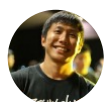


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The Art of Community: Seven Principles for Belonging — Book Notes

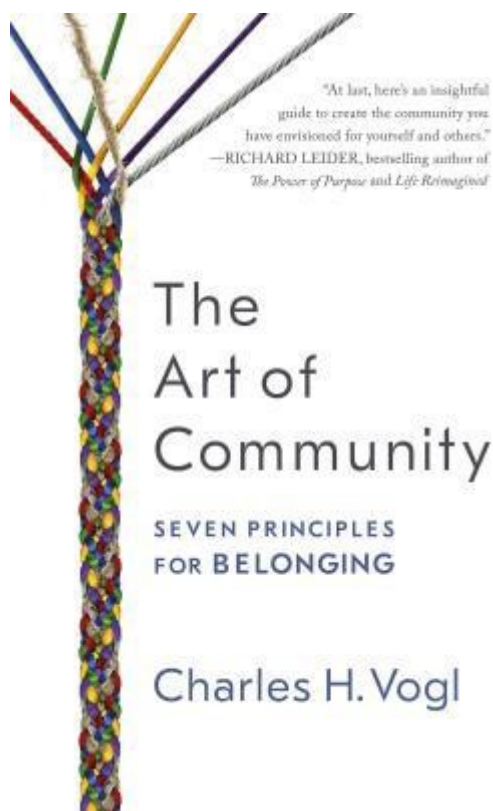
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- When leaders create a robust and committed community, they build relationships that are effective and resilient.
- We all want to enter rings of exclusivity. There are groups that are more exclusive and cooler than the ones which we already belong. **The problem lies not in the rings themselves, but our desire and longing to get inside them.**

- Even when we do get inside these rings, we will always discover that there's an even more attractive and exclusive ring beyond. This pattern will continue forever until we break it.
- The solution: find something you like to do and do it often. Then invite others to join us if they like doing that thing too.

Loneliness:

- The number of people who say they have no one to talk to about difficult subjects have tripled in the last few decades.
- More people say that they don't have a confidante than those who say that they do.
- 1 in 5 Americans report that they are lonely.
- People who are socially disconnected are less happy, experience health declines earlier, and live shorter lives than people who are not lonely.

Communities function best and are most durable when they're helping members to be successful in some way in a connected and dynamic world.

Understanding Community

- A community is a group of individuals who share a mutual concern for one another's welfare.
- There are 4 features that are almost universal in healthy communities.

1. Shared Values

- We want to believe that others value what we value, and disdain what we disdain.
- By understanding how a group develops and expresses values, a leader can help a community mature and grow.
- We may seek out a community because of a shared activity or interest. Shared activity indicates sharing some value for the activity. But we'll feel disconnected from such a community if we discover that there aren't enough shared values.
- Almost all communities express their values consciously or unconsciously. They do it with actions and words.

- No matter what the explicit values are, the implicit values will reveal the real deal.
- Look for what community members value so much that they actually put their bodies near it.
- For continued success, leaders must both clearly share and personally represent the values so others can recognize what they want to join.
- A community's values evolve as times and people change.
- Any effort to grow will fail if members sense that the community leadership is neglecting important values or introducing unwelcome ones. For-profit corporations are particularly at risk for this if they value members for their revenue potential rather than for their contribution and commitment.

2. Membership Identity

- Who am I? How should I act? What do I believe?
- This identity may not apply to all areas of a person's life.
- When a member is in the community, the community's values and identity feel comfortable and right. When members are around other members, those values and their identity are reinforced.
- To grow a tight community, it's essential to articulate the community's core values clearly, at least for yourself.
- We can ask: "Will this decision help us build on our core values?"
- If you don't know the values, you may not know who's seeking you. You may even seek out people with the wrong values and beliefs.
- You may expect and ask members to do things that disregard their values.
- For a rapidly expanding community, it's critical that prospective members are welcome to participate in community behaviour before adopting common values. Few want to join a community where they must adopt an overwhelming number of life-changing values before they can participate at any level.
- Give new members time and flexibility to adopt new values.

