



# A Celebration of Community

*Our old solutions don't fit the challenges of the future, as this far-sighted book makes clear.*

BY TERRENCE FERNSLER

## ***The Community of the Future***

*Edited by Frances Hesselbein, Marshall Goldsmith, Richard Beckhard, and Richard F. Schubert. 285 pages. Hardcover. JosseyBass Publishers. Available through the Society for Nonprofit Organizations' Resource Center (see the Resource Center Catalog, starting on page 22 of this issue, or call 800-424-7367).*

**T**he third in a series of essay collections by today's leaders, *The Community of the Future* upholds the standards of the Drucker Foundation's previous works. The leaders who are to shape future communities are scanning far beyond the horizon. It's our task as nonprofits to build the new communities needed by society.

The 26 essays bring together such leading thinkers as James Barksdale, Stephen Covey, Arun Gandhi, Peter Drucker, and Meg Wheatley to provide insight into the powerful notion of community. This collection from the world's top thinkers shows us the challenges we face in building communities of the future and how we can prepare.

Although the editors insist you needn't read the book front to back, the essays flow well from defining community to understanding the values of successful ones. The book looks at how communities are affected by technology and how to make organizations more effective and

humane by building within them. It explores whether Internet communities can help people reconnect with each other, and it studies how building community can strengthen society.

Three factors will cause a sea-change in the nonprofit sector, the authors note. The first is the aging of the baby boomers: Will they retire as the "me generation" or work to build community? The second is the development of churches emphasizing leadership development, peer learning networks, cultural relevance, and mobilization of the laity. The third factor is the rise of social entrepreneurs, who pursue innovation to bring about

change. They are out to fix problems, not institutionalize them.

Whether these factors translate into strong communities depends on how prepared nonprofits are to join together for a greater good. That means nonprofit leaders must make connections with causes and resources already aligned to their missions. They must seek models they can apply to their own work and share their own successful initiatives. Since today's communities are movers of information, leaders can easily transfer "best practices" from site to site and connect others' expertise to local conditions.

What makes a community is its common commitment. People will listen when they are connected to something larger than themselves. People will act unselfishly when they are conscious of centers of significance outside themselves.

Successful communities share a common story and set of beliefs. They sustain community members' faith in core values, introduce their

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heroes to new arrivals, make progress inclusive, and believe the best of everyone. They practice negotiation, mediation, listening, and teambuilding, and they make such skills available to all. If values and actions are widely shared, everyone is a spokesperson.

Communities of the future will be communities of choice. To accommodate people's ready ability to leave a community, leaders need to do the following:

- Forge a strong and distinct identity.
- Establish clear rules of inclusion.
- Share information across boundaries.
- Create social reciprocity.
- Use symbols, myths, and stories to create and sustain values.
- Manage enough similarity so that the community feels familiar.

Successful leaders consider longterm results; they affirm that all citizens are critical and that none are

left behind; they recognize that sustainability occurs when most people have a stake in and contribute to the community. They build on assets, think strategically about the future, create opportunities for citizens to connect and find areas of common interest, and value the richness of diversity.

By the middle of the next century, the United States' population will be half white, half people of color. We must come to terms with this reality and offer equal opportunity for all. We must also confront such issues as the aging of society, a different view of work, and a more global community. Our challenge is to be realistic about changing circumstances, innovative about responses, and bold about the action that's needed.

The future belongs to those who have the processes, the public will, and the systems to work together. We cannot separate ourselves from each

other. Those holding on to narrow definitions of community will suffer by their lack of inclusion.

Resignation leads to indifference, which is like a prison. The indifferent are surrounded, and consumed, by emptiness, devoid of hope or imagination and of any future. Our work, as we enter the 21st century, is to give noble and humanizing meaning to a community in which all members will define themselves not by their own identity but by that of others. ■

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