

Personal Excellence

The Magazine of Personal

May 2010

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Design
a New Life

Success Enablers

Power of Protocol
It Opens Doors



"Personal Excellence is the only reading you'll need to do for continual self-improvement both personally and professionally!"

—Sharlene Hawkes, Former Miss America, award-winning ESPN broadcaster

Abundant Community

Rediscover your neighborhood gifts.



by John
McKnight and
Peter Block

WE ENCOURAGE YOU TO FOLLOW A simple process to help build the strength of your community. Basically, the process is connecting individuals to individuals. As the effort grows, you can connect two people and begin a common interest club, a local marketplace for barter exchange, a group caring for those on the margin, a health support group, or a safe neighborhood campaign. This is how *associations* begin.

Or, you can connect to an existing club, group, or association. For example, if there are six people who want to learn how to garden, by putting them together, you broaden the association so that they are becoming more active in creating a better neighborhood.

You can also link association to association. For example, you can say to the gardening club that there is an environmental club here. Do you think the gardening club would meet with the environmental club to preserve the neighborhood and its beauty? Or can you connect the gardening club with people who like to cook?

Out of all these efforts, you will find there are some who enjoy connecting and you can invite them to add people to the Connections you are creating.

Here's how you can find your way into the heart of your community:

Go with someone else. Invite someone you know in the neighborhood who will join you. Better yet if they're already good at meeting strangers. The shift in the function of the family and the competence of the community really begins with this first invitation. We might even say that the transformation has occurred the moment we ask another to join us in creating a community.

Focus on gifts. Experience shows that people will be flattered by your interest in their gifts. People are waiting to be asked to contribute if what you want to ask for is something they want to do, something they are interested in doing. You are going to find that it is fun and fulfilling when you talk to your neighbors about their gifts. They are waiting for you because nobody has

asked before. You are contributing to the community by enabling the community to give its gifts.

Practice. Rehearse the conversation with the partner you have recruited to join you. Practice what you might say as you knock on the door of a neighbor. Is there anything you'd like to learn about? Could you tell me about the clubs or groups to which you belong?

Start small. We suggest you start by talking to five people, one at a time. Don't begin by calling a meeting. Begin with meeting people door to door. It is more personal and you'll learn more.

Consider the possibilities. After talking to five people, sit with your partner and review everything you learned about the first person you interviewed.



List the possibilities you see for connecting that person's gifts and interests with other people in the neighborhood, including youth. Do you know people with an interest in gardening? Would any of the people you interviewed like to learn about gardening? Who would teach about gardening?

Keep going. Do the same for the other four people. If no connection appears, keep interviewing until a match occurs.

Make connections. Decide how the two of you are going to connect the gifts of one of these people. How will we introduce one of the people we interviewed to another person or two who could usefully receive their gifts?

Review and reflect. Discuss with your partner what you are learning about inviting others, seeking their gifts, connecting those in the neighborhood. What works?

This process enhances the community building efforts that already exist, like block parties, clean-ups, picnics. These are social events, and now what

we seek is to build deeper relationships by collecting people's gifts and providing a means through which they can be offered to their neighbors. This process can return power to the family, neighborhood, and community.

When a Village Raises a Child

In every neighborhood, the issue that all can come together around is a concern for the next generation. This is the primary function of the village. The question that begins to construct a village is, *what does each person in the neighborhood have to offer?* How can the adults, with their skills and knowledge, be connected to the young people? And how can the gifts and interests of young people be connected to adults?

We asked a group of neighbors what they'd do (or are doing) to care for the next generation. Here are their answers:

- First, we have to know the children. We have to decide to know the names of each child in the neighborhood.
- Second, we have to know the parents of the children who are around us. The children in most neighborhoods are better organized and connected than the adults. We have to catch up with them.
- Third, we have to know that each adult has a gift or passion that can be connected to young people.
- Fourth, we need to know what each child knows, cares about, and wants to learn about or teach others.
- Fifth, our goal is to have each child know what they are good at. This becomes a collective purpose of the family and neighbors.

Now, all we need is neighbors who are willing to make the connections. You are one of those neighbors.

The consumer society is designed for dissatisfaction. Organizations and systems have limitations that result from their devotion to scale and replicability and their uneasiness with all that is personal. This is a way for families and neighbors together to create that part of life that systems can never provide. And this life is created from the abundance of our gifts, the expansion of our associations, and our willingness to extend an invitation to those we have not known.

The word that embraces all of this is love. A great community creates conditions where people can fall in love. It is a place where we can make a fuss about one another. A place where we can ask, "How did I ever live without you?" PE

John McKnight is the author of *The Careless Society*. Peter Block is founder of *Designed Learning*. They are co-authors of *The Abundant Community* (Berrett-Koehler). Visit www.abundantcommunity.com.

ACTION: Serve in your neighborhood/community.