



5 PILLARS OF COMMUNITY

CONNECTING HUMANS
FOR ASSOCIATION GROWTH



Communities morph, stretch and take on many different meanings in society, association, and even personal lives. Whether they be communities for friendship, jobs, towns, or even virtual connection; people are always searching and placing themselves in different communities of interest. People seek places where they belong and where they can make a difference.

Defining and understanding the importance of community starts with human connection. Communities are made of people doing extraordinary things through communication and they allow us to establish a world where people can connect and grow. It is important to understand the soft side of individuals, connection, and, overall, what it means to have a successful or failing community.

Although the definition of community can be expanded to many different scenarios, for this purpose it is vital to define personal and virtual communities. Personal communities can be friendships or work groups and even family or religious. However, the most important part of personal communities is the emotion received from those connections.

Personal equals emotional. Virtual communities can be remarkably similar, but when things go digital, they can become less emotional. Identities are often hidden by screens and technology so the way humans connect isn't as personal. Although virtual communities can keep us connected at a basic level, they often do not exert the same emotions as personal connections because there are no physical interactions.

Virtual communities consist of things that are digital like social media, work groups, and even platforms like GrowthZone's Community application. Community will always be important because it brings people together with a common interest. Communities are a vital aspect of association development because they help connect and educate leaders with their members. All in all, communities are what sustain communication, growth, and overall success.



HOW SHOULD COMMUNITIES FUNCTION TO ACHIEVE SUCCESS?

The recently famous Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offered what is called “The ACHIEVE Model” as a path to prevention and reduction of chronic illness. What the CDC discovered was the more patients who were engaged with actively trying to reduce chronic illnesses, the bigger the reduction in illnesses resulting in death. Engagement literally saves lives in the CDC ACHIEVE Model.

GrowthZone’s Community application prides itself on a similar utilization, geared toward association sustainability for associations that gather people into virtual and physical communities. The Five Pillars of Communities are important steps for success: Direction and Desired Outcome, Shared Responsibility, Personal Value, Progress Awareness and Ongoing Ecosystem.

One of the greatest assets in the world are communities and the people in them seeking impact and connection. One way of doing more with less, is by simply activating and engaging those communities. People are always searching and placing themselves in communities virtual and personal, but are those communities encouraging motivation? Community members are full of people with creative ideas, skill sets, and marketing IQ.

It is vital for successful associations to encourage and activate those hidden talents. Once an association can activate the full potential of their communities, the strength of the association can reach exponential milestones. If associations can begin to blend the personal and virtual communities and overall get members emotionally invested in their association, the strength of the organization will reach unpredictable heights.

COMMUNITY PILLAR ONE: DIRECTION AND DESIRED OUTCOME

The first pillar of a thriving community is Direction and Desired Outcome. When starting or joining an association some crucial information that everyone should know is: “where is our direction and why does it matter?” Everyone wants to envision a positive future. Here is scary and depleting, but the future is there and exciting! But what is so important about vision? Vision creates motivation, purpose, story, and establishes the question of: “why am I here?” Vision gives people something to believe in.

Thinking about vision and motivation together, it’s important to understand the percentages of total engagement within businesses, for example. According to an article featured in Gallup in October 2020, written by Jim Harter, “the percentage of engaged employees -- those who are highly involved in, enthusiastic about and committed to their work and workplace -- has dropped back to just slightly above the pre-COVID-19 rate of 35%, to 36%. The percentage of workers who are “actively disengaged” -- those who have miserable work experiences and spread their unhappiness to their colleagues -- in this latest survey remains the same, at 13%.”

To make matters worse, “The remaining 51% of workers are “not engaged” -- they are psychologically unattached to their work and company.” Think about how costly that is! When you put these two things together: thirteen percent of people are actively not engaged and fifty-one percent of people don’t feel engaged at all, it’s not surprising that there is an engagement problem.

So, what is the problem and how can it be fixed? Vision.

Now, it is never wrong to sit back and honestly say: “I don’t know what our vision is,” but saying that is also a problem. People are always looking to invest their time into a track that is going somewhere; it’s not sustainable to not have an answer. It might take some time to solve that question, but it is crucial that there is an answer. If there is an organization, but not a vision, that’s when the percentages of engagement really drop. Associations of all types must be clear on direction and desired outcome: “We are going here for this specific reason and it is vital that everyone understands that.” The more that is communicated, the more successful and profitable the community -- the business, association or even a team or family group -- can be. If leaders let people know where we are going and why they are here, we can increase motivation and performance.

COMMUNITY PILLAR TWO: SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

The overall success of a community is greatly impacted by pillar two: Shared Responsibility. When starting an association, for example, a group of ordinary people get together to create something impactful; they have a vision. An association requires a group of people with different skill sets to make it function, and a shared responsibility to the whole to make it thrive. If leaders of associations begin to separate themselves from the team, engagement numbers drop. It is critical that leaders reassure the “we” throughout the community. From the person with the most responsibilities to the least, everyone needs to understand the “we” in the team.