3. Moral Proscriptions

- A community provides moral proscriptions on how members should behave and treat others. It may not provide proscriptions for all areas of morality, but it will for those areas that relate to the core values.
- What and whom do we protect? What is intolerable? What do we share? With whom do we share? Whom do we respect? How do we show respect?
- If your group does anything together or supports members in participating in any activity, it's almost certain that the community advocates certain moral proscriptions.
- How restrictive the proscriptions are depends on the community.
- As a leader, there may come a time when you need to articulate these proscriptions. Don't be afraid. Such standards are what define strong communities.

4. Insider Understanding

- One of the great pleasures of being part of a community is that we don't have to explain ourselves. We want to feel seen and understood without explaining the parts that outsiders don't get.
- Another important part of insider understanding is the emotional or "internal" understanding — understanding about how it feels for insiders and the values that drive choices no matter how hard, easy, fun, painful, scary or noble it looks to outsiders.

Seven Principles For Belonging

- these are tools to use when you want to strengthen what you have at whatever level you're at today.

Principle #1: Boundaries

- Members want to know who's in the community and shares their values. Visitors want to know a safe way to explore without committing themselves. Novices prefer to know at what point they've joined a community.
- **A boundary is the recognized demarcation between insiders (members) and outsiders.**
- This boundary should be more about making the inside space safe for insiders than about keeping outsiders out.

- Without a boundary, you'll face an everything-nothing conundrum. If everyone in the world belongs in your community, this means your community cannot be distinguished from no community.
- To ensure that the community is welcoming to new members, there must be a clear route across the boundary for outsiders with shared values who want to join the community.
- No matter how small the difference or how wide the welcome, the distinction (shared value) is important to identify so that future members can recognize it and understand that they belong inside.
- An exploration zone is important for visitors. This is how we protect insiders while giving outsiders a chance to participate, to learn more about our community, and to decide whether it's right for them.
- We can encourage explorers by sharing some specified activities and areas, but not all. These are outer ring activities. Areas reserved for insiders are inner ring.
- The larger the outer ring, the more outsiders can evaluate a community before seeking membership. It's important to have an inner ring too as this gives shared values explorers something to aspire to and provides that important safe space for your members.
- If you prefer welcoming visitors to all community activities, an inner ring can be designated by privileges. This means members are allowed to do things that visitors are not.
- The boundary is maintained by either a formal or an informal authority.
- It is imperative that the boundary is protected according to community values, as opposed to personal preferences, petty concerns or whimsical criteria.
- Boundaries can be poorly protected: 1) overly inclusive — people with mismatched values are permitted inside. 2) overly exclusive — people with shared values are excluded.
- In regulating the boundary, it's important to recognize what unstated values are actually enforced in contrast with those that are outwardly stated.
- If members trust that the boundary is enforced according to explicitly stated values they embrace, they will appear the enforcement.

- Gatekeepers are important for helping visitors across the boundary. They are the people who can give newcomers access to the community. They evaluate whether an interested newcomer should be welcomed across.
- Growing communities need to give newcomers access to gatekeepers because it may become unclear how newcomers are evaluated, if they never meet one.

Principle #2: Initiation

- An initiation is any activity that's understood as official recognition and welcome into the community.
- The initiation helps members understand clearly who's part of the community. It marks the completed journey over the boundary and into the inner ring.
- After the initiation, insiders gain new privileges and are valued for having crossed over the boundary. They have nothing more to prove.
- Initiations can look anyway you like; they don't have to be elaborate. They simply need to be actions that are immediately understood as recognition and welcome.
- If initiations do not exist, newcomers will look for something to interpret as an initiation.

The Crisis of Belonging

- Many members become convinced that they do not belong.
- The tragedy is that even when many members feel this concern, they continue their lives as if this fear doesn't exist. The community becomes a crowd of individuals, each one lonely and convinced that he or she doesn't belong in the crowd.
- The solution is simple — **extend invitations**.
- Invitations can be to social gatherings, insider events, or one-on-one time.
- When we extend invitations, we establish ourselves as having the power to invite, no matter what formal role/title.
- Inviting others to connect with us allows us to plant ourselves more firmly within the community. We often make invitations more challenging than they need to be. We fear others will reject us or simply dismiss our authority.

