



Do Your People Know They Belong? (How)?

By [Charles Vogl](#)



When leaders ask me how to make their community stronger, the first question that jumps to my mind is, "Do your people know that they belong?"

As a leader, you may think you know who belongs. Some of your members may be confident that they belong. But are you confident that everyone knows that they belong?

This belonging can be expressed formally or informally.

Belonging comes about in part from these four things:

- 1) We know that others share our values (at least those values that are pertinent to the community).
- 2) We receive (and/or offer) invitations to participate.
- 3) We have evidence that others care about our well-being.
- 4) We believe that we can grow in a way we want, with community support.

There are certainly other elements to belonging, but these are critically important.
Do your members or prospective members have a way to see these things?

Do you have a ritual, formal or informal, that lets each member know themselves, and the other members as well, that someone fully belongs? I can't tell you what a difference this will make.

Belonging rituals can be long and involved, with robes and fire-lit halls and weird chants. And they can be as simple as a quiet conversation between two people explicitly acknowledging the full embrace into the community.

When I served as a Peace Corps Volunteer there were several moments that I can reflect on that let me know that I belonged. There was the call that invited me to serve in Zambia, the moment I started orientation in Washington, DC. And the moment I got off the plane in Southern Africa.

However, there was also a formal ceremony in Zambia in which a Peace Corps pin was given to me and a state department officer shook my hand. Obviously I knew I belonged in the Peace Corps before that moment, but it still sticks in my memory as a transition from trainee to full volunteer. It provides punctuation to my experience.

How do your members know they belong now? If you have no ritual, make the implicit belonging explicit. You'll strengthen the belonging immeasurably, simply by doing this.

[Read more articles here](#)