networks:** Relatives, friends, neighbors, parents of your children's friends, tradespersons and service people (doctor, dry cleaner, cobbler, baker, yoga instructor, dog walker, gardener, housesitter), teachers, high school and college friends, fellow hobbyists, hobby and sports clubs members, friends from personal religious and political activities.

**Professional Networks:** Colleagues at current and previous jobs, your peers at government, nonprofit and private sector institutions, members of the media, other librarians, managers, clergy, private citizens, academics, members of think tanks, property owners, ranchers, developers, farmers, business owners, and degreed professionals.

## Types of Networks

**Networks of Geography:** Neighbors, roommates, people who work down the hall or in the same building or on the same campus or on the same block or on the same street. The people who live in the neighborhood of your workplace, or in your town, county, state, region, country.

**Networks of Intention:** Elected and appointed officials, members of task forces and community groups, members of citizens' groups, members of political parties, members of movements and action committees.

**Networks of Interest:** Members of professional associations, clubs and conferences, people who subscribe and read the same magazines and play the same sports, people with children the same age, people with the same disease, people who have lived through the same difficult experience.

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**Networks of World View:** Followers of the same guru, practitioners of the same religion or spiritual path, people who speak the same language or who identify with the same ethnic group, people whose families came from the same part of the world, people who share your philosophy concerning politics, education, or the supremacy of the Chicago Cubs.

**And how about...**Salespeople, police officers, receptionists and secretaries, postal carriers, kids, the person in front of you in line at the grocery store, the person next to you on the plane or bus, your waitperson, your worst enemy, your best friend, your childhood crush.

**The people most overlooked:** Your parents, people who you don't like, people who you are in awe of, people who you don't know, people who you were told about years ago, people who make less money than you or who don't have your education or credentials, and those with superior money, education, and credentials.

**The people we tend to exclude:** The Others: people who you perceive are on the other side of important issues, people who vote differently than you do, people who have different ideas about: abortion, public school curricula, birth control, freedom of speech, sex, gun control, capital punishment, cats, trade laws, books, vitamins, music, how to raise children, taxes, the role of women, the Internet, the role of men, the United Nations, hunting, and nuclear power. And, people who live in the wrong city or state, people with the wrong religious ideas, people who work for the wrong employers, people who eat the wrong things, people who disagree with us. People are obviously just wrong.

# Specific Strategies for Community-Building

Everyone in your library has “internal and external community-building” as part of their job description. Everyone.

No one ever gets “punished” for going outside whatever boundaries are set regarding whom the organization is “speaking to” or which organizations are on the “acceptable” list.

Even regarding an organization with which you can’t possibly work, find one person with whom you can have a reciprocal relationship.

Even with a person with whom you can’t possibly do business, find one facet of that person that you have in common and about which you can chat at length, even if it is something that is not very important.

Play “what if” a lot. Be willing to dream out loud about possibilities all the time and with everyone, even if only the tiniest percentage comes to true.

If you are in a leadership position, give your staff more and more important work to do, so they can feel like full community-builders in the mission of the library. Assume your job is to grow leaders and to coax the genius out of all of the people with whom you work.

Keep a permanent personal and professional database. Find ways to keep in touch with people and invest in your relationships with them.

# Creating Community

1. Each time you host a program about community, invite everyone you can. Keep asking yourself whom you have forgotten.
2. Remember that each person in the room will know more than you do more about some aspect of the subject. Create opportunities for everyone to speak, not just the leadership or people with formal credentials, education and experience. Everyone.
3. Create opportunities for participants to speak to and help each other. Everyone.
4. Encourage different community members to run the presentations each time. Do not allow community to be limited to one committee or department.
5. Measure your ability to elicit community by how little people need you; if you leave the meeting room and people don't notice, you have done a successful job.
6. Human beings have many facets. The more facets that can be touched and engaged in thought, word and deed by other people, the more likely that there will be the creation of community.
7. People need overwhelming meaning in their lives, but shared meaning might not be enough to create a community that can sustain itself. Otherwise, there is only one connection, albeit large, with other people, and the community is likely to be more like a cult or tyranny. This is the great danger and contradiction of all single-minded community causes: community emerging from own source.

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8. There must be a high level of reciprocity among the participants.
9. Community requires a higher degree of public life, where people are willing to talk with each other and reveal themselves to each other. For some people, community makes them feel naked. Not everyone needs to participate in the same level of disclosure, however.
10. Community is built in the informal more than in the formal; otherwise, people start replacing the I-Thou (Buber) with committee meetings.
11. Ritual and structure can strengthen community, but they are not, in themselves, community.
12. Community is built on the daily actions of most participants.
13. You know each other's stories and act on that knowledge.
14. Community does not have to be based on proximity. Scholars and merchants, e.g., have shared virtual communities for centuries before there was an Internet.
15. After the flush of "you are one of us," something more must happen.
16. Community is tested in crisis.
17. Workplace communities are fragile because of the realities of the marketplace. However, friendships can help sustain community.
18. Community is how people interact when they don't have to.

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19. Community is modeled by the leadership every day and with every person. A good “politician” runs for office every day.
20. Communities have hierarchies, but the more ways that every person has the opportunity to lead, has status, can be seen as a peer of the top people, has been a top person in some facet of life, etc., the more likely the community will survive.
21. A group where one person pays the bills is not a community. Allocation of resources impacts community-building. In library communities, this means being careful of having one small group of prosperous or assertive people with a financial stake in a project, such as the building or foundation.
22. Community dies when more than a very few people are not giving. The danger comes much sooner than most people think

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