- The invitation itself becomes evidence of their belonging.

Principle #3: Rituals

- Any practice that marks a time or event as special or important.
- The actions are imbued with meaning. They connect the present with things in the past and our hope for the future.
- Rituals are a tool to bring meaning into our lives.
- Strong communities create both formal and informal rituals. There are as many types of rituals as your imagination can conjure up.
- They often rely on special symbols and are important emotionally (feeling connected, trusted, appreciated and welcome)
- One way to recognize a ritual is to ask whether removing the activity would make the time feel less important (e.g blowing out birthday candles)
- Rituals often have forms (patterns) that participants recognize, and they are learnt after participating in them when the time is right.
- Simple repetition can grow them, though repetition does not necessarily make a ritual
- Strengthening a ritual makes the activity more special and important.
- Ritual silence can be very powerful — it can mean that the relationship is so close that not everything needs to be said aloud and not every moment needs to be entertaining.
- Rites of passage are the most common ritual noticed in communities — the rite is where the community acknowledges someone is passing from one status to another (e.g graduation).
- The initiation to membership is a rite of passage from outsider to insider.
- Community display rituals reveal the community to itself. There must be collective displays of participation and community membership. This means that there should be some activities where members can see other members participating as well.

- Play rituals — communities must have an opportunity to play together (e.g eating together)

Ritual Foundational Form Elements

1. Opening

- Welcome** — the welcome marks the beginning of the ritual time as distinct from the gathering time/unritualized time. In the welcome, all who are gathered are called to focus their attention on one person. That person offers a special welcome to all who have come.
- State the Intention** — the intention of the gathering is stated explicitly. This can be a single intention or several.
- Reference a Tradition** — this is the time to let everyone know that the activity at hand stands in a tradition or is at least informed by one. If not, you can state you're beginning a new tradition. You can always say what person, philosophy, or experience inspired the activity at hand.
- Explain Events and Instructions** — this is where participants learn what will happen in a ritual

2. Body

- Share Wisdom** — read aloud, quote from memory or summarize wisdom from anyone important to your community or this event
- Invite Participation** — invite all to participate. Ideally the activity connects and adds to the ritual's symbolism

3. Closing

- Acknowledgement** — states what is complete or changed after the ritual. This gives a sense of accomplishment
- Sending** — mark the close of the ritual

Principle #4: Temple

- a place where people with shared values enact their community's rituals

- it need not be a designated permanent place; as long as members gather and enact rituals, it is a temple
- the rituals performed inside a temple might be considered weird if performed outside and seen by outsiders with no explanation. Within the temple, they are meaningful and comfortable.
- The environment in which an event occurs affects the tenor of the ritual and the emotions of the participants.

Features of a sacred space

1. Space boundary
 2. Invitation — people important to the rituals are specifically invited
 3. Clothing — participants wear special clothes to the space where it's sacred
 4. Lighting — lighting is shaped for the ritual
 5. Sound
 6. Height — objects important for the ceremony are raised up, including people
- the more secret and inaccessible the temple is to outsiders, the more satisfying it feels to enter, though concealment limits growth and access for visitors and explorers.
 - a large community will almost certainly create minor temples. A minor temple is simply a place where members gather and enact rituals that either is smaller than the primary temple or used by a subcommunity.
 - an online destination can become a type of community temple. But the most powerful thing an online community can do is create offline friendships.

Principle #5: Stories

- stories are how members, future members and outsiders learn the values and the value of the community.
- the stories must be shared so that members can understand the community's authentic values and identity.

- among the most important stories are origin stories (stories that explain how things started)
- while different origin stories for different parts of a community may exist, there must be a single origin story about how the founders were inspired to form the community. It must include how they learned something new, did something new and then invited others to join them.
- Origin stories are often considered true if they share factual, emotional or ideological truth.
- Community origin stories communicate who the community serves, why it serves and often how it serves.
- there must also be stories about how the community's values are expressed and how they affect real people.
- share vulnerable stories. Vulnerability is when we share something we fear may cause others to reject us. This includes uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure. They may include accounts of failure, or the fears, feelings and truths we don't want the whole world to know.
- These stories are so important that if they are not shared, and the vulnerability and intimacy never built, there will almost certainly be a superficial feeling of connection among members and with leadership.
- members also need opportunities to share their own stories. This helps them feel that they're seen and understood. It also helps members understand the shared values in the community.
- it's possible that sharing your stories is a way to make an investment in a particular community.

