

Foreword

THE IDEA OF COMMUNITY is all around us and increasingly on our lips. It sells real estate, markets social technology, and appears in the mission statements of most institutions. There are community recreation centers, community health movements, communities of practice, and community organizers. Unfortunately, the idea of community is more on our lips than in our experience. The speaking about community is always genuine, but it so goes against the individualism and fear embedded in our modern culture that it represents longing more than reality. It is more an adjective than a statement of central purpose.

The idea of community also suffers from its ambiguity. The word has a wide range of meanings. It can be a town, a network of interests, a neighborhood, a group of friends, or a set of employees. When a word covers everything, it loses its utility.

Paul Born, as much as anyone I know, has brought clarity and solid practical usefulness to this thing called community. He decided thirty years ago that if we care about poverty, safety, or well-being, then the experience of community is essential. It is the point. Not a luxury, or a pleasantry, or a memory of a time past. His work holds the intention that community needs to be at

the center of our thinking, no matter what results we are trying to achieve in the world.

That is why this book, *Deepening Community*, is important. It should be required reading for all those, as Paul puts it, “who want to better understand the value of community and neighbors, and their importance in building belonging and inclusion into the services they offer or the social-change strategies they effect.” In a personal and accessible way that is in total harmony with the book’s message, Paul explains how to make community the heart of these efforts.

Making community the point is a major undertaking. It means we need to make the common good a priority again. It calls for cooperation and collaboration. It asks that we place the well-being of all of us higher than the well-being of any single one of us. If we take community seriously, then we agree to give up some control and to listen more than speak. Community blurs the line of where your property ends and mine begins. These are radical practices when taken seriously.

Western culture stands on a long history of affirming the rights of the individual. Capitalism worships the idea of competition and winning, so much so that we have raised the status of competition to be a defining part of our nature. We place a bell curve ranking the best to the worst over the heads of our children the moment they enter school.

In addition to revering competition and individualism, we hold a nearly religious belief in the healing effects of technology. As Paul declares, we believe the myth that “all we need is more time, money, and technology to solve the problems of peace, poverty, and health.” Perhaps now is the time to put this myth to rest. This book invites us to do just that. It is an important invitation, and here is why:

- Time in the modern world has become the enemy of relatedness. Speed has become a rationalization for doing what we do not believe in. Time has become an argument against collaboration. Cooperation and democracy are discounted as inefficient. We live on the pretense of being busy.
- Money is also an argument against community. Learning together in the same room is costly. Meeting together is costly. The virtual world is justified by its low cost. We say, let's create the future online. We can learn online. We can meet online. This ignores the social and relational dimension of learning, the relational dimension of achievement. Learning and achievement have been reduced to a transfer of knowledge and automated ways of managing the world. When our occasions for human connection become commodified into what is cost-effective, so much for community. So much for relationships.
- Technology has become a religion, Steve Jobs a saint, and speed, convenience, global access, and home shopping a liturgy. The dominant argument against community, against the intimacy and connectedness that Paul speaks to, is that what was local, and intimate, and had space for silence, has now been automated. We have swallowed 24/7 as a condition of nature. We must respond, *this moment*. Wherever we meet, we bring our phones that we have labeled "smart." The technology manages us because it is there. In larger questions of the land, of the environment, of the workplace, technology promises nirvana. It replaces the schoolhouse and the local business. It promises connection, but in reality reinforces our isolation. We spend a lot of time alone, watching a screen.

Against this onslaught, *Deepening Community* radically declares that we *do* have the time, the money, and all the tools necessary to solve any challenge, by coming together in community. The book gives us the definitions we need. It makes important distinctions so that each of us can find our way into community, be it through inner work, family, neighborhood, or the workplace.

The book is also timely, for much is already occurring in the world that proves the value of community. There is a cohousing movement, where people choose to share the tasks of raising children, cooking, caring for the vulnerable, and keeping safe. There are pocket neighborhoods, such as those being designed by architect Ross Chapin: modest dwellings that all face a commons and become the village that raises a child.

There is a resurgence in cooperative businesses, where the well-being of the employees is their first priority and profit takes its rightful place as a means instead of an end. Every city has community gardens and community-supported agriculture networks (CSAs), where food is locally grown and abandoned land is reclaimed.

There is cooperative learning and cooperative education. A heart surgeon named Paul Uhlig has invented Collaborative Rounds, where the physician, nurses, and other supporting functions meet in a circle with the patient and family to jointly discuss treatment. When they do this, all measures of care improve. Edgar Cahn has developed TimeBanking, where generosity and neighborliness are tracked and exchanged. *Yes!* magazine does a beautiful job of telling the story of these movements toward community.

All these cooperative and communal ventures form a social movement of enormous importance, one that offers an alternative to the dominant belief in competition, materialism, and individualism. *Deepening Community* is an important contribution

to this movement. The book is an anthem bearing witness to our humanity and our capacity to be together in peace. It takes a big step in making community building a legitimate discipline that belongs at the center of our thinking.

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