



Defining Community

By [Charles Vogl](#)



Communities help us succeed where we cannot by ourselves. This can look like others showing up when we are at our weakest.

Just knowing that we have others to support us makes us stronger, even as we risk failure. Wouldn't we all love to work in a team or live in a neighborhood where we have such a community?

For the purposes of my work, I define a community as "a group of people who share mutual concern for one another's welfare." To put it more simply, community members believe other members care about them.

A group may call itself a community, but if members are really only looking out for themselves, they're just a group. Maybe they are a network, but that's a distinction for another place. Alternatively, a self-identified group could be made up of residents of a particular city block, Olympic weightlifters, or African bush pilots.

But despite their loose affiliation, they may in fact care deeply about one another's well-being. They may have an un-named community (which is perfectly OK).

How can you tell the difference? It's not always easy to tell — until one member of the group is in trouble. If the other members rally around, it's a community. If not, it's a group. And it may take an emergency to reveal to the members themselves that they have a true community.

I bring this up because sometimes leaders claim to have, or belong to, a community, but it is just wishful thinking on their part. Managers want to believe their crew members watch out for one another. Executive directors want to believe that board members and donors are a community. Coaches want to believe team members are in a community. It's certainly possible. But saying it is, doesn't make it so.

We could play endless semantic games here. We could pontificate about where the designation "group" ends and "community" begins. That doesn't interest me.

What interests me is how we as leaders can identify what's not present that we want to create. Here it is belonging. We want to belong, and we want to let others know that they belong. A big part of that feeling of belonging comes when we see that others care about our success.

This is a fairly simple idea and a life-changing one. Is your community actually a group? Are you part of groups that are actually communities? Does it make a difference when you recognize something has grown into more than a collection of like-minded and perhaps conveniently located people?

Would it matter to others if you shared this new insight?

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