

Developing Community Relationships: Conversations and Network Weaving

Based on writings by June Holley <http://www.networkweaver.com/>

Community is the quality of connections among people who share a common purpose, place, past, practice and perspective. **Developing Community Relationships means building the quality of these connections.**

When there are high quality connections in a community, people know each other, share with each other, and engage each other.

- People know each other's stories and talents,
- They share their talents and time with each other.
- They engage each other in doing together what they cannot do alone.

When people are better connected, they are more individually and collectively productive, cohesive, and resilient.

Community relationships develop and the Community is built when we have the four conversations that have the power to create deeper and wider connections among people in the community.

The Four Conversations that Build Community

In the Dreams conversation, we talk about what we would love to be possible in our community 20 years from now. It is a description of what we want rather than speculation about what might be. We dream in order to see the present possibilities more clearly and to create a community of passion.

In the Small Acts conversation, we talk about what small experiments can move us in the direction of our dreams. These are projects that are possible given the resources and opportunities we have. They are the small acts we can do without permission or validation by the majority in the community. They realize parts of our dreams that are possible in the present. Over time, thousands of small acts in a community make the impossible possible every time.

In the Gifts conversation, we talk about the talents and resources we have at the table. They are the gifts that can make our small acts possible. The more we engage our gifts together, the more we can do together what we cannot do alone. **The origin of the word "community: is "gifts together."**

In the Invitation conversation, we talk about who else in the community we can invite to join us in our small acts. They are people who have gifts that can make our small acts possible. They are people we know well, people we know of, and people we can be introduced to. They complement our talents and resources in ways that make our weaknesses and deficiencies irrelevant.

The more we initiate and invite the four conversations that build community, we build connections among people in the community. The success stories we create and tell attract more gifts to the community because people seek communities where positive stories thrive. This is what sustains the renewal and growth of the community.

These four conversations need to happen informally and formally, in public spaces and public meetings. They need to happen in organizations and among leaders in the community. They need to happen wherever people are gathered by mandate, plan, or accident. We need to facilitate these conversations whenever we want to connect people in new ways.

The simple power of these conversations is that anyone can initiate them and invite people into them. It requires no power, position, or permission to invite people into conversations about dreams, small acts, gifts or invitations. Building community is everyone's possibility the moment we embrace our calling to do so.

Network Weaving – key to developing community relationships

Social network sciences suggest that the most significant accelerator of network connections is the presence of network weavers in networks.

These are people who generously give time to connecting people in a network. Most networks already have network weavers, though they may not be obvious or named as such. **Anyone can be a network weaver.** It requires no specialized position, permission, personality type, or preparation.

Network weavers are people who intentionally and informally - and often serendipitously - weave new and richer connections between and among people, groups, and entities in networks. They also weave new and richer connections between and among networks.

Network weavers have three common characteristics.

1. **They keep up to date** with what's happening in the network. **They stay curious** about who's new, who's doing something new, and who could help others in the network.
2. They are **credible** in the network. People like them and believe what they say. **What gives them credibility is that they are good storytellers and storylisteners**, which makes others feel a positive connection with them.
3. They **actively introduce people** for the purpose of creating new connections of generosity, exchange, or collaboration. They help people get to expand their awareness and reach into the network for idea, resources, and support.

Some of the skills involved in network weaving include:

- Engaging People in Accidental Conversations
- Network Mapping

- Making Inspiring Introductions
- Story Telling
- Story Listening

The power of network weaving is how it invites a **culture of generosity** that is the basis for all thriving networks and communities.

As our community relationships reflect the Great Commandment, we will confirm the truth of the Great Commission message we share.