Principle #6: Symbols

- represent a set of ideas and values. They conveniently stand in for many words.
- Anything can be a symbol. They remind us of our values, identity and commitment in a community.
- a community symbol works best if they are not too literal. It's far more than a pictorial representation of a single, word, idea or memory.

- Symbols usually reference a story, place or tool that's important to the community's history.
- a token is a kind of symbol given to a person as a keepsake to remember an idea, event or a set of values. It's often a reminder of accomplishment, belonging, and commitment.
- tokens are much more meaningful when others give them to us. The important of the token's presenter will imprint on the token's value.
- the only limit to the number and types of tokens is your imagination. Of course, too many will make tokens lose their value.

Principles of token giving:

- **Intention** — tell the receiver why you're giving it to her
- **Symbolism** — tell her what it represents to you
- **Connect to the future** — tell her how you hope it will support, change or serve her.

Principle #7: The Inner Rings

- we all want to be special to someone or several someones. We all want to be valued and valuable.
- We all aspire to belong to prestigious inner rings. This desire is so powerful that we're rarely satisfied with the rings we already inhabit.
- the endless striving for the next inner ring can be a dangerous trap. In mature and formal communities, there's a much more satisfying and healthy way to relate to inner rings.
- Create different levels of inner rings that members can enter and serve differently.
- At each level, members gain some benefits related to their maturation or formation (new access, knowledge, authority, acknowledgement, respect, etc.)

Typical progression

- Visitors
- Novices

- Members
- Elders or senior members
- Principle elders and skilled masters

A community can decide what makes an appropriate inner ring and how many there should be. Obviously there is a point where too many is pointless and silly.

- it's not important that each member pursue inner rings.
- it's perfectly fine for a member to find a preferred level and remain there. Success in life/community should never be defined only by progression into increasingly exclusive inner rings.
- Strong communities offer a progression (opportunities to progress) into successive inner rings.
- This journey follows a path of progression during which concern for ourselves diminishes while concern for others grows
- it must be clear how one crosses into inner rings.
- advanced inner rings must give members an opportunity to teach others — to share not just skills but values and beliefs that help us mature internally as people (create opportunities to be mentored and mentor)
- if all members are forced to progress at the exact same pace, then time is honoured more than maturation. This is an unattractive and uninspiring path.

The Diaconate

- People who have more authority in the community than other members. They should also have more wisdom about the community, but it's a best case scenario. Their opinions are more valued than those of other members.
- It is always made up of members who are elders and leaders
- They have 3 duties: 1) protect the boundary by excluding or rejecting someone from the community, 2) officiating at rituals, 3) teaching on community values
- without a diaconate, there is no way to differentiate the contribution of an Einstein from that of a crackpot.

In a strong community, members must know how to access the knowledge held by others

- can be formal (personal lessons, classes, apprenticeships) or informal (hanging out with other members)
- if members no longer believe that the community can teach them how to succeed, their commitment will fall away

Communities offer external and internal growth.

- almost all communities teach members some external skills
- the strongest communities also teach their members how to improve internal health, including emotional and mental growth that cannot be learnt from books or videos

Strong communities teach esoteric knowledge:

- Data — information that's shared only with people who are determined to have the right intentions, integrity and values.
- Perception — when members learn either from explicit teaching or from experience that certain things are not as they appear to outsiders

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Avoiding Cults

Common features of a cult:

- absolute moral authority resides with the leader alone — whatever the leader says is right
- leadership is not accountable to anyone else
- unquestioning commitment to the leader is required
- isolation from the outside is encouraged
- exit barriers are high

- worldview is polarized — group has a us-versus-them mentality
- ultimate moral permission rests within the group — group believes that its exceptional status and its all-important ends justify whatever means members choose to achieve their goals
- obsession with growing the group is central

If these features are not part of your community, and you have no intention of including them, then you're likely building something very different from a cult

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