If employees feel stranded or alone, they will begin to individualize their work and fail to see the overall success that would be possible if everyone worked as a team. Remind the people in those communities that “we” are in this together and there will be increased motivation.

To increase motivation and encourage “we” within associations, it is first important to understand why that isn’t happening. Max Ringelmann, an early 1900s French professor, established what is known as the Ringelmann effect. Although Max was not original with names, he discovered that people exert less effort when everyone has the same role.

The perfect example is with the game tug of war. According to the Harvard Association Review, “in a set of simple rope pulling experiments he discovered that people’s efforts quickly diminish as team size increases. He rationalized the decay in effort by suggesting it was difficult for team members to coordinate effort, and left it at that” (Rond HBR). This happens all the time in associations and associations.

If there is no unique role given, people inside of associations will start to believe their contributions have no unique meaning. If everyone feels like they are doing what everyone else is doing, what motivation is there to contribute more? After Alan Ingham and company from the University of Massachusetts Amherst recreated the event, more and more studies began to develop over the Ringelmann effect.

What the recent studies found out was “it didn’t seem to matter whether people were part of a larger team or simply thought they were part of a larger team — they worked less hard” (Rond HBR). Any leader in any organization must define what their community members roles are in this journey. If they do not, it is crucial to take a step back, look at the company’s vision, and reinstate it to the community.

When leaders and community members understand the vision and that it is a shared responsibility, progress can be created together.

It can be very difficult to think about the thousands or tens of thousands of association members and establish a unique role for all of them. Step back to vision and communicate the direction and desired outcome so that people may self-select how they can play a role in that. Think about the person at the end of the tug of war game; that person is always trying and pulling the most weight.

There is a unique role for everyone and all talents can impact the community differently. However, if people don't understand their role and the vision, there will only be one person pulling as hard as they can from the back.

With established vision, people will find a place for themselves on the rope and begin pulling together because they know their contribution is different from everyone else's. According to Brent Gleeson, leadership strategist for Forbes: "leaders improve engagement by defining and communicating a powerful vision for the organization. They hire and develop managers that are emotionally invested in the organization's mission and vision and give them the resources to build great teams with the right people in the right roles. They empower."

Engagement means that individuals care about the progress of the association and they understand that their role has an impact on that. If that is reassured, it will keep people motivated. Give credit where credit is due, and really define the importance of team effort within that vision. Communities that know where they are going and why it matters are confident. Communities that can tell their people how they can contribute, begin to be more successful than others.

COMMUNITY PILLAR THREE: PERSONAL VALUE

Moving onto pillar three, Personal Value, it is important to consider as leaders what to require of community members and how to reward them. Pillar three is a big one because rewards must out way the requirements.

Associations are always asking people of their time, money, relationships, and efforts. Associations have to ask: “what reward are we giving our members that are outweighing the requirements we are asking them to do?” If associations cannot define that in their association, those communities are facing a direction that they may not want to go.

It is important to swing back around: “How is our vision doing? How can we build this up? Are we clear in our needs from our people and what are their opportunities? Does this reward out way the requirement and how can we make that happen?”

Some of the greatest rewards people can ever give somebody is personal value. Letting someone know that they have been picked is an everlasting motivation. The reward of being needed is far greater than the reward of monetary things. Monetary is transactional and fleeting, but the reward of being needed is so powerful for the people in our associations.

When a community member knows that they are valued for the survival and the success of the organization they will always be exponentially more engaged. Emotional connection drives individuals and simply letting community members know how well they are doing is unbelievably rewarding and motivating. Establishing messaging and marketing that explain the whys and the benefits rather than just features push into this Personal Value pillar.

Once associations establish vision and direction, when they understand what exactly they need from their memberships, they can ask: "Are our rewards outweighing the requirements?" If so, that community is in a better position to grow, excel, and be more sustainable in the long run.

COMMUNITY PILLAR FOUR: PROGRESS AWARENESS

“Are we there, yet?” It never fails on a road trip that someone always asks: “are we there, yet?” That is a principle that people never outgrow. When people have invested interest in something, everyone always wants to know the progress. That leads to pillar four, Progress Awareness.

Another study by Harvard Association Review asked workers to take a diary of any events that stood out to them during the workday. HBR found this in the diaries: “their remarks tended to make clear what they thought of the event—what it said to them about their work, their team, their organization, or themselves—and how it made them feel” (HBR).

As the article also states, “areas of the brain associated with rational thought and decision making have direct connections to areas associated with feelings” (HBR). Overall, the study found out that emotions are what drive decision making and depending on what emotions are exerted, motivations can shift and affect performance in the work space.

To boost emotion, “we found that the single most important differentiator was a sense of being able to make progress in their work. Achieving a goal, accomplishing a task, or solving a problem often evoked great pleasure and sometimes elation. Even making good progress toward such goals could elicit the same reactions” (HBR).

Knowing or accomplishing some kind of progress reinstates motivations. Remember pillar three, Personal Value, because emotions drive decision making. Progress tells people that they are doing something meaningful which leads to positive emotions.

