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Community: The Structure of Belonging (Part 1 of 3: Welcome)

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Wednesday, August 1, 2018 -- Peter Block

Curator's Note: *Peter Block's book, Community: The Structure of Belonging has for years and many reasons been a constant guide in the work of Axiom News. Peter is one of, if not the, greatest question askers of our time. The six conversations and the provocative questions Peter poses within them have been the standard against which we evaluate each question we invite those whose stories we share to consider. The Peterborough Dialogues, which we launched in 2015 with terrific community outcomes in our hometown, rested on Community for its first principles*

and practices. In Community we have had both a philosophical treatise and a practical road map.

Peter has published a second edition of that important book and has shared his thoughts as to why in this blog series, originally published on AbundantCommunity.com. He notes that even though there is growing recognition amongst citizens and institutions of the need for deepening community, the practices by which it is attempted still often do harm and miss important nuances. Peter's analysis can and does show us how we can do better. We know what he recommends works. We know as well, that it is easy to make missteps.

Peter brings clarity where it is most needed, in Community. We share his original blog serialized in the hope to slow our readers down, to offer the space in between postings to sit with his words and wisdom before so quickly moving on.

As we continue our own work to Reimagine Democracy, the timing of this second edition is, for us, delightfully serendipitous.

Welcome

This book is written to support those who care for the well-being of our community. It is for anyone who wants to be part of creating an organization, neighborhood, city, or country that works for all, and who has the faith and the energy to create such a place.

To act on whatever our intentions might be to make the world better requires something more than individual action. It requires, in almost every case, people to decide to come together for some common good.

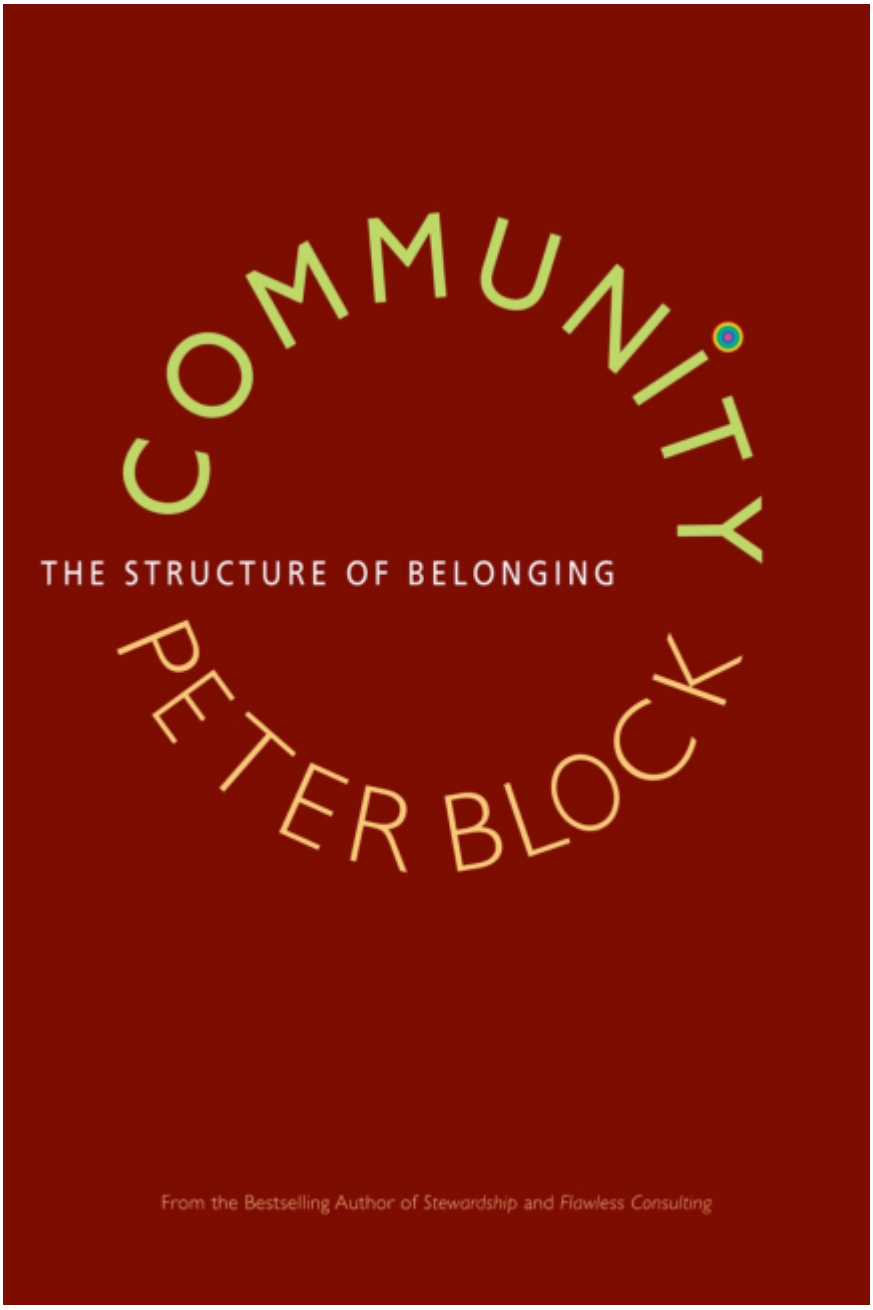
I am one of those people. Whenever I am in a neighborhood or small town and see empty storefronts, watch people floating aimlessly on the sidewalks during school or working hours, visit somewhere that seems like a hard place to raise a child or grow old, I am distressed and anguished. It has become impossible for me to ignore the fact that the world we are creating does not work well for all and increasingly does not work for most.

Along with this distress comes the knowledge that each of us, myself included, is participating in creating this world. If it is true that we are creating this world, then each of us has the power to heal its woundedness. This is not about guilt, it is about accountability. Citizens, in our capacity to come together and choose to be accountable, are our best shot at making a difference. This is true whether you want to improve conditions inside an organization, advance a cause or profession that you believe in, or are engaged in making your neighborhood or city a better place for all who live there.

To act on whatever our intentions might be to make the world better requires something more than individual action. It requires, in almost every case, people who may have little connection with each other, or may even be on opposite sides of a question, to decide to come together for some common good. The need and the methodology to make this happen simply and quickly is what this book is about.

This truth has become clear in the wide range of unexpected invitations I have received since the book originally was published in 2006. I have been invited to a water scarcity conference in Calgary, Canada. I know nothing about water conservation; in fact, I am one of those people who leaves the water running while brushing my teeth. Companies have asked for help in building a community of mothers who purchase a certain diaper for their children. Ken Jaray was running for Mayor of Manitou Springs and wanted to talk about using the community ideas both to run a campaign and to govern when elected. The faith community has repeatedly invited me into a discussion of ways to bring people together to begin a church where none exists and to explore ways to help existing churches more fully engage in the community and not rely on people finding meaning inside the church building. A university concerned about the safety of its students used the community-building ideas to engage its neighbors in taking collective action to make the neighborhood safer. Some cities, like Colorado Springs, Colorado, even had several hundred groups use this book for their city-wide book club with the intent of building a more connected community.

Image



This tells me that the need for the experience of community, which is the collective capacity of citizens to make a difference, has only intensified. Even with all the ways to connect with each other, we live and function in ways that keep us isolated. Without new ways to come together, this isolation will persist.

Whatever it is that you care about, it takes a group of people to learn to trust each other and choose to cooperate for a larger purpose to make the difference that you seek.

To read Part 2, click here.

To read Part 3, click here.

This blog was originally posted to AbundantCommunity.com, and appears here with permission.

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