What leaders have to do is to make sure to actively communicate the progress and remind people of the goal or vision. If members are emotionally invested and are being updated on the progress, a positive team mentality has been established. Think of that pesky question again: “are we there, yet?” If leaders are driving the car toward their vision and make sure to remind people how close the community is on grasping that vision, it absolutely becomes a game changer.

There is nothing worse than for a community member to ask for an update on progress because asking leaders questions is scary, doubt-raising, and even frustrating. If leaders can answer that question before communities get to that negative emotion, it can be flipped into motivation by simply getting ahead of communication.

Thinking about personal or virtual relationships, the majority of relationships that fall apart are because of communication deficiencies. Associations must communicate along the Five Pillars of Community to keep people moving beyond tomorrow.

COMMUNITY PILLAR FIVE: ONGOING ECOSYSTEM

The fifth and final pillar is called Ongoing Ecosystem. Everyone wants to know that what they are investing in will last. If people hop on this track, will it remain sustainable for many years to come? If people think for one second that this organization is done, they will quickly go away from it.

Think about some of the associations with the most success and longevity like Ford, Coca-Cola, or even Apple and Microsoft. No one thinks about these associations going out of association because their vision is set in stone. Ford: "Go Further," Coca-Cola: "Taste the feeling," Apple: "Think different," Microsoft: "Be what's next." These associations may have shifted slogans over their combined hundreds of years of association experience, yet they still find ways to establish their lasting vision through their messaging. They are always giving their communities new ideas, creating new branding opportunities, and always communicating their vision and how it fits with the future.

The importance of vision alongside an Ongoing Ecosystem is important because it keeps people thinking beyond the future. A strong brand can change with the times but still maintain that same community vision to draw people in and keep moving the community forward.

What people really want to know: “Is this thing going to exist by the time we are done?” If there is no messaging surrounding this final pillar as equal to the rest, there is no plan of attack to create success and motivation.

When people decide to give their talent, treasure, time and energy, to anything, they really want to know if it’s going to last. Communicate sustainability and enhance the brand of the community or organization to keep up motivation. Erecting these pillars and communicating about them allows associations to build more connected communities. What’s incredibly vital for the success of associations is communication, but that communication must be incorporated throughout the power structure.

People are the greatest assets in the world because they make up our communities, and communities do incredible things when they work together. It is important to understand that people have feelings and in the right mindset are willing to share those feelings. Consider doing a survey with members or members to ask important questions like: “Why do we exist? Do you know why we need you?” It is also important to ask simple questions around communication, connection, learning and working environments. Sometimes resolving a problem is a simple question away.

Maybe the people in those communities simply need a reminder about the vision and where it is going. It is vital that associations explain to their communities what they need than what they can give. If associations focus efforts on reminding members what’s in it for them, rather than why the association needs them, the whole point of community is missed. “We need you, we need you, we need you!” If associations can flip that idea on its head and start telling people why they need them to help accomplish the vision, everyone will become more invested.



GROWTHZONE COMMUNITY

GrowthZone knows these five pillars will absolutely allow any association to do more with less and move beyond tomorrow.

The GrowthZone Community application connects, engages, and grows communities 365 days a year with live and on-demand content capabilities, personal engagement tools, and rich analytics that reduce friction and complexity. GrowthZone supports association growth and healthy return on investment with built-in revenue-generating opportunities that stem from a strong community.

WORKS CITED

Amabile, Teresa M., and Steven J. Steven. Inner Work Life: Understanding the Subtext of Association Performance, Harvard Association Review, May 2007,

<https://hbr.org/2007/05/inner-work-life-understanding-the-subtext-of-association-performance?registration=success>

Gleeson, Brent. 5 Powerful Steps To Improve Employee Engagement, Forbes, 15 Oct. 2017,

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/brentgleeson/2017/10/15/5-powerful-steps-to-improve-employee-engagement/?sh=2c25a3a1341d>

Harter, Jim. "U.S. Employee Engagement Reverts Back to Pre- COVID-19 Levels", Gallup, 16 Oct. 2020,

<https://www.gallup.com/workplace/321965/employee-engagement-reverts-back-pre-covid-levels.aspx>

Horne L, Miller K, Silva S, Anderson L. Implementing the ACHIEVE Model to Prevent and Reduce Chronic Disease in Rural Klickitat County, Washington. Prev Chronic Dis 2013;10:120272. DOI:

https://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2013/12_0272.htm

"Lack of Communication is one of the Lead Causes of Divorce," Marcia Mediation Group, 29 Nov. 2019

<https://marciamediation.co.uk/lack-of-communication-is-one-of-the-lead-causes-of-divorce/>

Rond, Mark D. Why Less Is More in Teams, Harvard Association Review, Aug. 2012,

<https://hbr.org/2012/08/why-less-is-more-in-teams>



5 PILLARS OF COMMUNITY

CONNECTING HUMANS
FOR ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH



GrowthZone
smarter association software